

HOW TO HELP A *Grieving Child*



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The Elephant in the Room

by Terry Kettering

There's an elephant in the room.
It is large and squatting, so it is hard to get around it.
Yet we squeeze by with, "How are you?" And, "I'm fine"...
and a thousand other forms of trivial chatter.
We talk about the weather.
We talk about work.
We talk about everything else – except the elephant in the room.

There's an elephant in the room.
We all know it is there.
We are thinking about the elephant as we talk together.
It is constantly on our minds.
For, you see, it is a very big elephant.
It hurts us all.
But we do not talk about the elephant in the room.

Oh, please, let's talk about the elephant in the room.
For if we talk about his illness or death
Perhaps we can talk about his life.
Can I say his name to you and not have you look away?
For if I cannot, then you are leaving me
Alone...
In a room...
With an elephant.

– Adapted from Food for the Soul (1991: Bereavement Publishing)



The Forgotten Grievors

Grief and bereavement can be one of the most difficult and confusing, yet normal experiences in life. We learn from an early age what and how we grieve. Grief is complex enough as an adult who has lost a parent, spouse or child. This can be compounded by the responsibility of supporting a young person in his or her grieving process. These children can become the forgotten grievors.

Many parents or guardians feel, "I don't know what to say, so I don't say anything." "What if I mess it up? I may scar them for life." Many wonder, "Do children grieve?" Do children have the understanding capable of recognizing and experiencing a loss? You are not alone if you have wondered just how much of the concept of death children can understand. The answer is yes. Children can and do experience loss at all ages, though they may react in ways different from adults. Even at birth, an infant will mourn the loss of the mother's womb, and the safety and comfort it provided.

"If you are old enough to love, you are old enough to grieve."

It is important to recognize that children of all ages do not always communicate their sense of loss in the common patterns of grief we expect to see in adults. Children are not little adults. Parents and guardians have a natural desire to be a helper-healer for their child. Pain and loss are natural bridges to cross in the journey of life that children can and do grow from.

Helping a child heal begins with understanding that you must grieve yourself, while also becoming educated about your child's grief journey. The wise parent allows the child to become the teacher of what their grief is uniquely like for them. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the way children grieve is directly influenced by the response of the important adults in their lives. Rest assured, how you communicate with and support your child carries more weight than the words you actually say. Being a comforting, supportive presence is the best place to begin.

At times you will need to guide or walk beside your child, and other times you will follow their courageous lead. Children can be the best teachers. They show an instinct for moving toward difficult feelings in manageable doses, and innately realize the need to mourn. Children merely need the permission, opportunity, safety and support to work through their losses in their own time and own way.



COMMON GRIEF REACTIONS

Crying	Anger	Sadness
Anxiety	Fear	Hyperactivity
Confusion	Denial	Aggressiveness
Shyness	Lethargy	Appetite Change
Sleep Changes	Embarrassment	Magical Thinking
Fears	Regressive Behaviors	Physical Symptoms
Withdrawal/Isolation	Poor Concentration	Thoughts about Death
Guilt	Loneliness	Numbness/Shock
Forgetfulness	Agitation	Insecurity

Regressive Behaviors

Clinginess/Insecurity
Sucking Thumb
Wetting Bed
Needing Blanket or
Stuffed Animal
Talking with Infantile Voice

Magical Thinking

Seeing the Deceased
Talking with the Deceased
Death Impermanence
Cause of Death
Responsibility

Physical Symptoms

Stomachaches
Increased Energy
Shortness of Breath
Aches and Pains
Fatigue

Sleep Changes

Restlessness
Nightmares
Insomnia
Need to Sleep in Parent's Bed
Fear of Dark

While these responses are common experiences of children, it is also common that children do not have a recognizable or distinct reaction to a specific death or loss. Grief responses are individual and deeply related to a child's maturity level, personality, intelligence, relationship to the deceased, environment, understanding of the loss, family structure and culture.

