

Child & Youth Bereavement Resource

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Dear Parents and Caregivers,

St. Joseph's Child and Youth Bereavement Resource package has been created in order to provide you with some basic information that will help you talk about death and dying with your child or youth. We are committed to helping you navigate this very difficult time. If you require additional material or need help finding a Bereavement professional in your area please contact St. Joseph's Supportive Care at: 519.931.3474.

Additionally, while at Hospice we invite you to introduce your child to our Children's Grief Cart, located on the residential wing. This cart contains several resources to help your child explore feelings associated with grief. We also have on hand children's grief workbooks. Ask your Supportive Care team member or a nurse for assistance.

Sincerely,

St. Joseph's Hospice Supportive Care



Services for Children and Youth at St. Joseph's Hospice

St. Joseph's Hospice is committed to helping you navigate this difficult time with your child or youth.

Children's Grief Cart

Our Children's Grief Cart was introduced to help children experiencing grief and loss. Legacy and memory making, as well as helpful books, journals, toys, and materials are extremely useful in helping children to express and understand their feelings, and promote a means for self-care and coping strategies.

The grief cart consists of:

- Craft Materials: To support meaning making and remembrance.
- Children's Books: To support awareness, validation, and normalization of feelings.
- Games: To support processing of grief emotions, and as a recreational diversion.
- Sensory Toys: To support mood regulation and promote stress reduction.

Children's Book Inventory:

- Tear Soup: A Recipe for Healing After Loss
- Sad Isn't Bad
- My Parent Has Cancer and it Really Sucks
- When Someone You Love Has Cancer
- When Your Grandparent Dies
- I Miss You: A First Look at Death
- When Dinosaurs Die
- What Happens When Someone Dies?
- Lifetimes
- Lighthouse
- Moody Cow Meditates
- Story Time Bear
- The Invisible String
- When Someone Has a Very Serious Illness
- When Something Terrible Happens
- When Someone Very Special Dies



Supporting Grieving Children and Youth Based on Development

When facing the loss of a loved one, it is important to consider that children and youth may require attention and discussion about grief and dying in different ways. The points below touch on important areas to reflect on while you progress through this journey of grief with a child or youth.

- **Children should be told about the death as soon as possible after it has happened.** If you are unable to talk with them, someone the child is close to can do this by using age appropriate words that they will understand.
- **It is best to use the word dead.** Avoid using words like sleep, taken away, or gone on a trip. These phrases may confuse and frighten children. They may become afraid to go to sleep, or feel abandoned and wonder what they did wrong.
- **Children grieve.** They feel sadness and loss when someone dies. Feeling the pain and working it through is how they will heal. They don't always get over it quickly. Sometimes it takes a long time. They will re-experience the loss in different ways at different times in their life - this is normal.
- **Children grieve in a different way than adults.** They have different ways of showing their grief. They may have a shorter tolerance for intense emotions, and may want to get back to their usual routine quickly. Wanting to go out and play, or go to their soccer game is normal - children take breaks from their grief by engaging in their regular daily activities.
- **Children need to be taken care of.** They cannot take care of you. They need to see that you are hurting but that you are also healing. If you can't meet their daily needs at first, have a trusted family member or friend help out.
- **Children need to have their questions answered.** They will wonder: "Will this happen to me? Did I cause this to happen? Who will take care of me now?" Answer these questions in an honest way with clear language.
- **Children need to have someone to talk to openly.** If you can't be that person right now, ask a family member, friend, teacher, etc. to provide this support for your child.
- **The main concepts in understanding death include:**
 - Irreversibility (once a person dies, they can't come back to life)
 - Non-functionality (a dead person does not feel pain, they don't breathe and they don't need to eat)
 - Universality (every living thing dies)
 - Causality (what caused the death)
 - Personal mortality (I will die too)

Child-Friendly Definitions

It is important to clearly communicate with your child in a way that will allow them to approach an understanding of what is happening or about to happen. The use and discussion of the below definitions can be helpful in explaining the finite nature of death, and the emotional journey of grief.

