

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a sunset or sunrise. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds in shades of orange, yellow, and blue. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow. In the foreground, there are silhouettes of tall grasses. Several birds are seen flying in the sky, their silhouettes dark against the bright light. The overall mood is peaceful and hopeful.

how to help children through grief and loss

COTTAGE CHILDREN'S MEDICAL CENTER



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Introduction

If this information is being provided to you, then someone you love is dying or has died, and there are children in your life you would like to start a dialogue with. Talking with children about the subject of death and dying is often an overwhelming task, and it is very personal to each and every family.

Many families try to shield children from subjects that could be difficult to understand and emotional to process as a way to protect them. It has been shown that children do best when given honest, truthful information at an educational level they can understand. They hear the information best when being supported by adults they trust. We acknowledge that every family is unique and that there are many ways to process the topics of death, grief and loss.

Many children are very perceptive and can sense when there is a grief issue happening within the family. When children see adults grieving outwardly and yet no one is talking about what is happening or causing the grief reactions, the outward responses and the words do not match. If adults avoid the topic of grief, or death and dying, then children can deduce that the subject is not open for discussion. Children often have questions and honestly want to know what is happening within the family.

As difficult as this might seem, helping children learn about the process of grief and having that discussion with someone they trust can be such a gift to a child. This is a journey that the family is going on together and the information that is provided is a way to help begin that journey together.

How To Talk About Death

When talking to children about the concept of death and dying, know that every situation is different and every family structure is unique.

In a study done called “Do you remember being told what happened to grandma? The role of early socialization on later coping with death,” the authors shed light on how various age groups feel about the knowledge or lack of knowledge surrounding a death.

“Open and timely communication has been shown to be positively associated with a child’s adjustment after the loss of a close family member. Therefore, parents who are not open to talking about death and their children’s feelings are thought to be creating an obstacle to the children’s healing process.”

(Martincekova et al., 2020)

“This communication should be seen as a process, not a one-time event.”

(Martincekova et al., 2020)

We acknowledge that all families have their own natural method to cope with death and the dying process. When talking with children, the trusted adult will communicate at the appropriate age and developmental level. Be honest, speak openly, allow time for children to process information, and have multiple conversations that support children asking the questions they want to ask.

Children look to adults to guide and protect, and by giving honest information it will set children up to trust the adults and open the door for future communication.

Helping children through grief or bereavement can be emotionally challenging for everyone involved. The tools provided in this booklet are there to assist and give guidance.

IF DEATH IS BY TRAUMA, SUICIDE OR SUDDEN DEATH

When a death occurs by a traumatic event or as a result of a suicide, talking with children may present an additional challenge. Adults may feel unprepared, rightfully in a state of shock and taking careful steps with how best to proceed. Children are able to receive difficult news best by a trusted loved one.

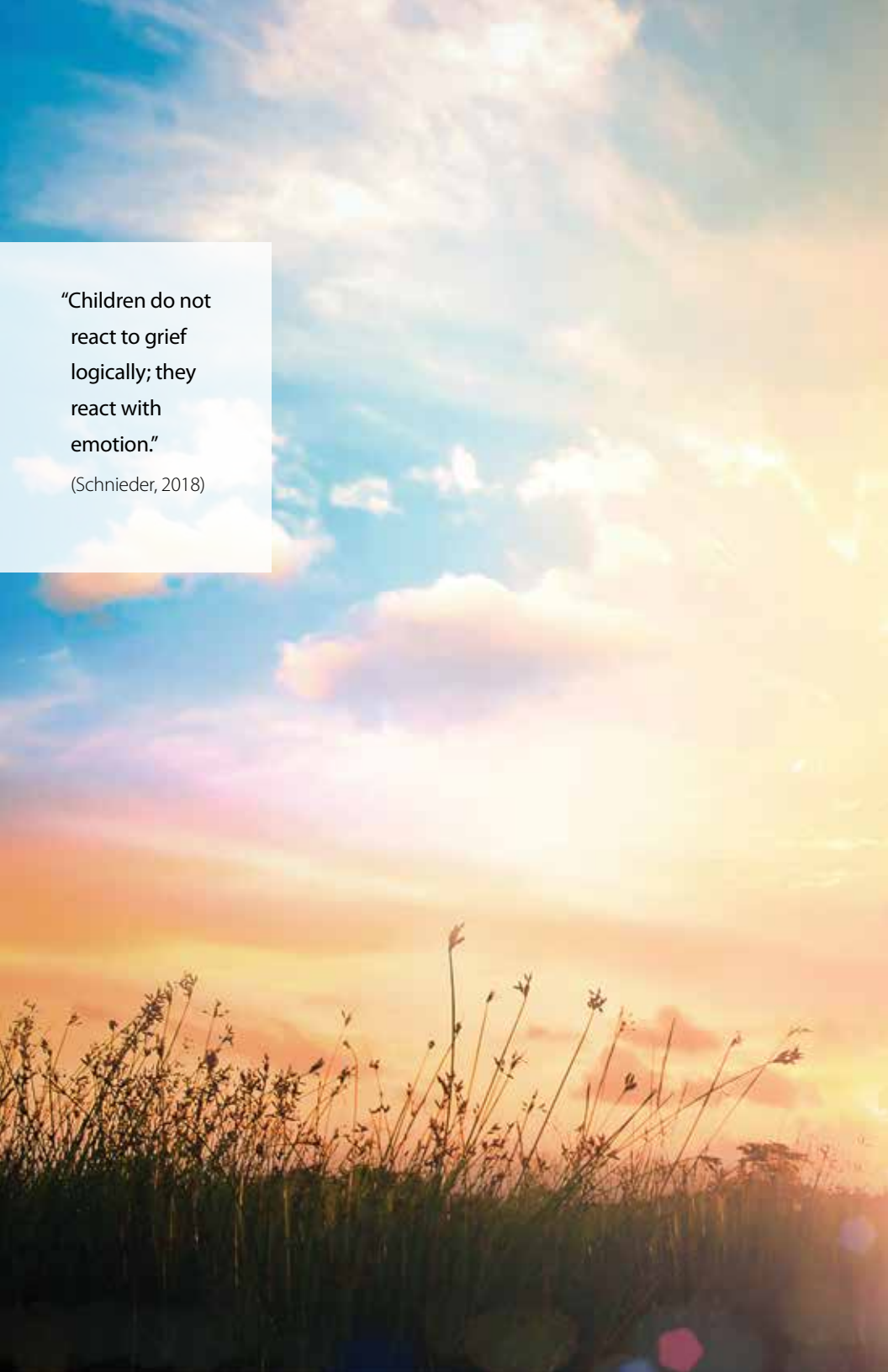
To support children during trauma or suicide, the family can refer to the developmental stages and know that children may take more time to process information. Reactions may be one of shock, fear, anger or denial which may be aimed toward a trusted adult.