Try not to worry if your child does not immediately express many of the above responses. That may be okay. Make yourself available to listen to and comfort your child whenever the time comes that they need your support.

COMPLICATED GRIEF

In the grieving child (and adult for that matter), a wide variety of thoughts and feelings can be viewed as healthy and appropriate in their grief journey. It is expected that adjusting to the loss will be difficult, complex and confusing, but most children will experience their grief in a normal fashion.

Complicated grief occurs when a child's grief process begins to drastically interfere with or overwhelm his or her normal functioning. The degree to which a child experiences certain responses can also be considered complicated by the intensity, time frame and effect of some otherwise normal responses. Complicated grief should be treated by a professional clinician.

Below are symptoms and behaviors to watch for and should be concerning.

Suicidal Ideation	Drug or Alcohol Abuse	Self Harm (cutting, burning)
Intense Phobias	Prolonged Denial	Obsessive Thoughts
Prolonged Poor Hygiene	Risk Taking Behaviors	Promiscuity
Violent Behavior	Harming Animals	Extended Isolation
Inability to Return to Routine	Self-Destructive Behaviors	Depression

Risk Factors for Complicated Grief

History of Abuse	History of Mental Illness	Traumatic Death
Poor Relationship with Deceased	Poor Coping of Parent/Guardian	Family Conflict
Inadequate Support System	Multiple Losses	Poor Coping Skills
Dependent Relationships	Not Allowing for Open Grieving	Health Issues

Traumatic Loss

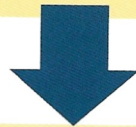
A traumatic loss is one that is sudden, unexpected and not within a "normal" range of experiences. While any significant loss has the potential to be traumatic to a child, circumstances such as murder, suicide, terrorist attack or an accident have greater likelihood of leading to unresolved grief. Experiencing a traumatic loss does not necessarily dictate that your child will experience complicated grief, but it is important to be aware that these types of losses are often more difficult to explain and understand, which may lead to a more difficult grieving process for your child. The same recommendations of being honest, supportive, communicating openly, patient and understanding apply in helping your child cope with the helplessness and confusion that often accompanies traumatic loss.

DEVELOPMENTAL DIFFERENCES

Children grieve differently from adults. While children will react differently to a loss respective to their personality and age, below are basic guidelines to help understand what is common and appropriate to different age ranges.

BIRTH - 2:

Infant children are unable to understand the concept of death. Responses are primarily related to reactions of adults in their environment. These children need to feel a sense of physical security.



AGES 3-5:

Children begin to understand the concept of death, but do not recognize it as final. Death may be seen as temporary or reversible. Magical thinking and regressive behaviors are common and they often play to process.



AGES 5-8:

Children have a greater understanding of death and can experience full range of emotions. They may assume blame or feel a sense of responsibility. Children may worry that someone else may die also.



AGES 8-12:

These children understand death as final and irreversible. They may internalize feelings, express more fear and anger, with more significant behavioral changes. May express worry about care in the future.



AGES 13 +:

Understands the full meaning and implications of death. Relies more on social outlets for coping. May express more anxiety, intense sadness and isolation. May see more risk taking behavior and struggles with identity.

