



Surviving the Holidays 4 Kids in Grief

A 2-hour lesson plan for children ages 5–12, to be used in conjunction with an adult Surviving the Holidays seminar.

Goals for the leaders

- To provide a safe place for children who have lost a loved one to death to understand that their holidays may be different now, but it's okay.
- To show them God's everlasting love, which is found in Jesus, whose birth we are celebrating.

Objectives for each child

- You may have many different emotions. You can learn to name your feelings and be calm when you are worried or confused over the holidays.
- Christmas is about celebrating Jesus' birthday. Jesus loves you, and you can still celebrate His birth no matter where you are or whom you are with—even if you are someplace new this year.

I. PREP TIME

Collect or prepare the following in advance.

Download and Print

At the GriefShare LeaderZone, www.griefshare.org/leaderzone, "Holidays" section, click the "Surviving the Holidays 4 Kids Lesson Plan" link.

- ☐ Download the "GriefShare: Surviving the Holidays 4 Kids packet" (you can download the entire packet or individual items from the packet).
- ☐ Make 1 copy per child of the following packet items:
 - "Did You Ever...?" Christmas tree
 - Happy Birthday Jesus card
 - Manger coloring page
 - Scripture decoder
 - Ornament name tags (4 name tags per page, print enough for group)
- ☐ Print 1 copy of each of the remaining items in the packet.
- ☐ Enlarge the Herby's Feelings Christmas poster.

Self-Serve Snack & Breaking Bread (two snack times)

- ☐ Gingerbread cookies and apple cider
- ☐ Happy Birthday Jesus cake and punch
- ☐ Cups and napkins

Art Projects

- ☐ Markers and/or crayons
- ☐ Tape

Wrapping paper

- ☐ Large piece of white tissue paper for each child
- ☐ Christmas star cookie cutters
- ☐ Red and/or green tempera paint
- ☐ Plastic or Styrofoam plates to put paint on

Christmas cards

- ☐ Heavyweight paper (for each child to fold & make card)
- ☐ Christmas Scriptures on small slips of paper (for decorating cards)

☐ Christmas stickers (optional for decorating)

☐ Envelopes for cards (optional)

Christmas Herby stick puppets

☐ 6 craft sticks

Star ornaments

☐ Wooden, cardboard, or heavyweight-paper stars with a hole in each to place a ribbon (two stars per child)

☐ Christmas ribbon to hang ornaments

☐ Glitter pens (optional)

Misc Items

☐ Christmas carol CD (plus songbooks or printed words to some of the carols)

☐ Small Christmas tree and decorations on the side

☐ Post-it notes

☐ Prayer notebook (use regular notebook labeled "Prayer Journal")

☐ Bible

☐ Nativity scene (inexpensive nativity scenes at www.orientaltrading.com)

☐ Pre-wrapped small box with a plastic baby inside (or a piece of paper with the name "Jesus"). Wrap the box lid separately.

☐ A long piece of white rolled paper. Draw squares as described in the Focusing Activity under "Christmas Feelings Toss Game."

☐ 3–4 small stuffed animals

☐ One piece of red or green ribbon for each child (long enough to reach from a child standing in a circle to the center of the circle)

II. GREETING

15 minutes

Have the Greeting activities and projects set up for the children to move through as they come in. Have adult or teen helpers available to interact with the children at the different activities.

Music

Christmas carols playing in the background

Greeting Activity

1. Welcome and Christmas ornament name tags (downloadable).
2. Holiday Job Sheet sign-up (downloadable): The job sheet provides a way for the children to contribute to the Surviving the Holidays session. Allow the children to volunteer by signing up for a job on the job sheet. When the children contribute, they feel they belong to the group, and it encourages a sense of well-being. The job sheet can be placed on a table with the instructions next to it or on the wall by the front door. Don't forget to utilize your volunteers throughout the session.
3. Herby's Feelings Christmas poster (downloadable): Herby is a lovable, heart-shaped mascot used with the DivorceCare for Kids program. He is a friendly looking, nonthreatening character. Many children will not be able to identify their feelings and that can be scary for them. Herby's facial expressions help the children to label and claim their feelings. Have the children put their name on a Post-it note and place it near the facial expression that shows how they felt when they walked through the door.
4. Prayer request notebook: Encourage the children to write their prayer requests in the notebook throughout the session. At the end of the session during the Closing Connection Circle, bring out the prayer notebook, read the prayer requests, and pray for the various requests.