Studies have shown that younger children are usually able to process the concept of death as it relates to an external source only, such as a car accident or getting shot, whereas older children are also able to process the concept of internal events as the cause such as illness, heart attack or suicide (Hennefield et al., 2019).

When a family is affected by a death that is sudden, whether it be a traumatic incident or a suicide, there are some specific reactions that you may see in children.

With suicide, children may sense the world is no longer safe or predictable. They may place blame on a loved one or ask, “why did they not just ask for help?” Additionally, families often feel guilt, blame, shame or hide how the person died from children. Children will pick up on dialogues that don’t happen or conversations that they don’t understand. Often there is a social stigma surrounding suicide.

When the death is unexpected and there is no time to grieve, children may be in a state of shock or disbelief. A younger child may believe that their family member could return if they “wish” hard enough. Children may feel guilt, regret or anger. Some may worry that they too will have the same outcome. Many children wonder what will happen to their family structure moving forward.



“Children do not react to grief logically; they react with emotion.”

(Schnieder, 2018)

Starting the Conversation

WHEN A PARENT DIES

PRESCHOOL AGE

CHILD:

“Will you die too, Daddy?”

ADULT:

“All of us want to live for a long, long time. That is what I plan to do. I will be around longer than you can even imagine. I will be here to take care of you.”

SCHOOL AGE

CHILD:

“I wish somebody else had died!”

ADULT:

“I know that you are angry right now, and that you don’t mean that. I’ll give you some time to calm down and then if you want to talk, we can.”

ADOLESCENT

CHILD:

“Why me? Why did my mom have to die?”

ADULT:

“That is a tough question, but I’m glad that you asked it. Let’s sit down sometime, and I will answer your questions the best that I can. There are also support groups for teenagers. We can talk about that as well.”

WHEN A SIBLING DIES

PRESCHOOL AGE

CHILD:

“I told Sammy I wished he was dead, and now he’s dead!”

ADULT:

“Oh sweetie, wishes and words don’t cause people to die. It’s not your fault.”

SCHOOL AGE

CHILD:

“Am I still a big sister?”

ADULT:

“Even though Sam died, you will always be his big sister.”

ADOLESCENT

CHILD:

“I am sick of thinking about Sam. I just want to have fun for a change!”

ADULT:

“It sounds like you need a break from your grief and that’s understandable. It can get very overwhelming to always feel that intense pain. Why don’t you plan something fun with your friends and let them know you just need to laugh for a while?”

WHEN A GRANDPARENT DIES

PRESCHOOL AGE

CHILD:

"I miss Grandma!"

ADULT:

"I know you miss Grandma, so do I. How about drawing a picture of your favorite memory of you and Grandma together?"

SCHOOL AGE

CHILD:

"Why couldn't the doctors stop Grandma from dying?"

ADULT:

"Many times doctors save people from dying, but sometimes they try their best and the person still dies. Their body is just too ill, like Grandma's. Most people go to hospitals to get better, but once in a while, people do die."