BILL OF RIGHTS FOR GRIEVING CHILDREN

- ☞ **I have the right to my own, unique feelings about the death.**
Each child may feel a wide range of emotions, none right or wrong.
- ☞ **I have the right to talk or not to talk about my grief whenever I need.**
Each child should have someone who will listen and be a comforting presence when needed.
- ☞ **I have the right to show my feelings of grief in my own way.**
Children may want to play to help them feel better; some may laugh, get mad or even scream. Children often tell us what they are feeling through their behavior.
- ☞ **I have the right to need help in my grief from adults who care about me.**
Children need someone that will give them full attention; validating what they are feeling and saying. It is important for children to have this support.
- ☞ **I have the right to get upset about everyday problems.**
Children often have days where they feel grumpy or even have difficulty getting along with others.
- ☞ **I have the right to “grief bursts”.**
Children may exhibit sudden, unexpected, overwhelming feelings of sadness or anger at anytime, even later in the grieving process. These are normal and will pass, but need immediate support.
- ☞ **I have the right to use my own belief system to help cope with my grief.**
Using traditions and rituals specific to a family’s beliefs, such as praying can help ease the confusion and sorrow of their grief.
- ☞ **I have the right to ask questions about the cause of death.**
Children are curious and will have questions, particularly “Why?”. Sometimes there are not answers to the questions, but it is okay to ask.
- ☞ **I have the right to think and talk about memories of the person who died.**
Memories may help maintain the connection lost in the death, encourage talking or telling stories about your loved one who has died.
- ☞ **I have the right to experience my grief and, over time, begin to heal.**
At different points in their life, children may experience their grief differently, but can move toward a sense of peace and healing about their loss.

– Adapted from Dr. Alan Wolfelt – Center for Loss and Transition

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

“Sometimes the questions are complicated, but the answers are simple” – Dr. Seuss

☞ My child is not crying. Should I be worried that something is wrong?

Children grieve differently than adults do. Even though your child may not be crying, this does not mean that they are not grieving. Children may show feelings of sadness, crying, or anger, or just as often, may not have an overt reaction. Sometimes they may laugh and play. Grief responses are as individual as a fingerprint and are related to different factors, including their maturity level, their relationship to the deceased, and their family structure. What is important is to not worry, but to be available to listen, to provide support for whatever feelings she/he does express, and to watch for the healthy and unhealthy ways she/he uses to cope.

☞ My child is acting out aggressively. What should I do?

Among the range of normal grief reactions your child may have is expressing anger or acting out aggressively. This behavior may be a way for your child to express their strong emotions including feelings of uncertainty, and lack of control, among others. You may encourage your grieving child to express and work through their anger, fear, and shock in constructive ways. Some suggestions are pounding a pillow, molding clay, or playing ball or exercising. These kinds of activities can help your child stay connected to life, his/her family, and can help him/her re-establish trust in what may have become an unsafe or scary world.

☞ How can I tell if my child is depressed or just sad?

It can be difficult to tell the difference between a child who is sad and a child who may be (clinically) depressed, because outwardly they can look similar. Generally, when children are sad because they are grieving, they will respond to comfort and support from family and friends. They are able to be openly angry and to use play to process their grief. They can also specifically connect their feelings to the death of their loved one, and they can still experience moments of joy and happiness in their world. Deep sadness may progress into depression if your child feels stuck in their sorrow without significant emotional progress or movement. If you are unsure, consult your pediatrician, family doctor or a children's bereavement counselor.

☞ I am grieving too, should I cry in front of my child?

Since adults and children grieve differently, parents can model appropriate grief behavior in their children by not only expressing them in front of the children, but also explaining their feelings to the children. It helps to explain to your child how you feel and acknowledge your grief. It may help your child to hear that you are sad, too. Parents can let them know it's okay to cry and that it may take a while to feel better. Crying will give children permission to cry themselves. How we grieve is learned over the course of our lives.

☞ Will this loss permanently scar my child?

This is understandably one of the biggest concerns parents may have. A child is often confused about a death as much as they are in pain. If these conflicting emotions are not addressed, the child may be unable to cope with future losses, which is often considered “scarring”. However, in appropriately grieving their loss, they have the opportunity to openly communicate about their thoughts and feelings, therefore reducing the confusion.

This enables the child to be equipped to cope with future losses and sorrows in life. Just as is any other injury in life, we may be left with permanent mark, but the pain and sensitivity to that harm lessens with healthy healing.

How do I explain burial or cremation to my child?