5. Manger coloring sheet (downloadable).
6. Christmas tree decorating: Have a small tree set up with ornaments on the side. The children who signed up on the job sheet as Christmas Tree Decorators can decorate the tree.

Art Project

Make wrapping paper (this can be used to wrap the Christmas star ornaments that the children will make later in the session). Place a thin layer of red and/or green tempera paint on plastic or Styrofoam plates. Have the children dip star-shaped cookie cutters into the paint and then print onto white tissue paper. Set aside to dry.

Second Art Project

Christmas cards: Help the children fold paper for Christmas cards. Provide markers or crayons, Christmas stickers, and Scriptures for the children to use to make their own Christmas cards. If possible, provide envelopes. If the children do not finish, there will be time later in the session to finish up or to make more cards.

Self-Serve Snack

Apple cider and gingerbread cookies

III. OPENING CIRCLE TIME

25 minutes

Music

Christmas carols – Sing Christmas carols. Give the children printed words to the carols or use books with Christmas songs.

Welcome

Share names. Ask if anyone would like to share the best Christmas he or she has ever had.

Ask the kids to share their family's holiday traditions. You may have to start this discussion by citing examples of what a holiday tradition is. Examples: Reading the Christmas story out of the Bible on Christmas Eve; leaving a plate of cookies and milk for Santa; eating pancakes on Christmas morning; wearing your pajamas on Christmas morning to open presents; drinking hot chocolate; driving around to see Christmas lights, etc.

Make a list of all the traditions the children can think of, and then make a second list of new traditions the children might suggest to their parent or guardian that they want to do.

Safekeeper concept: Discuss keeping safe and confidentiality. Many children do not feel safe when there is a crisis within the family (such as a death), and they experience a great deal of anxiety as a result. This is going to be especially true right now at Christmas. Tell the children that this is a safe place. Tell them you are the Safekeeper and it's your job to keep things safe. Explain that all of the leaders are Safekeepers. Tell the children it is their job to help you keep things safe.*

When addressing confidentiality, be very careful to use the term "private" instead of "secret." Many children who are abused or sexually assaulted are told to "keep this secret" or that "this is our secret." We want to avoid any confusion that would prevent a child from trusting the adults in the group. Tell the children that they are always free to tell their parent everything they said but not what other children say.

*The Safekeeper concept has been reproduced/adapted from the following with permission from Loving Guidance, Inc.: © Becky Bailey, *Conscious Discipline* (p. 51). Loving Guidance, Inc. 1-800-842-2846 www.consciousdiscipline.com.

Christmas Herby Stick Puppets

Ask the children to give scenarios of when Christmas Herby might feel sad, happy, angry, surprised, etc., during the holidays. Use the downloadable Christmas Herby stick puppets and attach to craft sticks.

Show pictures of jugglers (downloadable) and say, "Sometimes you might feel like you are juggling your feelings just like some of these jugglers are doing with the Christmas ornaments, food, and gifts. Have you ever felt that way?" List feelings the children might experience during the holidays. List positive and negative feelings.

Group Game

"Did You Ever...?"

Put a paper Christmas tree (downloadable) on the back of everyone's chair. Place chairs in a circle. Everyone should have a chair except the leader. The leader stands in the middle of the circle and asks, "Did you ever get a _____ for Christmas?" Anyone who has received this present must stand up and find another Christmas tree to sit by. The leader sits in an empty chair while the children are moving, which leaves one person standing. This person then gets to be the one who calls out "Did you ever get a _____ for Christmas?"

Keeping Fit

Deep breathing: Talk about breathing from the diaphragm when you are stressed. Deep breathing helps everyone to feel calmer.

Christmas tree stretch: Have the children pretend to be a tall Christmas tree that stands straight and its branches reach high into the sky. Then have the children pretend to be a Christmas tree that has branches slumping and withering to the ground as the children relax their bodies.

Explain to the children that when they are feeling stressed or anxious, they can also do stretching and relaxing exercises to help relieve the nervousness and anxiety.

IV. SCRIPTURE AND STORY

15 minutes

Read the Christmas story out of the Bible (Luke 2:1–20). Use a nativity scene to help tell the Christmas story.

Discussion

"The angel brought us the best news in the world—God loves you! God is for you. God gave us the best present ever."

Have a small box wrapped in beautiful paper. Wrap the lid separately so you can lift off the lid without unwrapping the entire box. Inside the box have a small plastic baby or the name of Jesus written on a piece of paper.