1. Died/Dead

When the body stops working and will never work again (heart stops beating, breathing stops, can no longer see, hear, feel, think, etc.).

2. Grief

All the different feelings and thoughts that happen when someone you care about is dying or has died.

3. Cremation

When a dead body is put through very high heat causing it to break down into small pieces that look like sand/dirt OR When a dead body is put in a room that gets very hot and the body turns to ash.

a. Make sure to go over what dead means (body can't feel anymore)

4. Suicide

When a person causes their body to stop working and the body dies.

Note: Prior to discussing death and dying with a child, it is recommended to determine a trusted adult or family member who will provide death education in a way that is acceptable to you (the parent). It is important that your child receive information that is consistent with your culture and personal beliefs.





Children and Youth Grieve Differently at Different Ages

A young child will grieve at the time of the death, and may grieve again when they reach a different stage of development; as an older child or even adult.

It is, however, important to consider that not all children progress through emotional and cognitive development in the same ways, and these differing paths can influence the way a child is able to perceive or understand grief at their stage of development.

The following describes how children may grieve at each age and how you can help.

Birth to 2 Years

These children:

- Have no understanding of death as a concept.
- Have a strong attachment to parent/caregiver/siblings, so if this person dies, they may protest their absence through crying, temper tantrums, separation anxiety reactions.
- Due to their lack of understanding at this age, as long as they are provided with a dependable parent/caregiver “substitute”, they have a better chance for typical development and can work to understand the death as they get older.
- Will respond to emotional upset sensed in parent/caregiver and in the environment.
- May be more grumpy, and their eating and sleeping times may change. These changes do not usually last very long.

Suggestions:

- Keep to a routine as much as possible.
- Hold and play with them often.
- Get help to take care of them from friends and family, if possible.

Ages 3 to 5

These children:

- Need to know that death is not like sleeping. Their ideas about what “dead” means may not always be right. They may think of death as a monster or ghost.
- Do not understand time very well. They may ask about when the loved one is coming back. There is the belief that death is reversible.
- Ask lots of questions which may shock you. They may ask about what happens to the body in the ground or about what it is like to be dead. It is important to be consistent with answers regarding the reality of death, as the child will need to hear the message over and over again.
- Most children this age may first experience death through the death of an animal (a pet, an animal on the road) – it is important for adults to use these moments as “teachable moments” to discuss life and death.
- Do not always show sadness when someone dies. This is normal. They may want to play, which helps them with their feelings. They may have short times when they feel sad, angry or afraid.
- Sometimes tell everyone, even strangers that the loved one has died. It probably helps them to understand what has happened and how they should feel.
- May have trouble eating, sleeping, or going to the bathroom. They may get stomach aches, headaches, or rashes. They may start to do things they had stopped doing like thumb sucking or having temper tantrums. This is normal for children under stress.
- May be more afraid than they used to be. Sometimes they have nightmares.
- May think that they made the death happen because at some time they were mad at the love one.

Suggestions:

- Use the correct words like dead, died, dying.
- Answer their questions simply and honestly. If you don't have an answer, tell them that.
- Tell your children that you love them and will take care of them. Hold them and play with them often, providing them with creative outlets for their grief – drawing, physical activity.
- Tell them that they did not make the death happen and that they cannot make the person come back to life again.
- Tell them that their feelings and their questions are normal.
- Keep a routine as much as possible.

Ages 6 to 10

These children:

- Are starting to understand what “dead” means, but they usually think it only happens to other people.
- Still have magical thinking – they can think they did, or thought, something that caused the person’s death.
- Some typical questions and worries include – How did they die? Will I die? Who else will die? Who will take care of me? What is dead? What happens to the dead person?
- They have a better understanding that death is irreversible and inevitable.
- Need to know that it is normal for grief to take a long time, and that healing does not happen all at once.
- May have trouble at school. They may have trouble concentrating on their work. Other children may not be kind to them.
- May get headaches or stomach aches.
- May get angry because the loved one died. They may blame the doctors or God or even you.