Children are naturally curious about what happens to the body of a person who dies. It is recommended that you answer the questions your child asks in an age appropriate manner and with care. With that being said, speak honestly, clearly, and concisely. It is helpful to explain about a burial or a cremation before a funeral to help your child prepare. Begin the conversation by telling them that the person who died no longer needs their body, and then briefly describe burial or cremation. It is also important to use the appropriate words when describing burial or cremation and to explain any words they don't understand. Here is an example: "When someone dies their body is no longer needed by them and we have to decide what to do with it. For a burial, the body is placed in a special box called a casket and buried in a special place. For a cremation, the body is taken to a place where it goes into a very hot oven. The body turns into ashes, and those are placed in a special container which we will put in a special place. Because there is no longer life in the body, we say goodbye to their body at the funeral service." Use your parental judgment, spirituality and cultural considerations as to what is most appropriate for your child.

Should I tell my child about suicide or homicide?

Yes, particularly if your child asks. But, even if they do not ask, they should hear the facts from you. Finding out from someone else can break trust. Even trying to shield children from the bad news can undermine trust and create a legacy of secrecy and shame that can be difficult to overcome. Give a gentle, yet honest explanation about what happened, especially if the death was sudden or traumatic. When talking about the circumstances of the death, use age appropriate words to explain the death, e.g. suicide, kill, dead, etc. Here is an example: "Daddy died by suicide, which means he killed himself." Let the child lead the conversation. He will let you know what he needs. Details are not as necessary but if a child, at any age, has questions, answer them honestly. It is important for your child to be able to have the reaction they will have and to be supported through their reactions.

Should I tell my child's school? What should I tell them?

Yes. Your child might behave differently and it may be hard for them to stay focused on tasks; so it is important for you to tell your child's teachers and guidance counselor about their loss. If the school knows they can help support your child. At the time of death children can be anxious, irritable, tearful and possibly have regressive behaviors. Giving the child's school this information can help make the transition in the morning smoother. It is important to keep children on a schedule and keep their routine as stable as possible, and school is one way to do that. If the school guidance counselor knows about the death they may be able to help your child access services they are eligible for in the school setting and in the community.

MYTHS ABOUT CHILDREN'S GRIEF

❧ Children don't grieve.

Children of all ages grieve and experience the loss in their own way. Even infants will miss the bond and react to their loved one's absence. Although children may express their grief in many different ways, they do in fact grieve and are capable of healing from the losses they experience.

❧ Children should be sheltered from the loss.

It is impossible to protect a child from experiencing the loss of a loved one. Even if/when they are not fully aware of the facts, children are keen observers and are intuitively aware of those around them grieving. The best approach is to be honest, guide and support them in their grieving process.

❧ Children should always/never attend funerals or memorial services.

Every family has their own traditions and rituals at the end of life. What is most important is to communicate with the child about what to expect and allow them to make their own choice about how much or little they want to participate. Adults who care about the child should support them in their decisions and be flexible; they may change their mind several times. If they want to attend, help them to prepare by explaining what to expect and allow them to share in the experience.

❧ Children get over losses quickly.

No one, adult or child, heals from a significant loss quickly. Just like adults, children need strong support and time to adapt and adjust to the new realities of their life. Children may also revisit their grief at different developmental stages or milestones in their life. Some children may not outwardly express their grief, which may give the impression that they have "moved on", this may or may not be true. Give them the opportunity to talk, ask questions and grieve for as long as they need.

❧ A child's grieving process will follow a predictable path.

If it were only that simple! While the commonly referred to "stages" of grief provide a good understanding of what we experience, grief rarely follows a linear path. What children feel and think may change day to day, with varying levels of intensity and expression. What is most important here is to support them where they are in the moment, with what they need. When you don't know what they need, trust your instincts of unconditional love.



FAMILY DYNAMICS OF THE GRIEVING PROCESS

The normal grieving process is primarily experienced as an individual, independent and often different from how others experiencing the loss may be coping. While this is important to remember and respect, it is equally important to recognize that all losses are experienced socially and as a community. The family unit is most directly impacted by this reality. Both adults and children are often confused and frustrated by the significant changes that a family must undergo on their healthy path to healing. But with care and attention, these changes can be navigated successfully.