Say, "Inside is the best Christmas present ever. What do you think it is?" Allow each child to guess. Then open the box and show them what is inside. Talk about the baby Jesus and refer to the Christmas story in the Bible. Help the children relate to Christmas being about the birth of Jesus and not just about the presents they receive. Remind them that Jesus will help each person be comforted over the holidays, especially people who had a family member or friend die.

Tell the children, "After someone you love dies, you may miss that person a lot at Christmas. This is called

grieving, and it can make you extra tired. Besides being tired, you might notice other differences in your household that occur over the holidays after someone you love has died. What differences might happen that could make you worried?" (Examples may include less money, watching a parent cry or feel sad, Christmas sights and smells triggering memories, etc.)

Ask the children for ideas of things they can do to help themselves. Examples might include pray, practice deep breathing, exercise, drink water, sing, draw, talk to parents or a friend, read the Bible, etc.

V. SMALL GROUP INTERACTIVE STATIONS

30 minutes

Set up six stations for the children to be able to work in small groups and move about on their own. The children are not required to go to each station, but rather let them choose stations and move at their own pace. Have an adult or teen helper manning each station, if possible. (Play Christmas CD in background.)

Activity Sheet

Happy Birthday Jesus card (downloadable); provide markers and crayons.

First Art Project

Wooden star Christmas ornaments: The children can make one as a gift for a parent (or other relative or friend) and one for themselves. Provide the children with two stars, and help them thread a ribbon through the holes to hang the ornaments. Let them decorate with markers, glitter pens, etc. If you don't have access to wooden stars, use heavyweight paper or cardboard paper stars.

Second Art Project

Wrap the Christmas star ornaments (provide tape and use the wrapping paper made earlier in the session).

Third Art Project

Continue making Christmas cards (from the Greeting time art project).

Breaking Bread

Happy Birthday Jesus cake and punch.

Scripture Decoder

Scripture decoder (downloadable); the children will decode the words to Matthew 1:21.

VI. FOCUSING ACTIVITY

10 minutes

Christmas Feelings Toss Game

Using a long piece of white rolled paper, draw large squares where you will write negative and positive emotions the kids might feel during the holidays. Put one feeling in each square (e.g., sad, angry, lonely, surprised, happy, silly). Decorate the paper for Christmas or make it in the shape of a Christmas tree. One by one, the children can throw a stuffed animal. When they hit a feeling, they tell about something that might make them feel that way or a time they felt that way.

VII. STORY

15 minutes

Christmas Is Here, But Where Is Grandma Sue?

The holidays may not be the same, but they can still be good. Traditions can be maintained, and new ones can be established. The children miss their deceased loved one, and they worry about their parents or other family members who are sad. They remember past Christmases and think, "Are we ever going to have another happy Christmas?"

Read the downloadable story "Christmas Is Here, But Where Is Grandma Sue?" out loud.

Discussion Questions for the Story

1. Anna missed her Grandma Sue. Who are you missing this year at Christmas?
2. Since Grandma Sue had died, Anna wondered if other people in her life were going to die. What questions do you have about death?
3. Does it make you feel like crying when you see other people who are sad and crying because their loved one died?
4. Do you think it is okay to cry about your loved one dying?
5. What is a favorite memory you have of your loved one who died?
6. What are some things you can do to help yourself remember your loved one?
7. What are some things you can do to help yourself feel better and not be so sad?
8. Anna and Roman started a new tradition when they decided to drink hot chocolate out of their grandmother's Christmas mugs at their house. What is a new tradition you can start this year?

VIII. CLOSING CONNECTION CIRCLE

10 minutes

Devotion

"And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7).

Say, "The holidays are not about us, but about what God has done for us all. He sent Jesus to be born, and Jesus loves you so much! You can celebrate Jesus' birthday whether you are at your house, your grandparents' house, or somewhere new this year. You can even celebrate Jesus' birthday on two different days if your family wants to do that.

"Jesus loves us, and that's a reason to be joyful this Christmas season!"

Encourage the children to spread the joy of Christmas with each other (e.g., shake hands, high five each other, pass along a smile, etc.). Allow the children to share their ideas about how to spread Christmas joy at home and with other people in their lives and community. You could also bring up the idea of spreading joy to people in need, such as an elderly neighbor, a sick friend, or people at a shelter.

Demonstration

Give one long piece of red or green ribbon to each child. Place a Bible in the center of the circle, and let each child put the end of his or her ribbon in the Bible. Talk about the importance of staying connected to God throughout the holiday season.

Prayer Circle

Read the requests from the prayer journal. Close in prayer.