Suggestions:

- Give your children simple, honest answer to their questions.
- Provide them with creative outlets for their grief – drawing, writing, and dance.
- Keep them physically active, if possible, through play, and organized sports.
- Ask if there is a group for children to go to for support. Sometimes these children will talk more to kids their own age.
- Tell them that grief doesn’t happen all at once but will come and go.
- Talk to your child’s teacher and let him/her know about the death. Have the teacher read this booklet and ask that he/she let you know if your child has any problems at school.
- Help your child have answers when other children ask them questions. Your child can just say “_____ died”. If the other children continue to ask questions and this bothers your child, then your child can just say they don’t want to talk about it.
- Make time each day to talk with your child.
- Include them in the mourning process (pick out a favourite picture to share at the funeral).

Ages 10 to 13

These children:

- Usually understand that death is natural and that everyone dies. Capable of seeing death as biological, universal and inevitable.
- Can describe their feelings of grief.
- Often try to hide their feelings. They may keep feelings inside and not cry for fear of upsetting their parents. Children of this age are sensitive and do not want to feel they have hurt their parents by “making them cry”. It’s important to let them know that you are sad too and they aren’t causing you more pain.
- Know both old and young people die.
- Can develop fear that parents/sibling/grandparents/caregiver might die. A child may avoid certain activities that take them away from their family because of this fear.
- May not be able to concentrate and do their school work.

Suggestions:

- Spend time with your children. Sometimes these children will talk more about their feelings when they are busy doing something else with you - like shopping, driving in the car, or playing games.
- Help them to talk by asking questions about how they are feeling. Let them know that all feelings are okay.
- Provide them with creative outlets for their grief – drawing, writing, and dance.
- Keep them physically active, if possible, through play, organized sports.
- Help them to understand “saying goodbye” to the deceased is important, but that the person will always be important in their lives.
- Include them in the mourning process (let them pick out a favourite picture to share at the funeral).

Talk to the teacher, a social worker, a public health nurse, and others about how to be helpful, what to expect, and where to get help. Ask if there is a group for children to go to for support. Sometimes these children will talk more to kids their own age.

Ages 14 to 18

These children:

- Have the ability to problem solve at a more complex level than younger children, and the ability to think in an abstract manner.
- Sometimes can develop a fascination with death, the death of others, and their own death.
- May not be in touch with reality of death and be engaging in risk-taking behaviours.
- They need to talk. May talk to other people about their feelings and not to you. This is okay because they are just making choices about who can help them. They may not want to hurt you with what they are feeling.
- May look for ways to numb the pain of grief by using drugs and alcohol.
- May have thoughts of suicide.
- May try to be like the person who died.
- May withdraw from family and friends or other social activities.
- May not be able to concentrate and do their school work.

Suggestions:

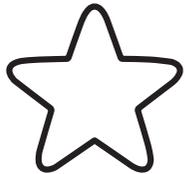
- Try to keep a sense of structure and balance at home, maintaining routines. Don't try to over-protect your child and be prepared to set reasonable limits.
- Watch for signs of depression like not doing the things they used to, showing no emotion, changes in eating and sleeping, or even talking about death all the time. Get professional help if you think your child is depressed.
- Encourage them to talk so that their feelings are not kept inside and then turned onto themselves.
- Ask if there is a group for youth to go to for support. Sometimes these youth will talk more to kids their own age.
- Give your child lots of opportunities to talk about feelings by being available to talk and listen.
- If you think your youth is suicidal, get help immediately.
- Even though they are grown up in many ways, these youth still need you to be in charge. Let them take on some new responsibilities, like household chores, but make sure that they don't start to act too much like the person who died.
- Allow choices and include them in the mourning process (pick out a favourite picture to share at the funeral).