We grieve as both individuals and members of a family or social network. We may all be grieving the loss of the same person, but we are grieving different relationships and different losses. Each family member will grieve at different paces, with differing support needs, styles and levels of expression. This is important to understand in your family, as these all should be respected and accepted as “okay”. Adults should take the responsibility of normalizing these differences in your family and helping the young people feel comfortable wherever or however they are grieving.

Each member of the family may also have different expectations of what life will be like now. What the future holds can be anxiety-provoking for everyone in the family, particularly after a significant loss. Maintaining as much stability and structure as possible can be a great comfort for children. It is natural for adults to want to be more lenient, which can be appropriate in some circumstances. However, maintaining normal expectations, whether around behavior, school or even what time they can expect dinner will be important for your family. Another expectation that should be considered is how a child should grieve, considering grief responses are learned over a lifetime, primarily from the family unit. Communicate what is “okay” and “not okay” in their grieving process.

Inevitably, families will experience as process of reorganization in the weeks and months following a loss. When someone dies, a sense of imbalance is often felt in the family. You must engage to find a sense of equilibrium or the “new normal”. This may result in adults taking on new roles or children feeling a greater sense of responsibility. Family members may initially resist or resent the new roles they must now fill. It is important to allow for a period of adjustment and open communication about the feelings and attitudes associated with these changes. Adults should also be cautious about putting undue responsibility or “parentifying” a child, as this can be harmful in the long run. If the reorganization process results in family conflict, adults should make their best effort to shield children from these disagreements and not ask them to “take sides”. If normal routines change because of the conflict, try to explain the reasons without blame or judgment. These changes can be experienced as secondary losses for children. The changes may be unavoidable, but how the changes are managed can make a tremendous impact on a child and family.

When there are children in a family adults tend to shift the focus away from themselves to addressing the needs of their children. This is natural and important, but it is equally important for adults to honor their needs and allow themselves the time and space to grieve openly. Adults are the models for grief from which their children learn. Mutually supporting each other is the best avenue for a healthy grieving process. Everyone at one time or another will need the most support, adults should be conscious about balancing needs the best they can.

Trust yourself and your loved ones. You can help yourself and your children survive this difficult time.

My grief is...

*“My grief is sad and
I have a big broken heart.”*

– 6 years old

*“My grief is a hole in my heart
that has left me empty.”*

– 17 years old

*“It’s okay Mommy, everyone
has people who die and it is
okay to cry.”*

– 8 years old

*“My body holds it in,
then it comes out really long
and really loud.”*

– 10 years old

*“I wonder if life will ever be
good again.”*

– 13 years old

“My grief feels weird.”

– 7 years old

*“Mom and I cry together now
and it feels good.”*

– 17 years old

“I feel sad. It wipes me out.”

– 13 years old

It's tough to talk about....

Be First

A child should hear about the death as soon as the facts are known from a trusted, loving person.

Be Brief

Simple, honest explanations are best. Long, complicated descriptions can be confusing.

Listen

Give the child a safe space to react, however they need. Be patient and attentive to what they need to share or ask.

Be Gentle

Remain calm, use a soft tone and even-paced words. Allow time for reactions and any questions they may have.

Be Concrete

Use the words "death" or "died". Euphemisms can be confusing.

Be Reassuring

Remember to emphasize that you are there and be a comforting presence. Give the best sense of security you can.

Remember

Children often find comfort in hearing stories about their loved one. Looking at pictures and sharing memories remind them they won't forget.

Give Choices

Allow children to choose how much or little they want to participate in traditions such as funerals or planning of special days.

but you can be the
greatest strength for your child,
and they can be yours.

MAKING SPECIAL DAYS SPECIAL AGAIN

Special days can be particularly difficult to navigate following the loss of a loved one. Traditions may need to necessarily change; maybe you can no longer go to Grandma's for Christmas or Passover. Birthdays, holidays or other special days have the potential to put strain on an already rocky road for your family. Being aware of these days and sensitive to your child's responses can help move him/her toward healthy healing. There are many creative ways to acknowledge a loved one's absence and honor their memory through the love you continue to share. You may wish to do so by continuing your family's traditions or create new rituals that are meaningful now. All of these recommendations can be done as a family as a shared supportive experience. Here are some ideas.

- ☞ Light a Memorial candle
- ☞ Cook a loved one's favorite meal as a family
- ☞ Eat a meal at your loved one's favorite restaurant
- ☞ Visit places that hold special memories (beach, park, etc.)
- ☞ Wear your loved one's favorite color or article of clothing
- ☞ Make a charitable donation in your loved one's name or to their favorite charity
- ☞ Plant a tree or flowers in your loved one's memory
- ☞ Share a special prayer, moment of silence, poem, memory or story
- ☞ Start a new tradition that your loved one could appreciate
- ☞ Ash scattering ceremony (if cremated)
- ☞ Visit cemetery or mausoleum
- ☞ Create pictures or drawings to display in memory of a loved one
- ☞ Play some of your loved one's favorite songs or music
- ☞ Watch your loved one's favorite movies or television shows
- ☞ Look through family pictures together and share stories
- ☞ Share stories about the loved one from his/her life before the child was born
- ☞ Take a special trip out of town rather than have a traditional holiday gathering
- ☞ Have a balloon release

Remember that there is no right or wrong way to "handle" a special day or holiday. Some may wish to keep family traditions exactly the same, while others make significant changes. Honor yourself and your child's grieving process. Allow your child to be a part of the planning and decision making process, ask for their input, suggestions and ideas. Let them participate, even when it is difficult for you.

GRIEF GARDENING

Many experts in children's grief have likened caring for a bereaved child to tending a garden. A child needs the love and attention of caring adults if she or he is to heal and grow. It is the bereavement caregiver's role to create conditions that nurture a young person's healing after a significant loss.



A young seedling faces many struggles on its journey. The gardener provides gentle encouragement, and the nourishing water that sustains growth.



Unsure of what the world will bring, the gardener provides shelter from the hostile weather, careful not to overprotect or inhibit growth.



The gardener will remove weeds and rocks that may disturb a seedling's delicate roots. All the while offering patience and giving support as the seedling pushes through reaching for the sunlight.



The gardener can stand proud when the young seedling blooms, knowing that the journey will not always be easy, but that it has the strength, resilience and trust that the gardener will always be there as it continues to flourish and grow.

TASKS OF RESILIENT GRIEVING

Recognize the loss. Acknowledge the reality of the death and validate attempts to understand what has happened and how life will change. Affirm that life will and must change in your loss, and that you do not need to travel that journey alone.

React to the separation. Move toward the pain of the loss while being nurtured emotionally, physically, socially, mentally and spiritually. Experience the full range of responses you may have in your grief.

Remember the person who has died. Convert the relationship with the person who has died to from one of presence to one of memory. This is not expecting the child to give up all ties with the deceased. Remembering includes helping children with the loss of 'what may have been' - clarifying unfulfilled wishes (that can keep children/adults bound to an absent loved one). Encouraging acceptance of the inability to make such wishes come true and discovering ways to satisfy these longings provide a pathway to hope and the future.

Readjust to adapt and move into the new reality without forgetting the old. Relate the experience of loss with meaning and purpose in your life. How? or Why? are common questions expressed verbally, but more often processed through play and physical behaviors. In this process, you may grow and a new identity may emerge.

Reinvest in you and the lives around you. Appreciate your worth and the legacy your loved one has left. Experience a continued supportive adult presence long after the death. Allow for lost confidence and security to return with hope for the future.

No one ever really dies as long as they
took the time to leave us with fond memories.