Emotion Regulation for Young Children

As we have come to understand, children and adults grieve and handle stress-related issues differently. It is important to note, when supporting a grieving child, that children under the age of 5, are typically still in an emotional learning stage where the logical centers in their brains are not fully formed yet. This stage of development would only allow them to comprehend a certain level of information regarding what is happening, and why they feel the way they do.

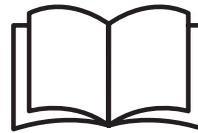
During this time, it may be helpful to introduce emotion-regulation activities for your child, in order to address the feelings, emotions or sensations they are experiencing, but can't quite comprehend or address on their own.

Below is a collection of exercises to target emotion regulation in younger as well as older children.



Star Breathing

An exercise to promote regulated breathing, when a child is in a state of fear, anxiety or anger.



My Grief Story

An exercise to promote the communication and understanding of death for a young child.



How I Feel

Resource to promote emotion identification and solutions to difficulties children face with emotions.



Goodbye Letter

An exercise to promote communication about death and memory making.

Star Breathing

“Star Breathing” can help slow down your breathing, for example, when you are angry or scared.

1

Slowly take a breath in through your nose as you trace up the arm of the star.

2

Slowly breathe out of your mouth as you trace down the arm of the star.

3

You can also use your hand to breath up your finger and down the other side!

START
HERE



My Grief Story

The person who died was...

Right now, I feel...

I feel the saddest when...

The thing I miss most about the person that died is...

Since they died, things have been different because...

Something I liked about the person who died was...

One thing I learned from the person who died was...

How I Feel

I feel:

- Happy
- Mad
- Sad
- Glad
- Worried
- Excited
- Bored
- Scared
- Annoyed
- Upset
- Sick
- Nervous



I feel this way because:



This is what I did about it:



Something else I could have done is:

- Ask for help
- Take deep breaths
- Walk away
- Do something else
- Tell an adult
- Talk to a friend

Goodbye Letter

To:

I am saying goodbye because...

Saying goodbye makes me feel...

I remember a time when we...

You taught me...

Something I want you to know is...

I will always remember...

From:

References

“Grief Sentence Completion” - www.therapistaid.com
“How I Feel” - www.therapistaid.com
“Goodbye Letter” - www.therapistaid.com
“Attending Funerals, Memorials, and Other Rituals” - www.drjaychildrensgriefcentre.ca
“Tips for Supporting the Grieving Child” and “Tips for Supporting the Grieving Teen” - www.dougy.org

Web Resources

For Children and Youth

Teens The Dougy Centre: www.dougy.org
Winston’s Wish Foundation: www.winstonswish.org.uk
Sesame Street – Grieving as a Family: www.sesamestreet.org/parents/grief
Griefworks BC: www.griefworksbc.com/Kids.asp
Bereaved families of Ontario: www.bfotoronto.ca
Website for Youth by Youth: www.soul2soul.ca

For Caregivers

Canadian Virtual Hospice: www.virtualhospice.ca

Literary Resources

For Children and Youth

Brown, L. K. (1996) - *When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death*
Schweibert, P., & DeKlyen, C. (1999) - *Tear Soup: A Recipe for Healing After Loss*
Goldman, L. (2005) - *Children Also Grieve: Talking about Death and Healing*
Abelove, Joan (1999) - *Saying It Out Loud*
Grollman, Earl A. (1999) - *Straight Talk about Death for Teenagers: How to Cope with Losing Someone You Love*
Eaton, Marge (1990) - *Coping with Death and Grief*

For Caregivers

Eaton Russell, C. (2007) - *Living Dying: A Guide for Adults Supporting Grieving Children and Teenagers*
Silverman, P. R. (1999) - *Never Too Young to Know: Death in Children’s Lives*
Worden, W. (1996) - *Children and Grief: When a Parent Dies*
The Dougy Centre (2004) - *Helping Teens Cope with Death, and 35 Ways to Help a Grieving Child*



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