~ Chris Sorensen

FAMILY HEALING ACTIVITIES

Memory Holders:

Jar – Take a jar and decorate it anyway you want. A basket can also be used. Keep it in a central location so everyone in the family has access to it. Family members can write a favorite memory, funny memory or a special time on a piece of paper and then fold it and put it in the jar. Keep paper near the jar. It can be small pieces of regular paper or you can be more creative and use color paper or cut out paper hearts and write the memories on that. On days where family members feel sad or want to think about their loved one they can read what is in the jar. You can also read these to each other on special days.

Box – Take a picture box or a shoe box and have the entire family decorate it. You can decorate it with family photos, pictures from a magazine or anything the family wants to be on the outside of the box. Have each family member put things in the box that remind them of their loved one or something their loved one gave them. You can have one box for the entire family or each family member can make their own and keep it in their room and add to it as they would like.

Scrapbook – Make your own scrapbook or you can buy one. The family can pick out pictures they want in it and as they are putting the scrapbook together they can share why the picture is important to them and share the memory that goes with the picture. Pictures can be put in and any other memorabilia. Examples could be movie tickets, concert tickets, cards, news paper articles, and funny sayings. Family members can also use stickers or write by the pictures as well.

Letters of Love

Write a letter to your love one. It can be something you want to share with them; it could be a letter telling them your feelings, or just a quick note to say you are thinking about them. This letter can be shared but it does not have to be shared, just writing it down is helpful. Once the letter is written it can be placed in a box, in a folder, ripped up, thrown away, attached to a balloon and released or put in a bottle and throw it in the ocean. Regular paper can be used or you can use the example on the following page.

Art

Art is a great way to express feelings in a healthy manner. Keep paper out with a variety of crayons. Children who are angry can use a red crayon and just draw or scribble whatever they want. Children and teens can draw pictures, graffiti, doodles or just scribble. Families can make collages out of family pictures or pictures out of magazines. If possible have a box or area where the crayons, markers, scissors and glue are kept. You can also put paint, glitter glue, stickers and any other type of ribbon, foam shapes, buttons or scraps of wrapping paper. Encourage the family to do art to get out feelings of sadness, loneliness or anger. Play dough or clay is also excellent to create objects that represent their feelings.

Family Meetings

These are encouraged for all families. They can be done once a week or once a month. It should be consistent. Example: one time a month on the same day and time. This is a time to bring up anything that may impact

the family as a unit. It could be a family change, celebration, or an important decision that the family needs to make. This is also a time to discuss family rules and boundaries. If there are behavior issues this is the time to address them. A family meeting should be the family only and everyone is required to be there. Everyone's input should be acknowledged and respected. Some rules to set are: one person talks at a time, everyone should be able to express their feeling or an opinion in a respectful manner, look at the person while they are talking and use only respectful words. Family meetings should take place at a table or some other area in the house with no distractions like the TV, telephone or any other toys. This should not be done during dinner time. It is also a good time to check in with each family member to see if there is anything they want to bring up.

Family Nights

This is different than the family meeting. This is time to just have fun. So many times families do not go out, have fun or just laugh with each other after their loved one dies. This can be a day or night that it is just for the family. It could be pizza and movie night. Some other ideas are: board games at home, bowling, miniature golf, going to the beach, going out to dinner, a water park, the zoo, cooking or taking a bike ride. This can be anything the entire family wants to do.

“Other things may change us, but we begin
and end with family.”

- Anthony Brandt

RECOMMENDED READINGS

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This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



WHY WE CHOSE THE SEA STAR

The sea star (or starfish) was chosen to help us teach our families about grief, loss and the overwhelming emotions we may experience when someone we love has died. When a sea star loses one of its rays –it has the ability to grow back or “regenerate”. Notice that one ray always shows a line through it. This line is to acknowledge the pain of our loss and that we have been changed forever. It is also a reminder that the people we love will always be remembered and will always be a part of our lives. Our sea star, however, will always be shown whole, with all of its rays intact. We believe that this symbolizes another tremendously important message; the belief that grief can transcend into a journey of healing.



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