ADOLESCENT

CHILD:

"What happens after we die?"

ADULT:

*"I don't know, but this is what I personally believe _____.
Everyone has to decide for themselves."*

WHEN A FRIEND OR CLASSMATE DIES

PRESCHOOL AGE

CHILD:

"I made Madison die because I was mean to her."

ADULT:

"Do you remember saying something mean to Madison? Words can make us feel sad or mad, but they can't kill us. You didn't kill Madison, honey. She died because her body was hurt very badly. Madison dying was totally out of your control."

SCHOOL AGE

CHILD:

"How can I stop feeling sad?"

ADULT:

"It's natural to feel sad when someone you care about dies. That's a part of something called grief - the mix of emotions we feel after death. At first it can hurt a lot. But if you are sad, don't pretend that you are not. That doesn't help. Sometimes it helps to do something like write a letter to Madison's parents telling them what you liked about her and what you miss, or hanging a picture of the two of you together in your room. If you allow yourself to feel your grief feelings, over time you will start to hurt less."

ADOLESCENT

CHILD:

"We just have to accept Maddie's death. I mean bad things happen, right?"

ADULT:

"It's true that Maddie died and you can't change it. Just know that if you start feeling sad about it, or want to cry about it, I hope you do. There is no right or wrong way to deal with this, so whatever you feel is OK. I'm always here if you ever need to talk."

WHEN SOMEONE DIES BY SUICIDE

PRESCHOOL AGE

CHILD:

“How did Uncle Matthew die?”

ADULT:

“Do you know how our bodies can get sick? Well, Uncle Matthew had an illness in his brain, and he was very sad. He chose to stop living and he died.”

SCHOOL AGE

CHILD:

“It doesn’t make sense. He seemed fine the last time we saw him.”

ADULT:

“It’s true. He was laughing and was even playing football with you guys. Even though he looked happy on the outside, he was experiencing something difficult on the inside. We couldn’t help because we didn’t know.”

ADOLESCENT

CHILD:

“How could he do that to us?! I am so mad at him!”

ADULT:

“When Matthew decided to end his life, I doubt he was thinking of you, his friends, his family or anyone for that matter. If he was, he probably wasn’t thinking straight and thought you’d all be better off without him. His death wasn’t about you or anyone else. It was about himself.”

WHEN SOMEONE DIES BY HOMICIDE OR MANSLAUGHTER

PRESCHOOL AGE

CHILD:

“How did Joshua die?”

ADULT:

“Joshua got in a car accident. Another car crashed into his car. Joshua was hurt very badly, and he died.”

SCHOOL AGE

CHILD:

“Tell me again about the night Joshua died?”

ADULT:

“OK. I’ll tell you again about the accident. Is there something you are trying to figure out? Is that why you want to hear it again?”

ADOLESCENT

CHILD:

“I am going to find that guy and kill him!”

ADULT:

“I hear your anger. I am really angry at him for driving drunk and killing Joshua too. Can we take a moment and talk about this?”

WHEN A PET DIES

PRESCHOOL AGE

CHILD:

“Luna was my best friend.”

ADULT:

“It must feel really hard to have your best friend die. Can you tell me about that?”

SCHOOL AGE

CHILD:

“I’m the only one in this family that misses Luna!”

ADULT:

“Is that how you feel? Maybe I haven’t told you, or showed you enough, how much I miss Luna. I really do. She was such a great dog. I love the way she _____. What do you miss about her?”

ADOLESCENT

CHILD:

“I can’t believe this hurts so much, she was just our dog.”

ADULT:

“She was much more than ‘just a dog’ to us, don’t you think? She was really a part of the family. I really loved her, and I miss her. The house feels empty without her.”

(Wolfelt, 2013)

COMMON QUESTIONS KIDS ASK ABOUT DEATH

These are five subconcepts about death that are represented by children’s questions. Being aware of the types of questions that children may ask can help parents or caregivers feel more prepared to respond when unanticipated questions arise.

1

UNIVERSALITY

*Can some people escape death?
Does every living thing have to die?
Why does death have to happen?
What can I do so that I will never have to die?
When will you die?*

2

IRREVERSIBILITY

*How long do you stay dead after you die?
Can dead people become alive again after they die?*

3

NON-FUNCTIONALITY

*What do you do all the time when you’re dead?
Can you feel anything when you’re dead?
Do dead people still have to eat?*

4

CAUSALITY

*Why do people die?
Do people die because they are bad?
Can people die because someone wished they would die?*

5

CONTINUED LIFE FORM

*What happens after you die?
Even when my body dies, will my spirit go on to a better life?
Will I be alive again in this body or in some different form?*

(Walsh, 2012)

Behavior You May See

How a child and family grieve and cope with a death is greatly influenced by their culture, faith or religious preference, previous experience with grief, the child's age and current development, and most importantly, how the family as a whole approaches the subject.

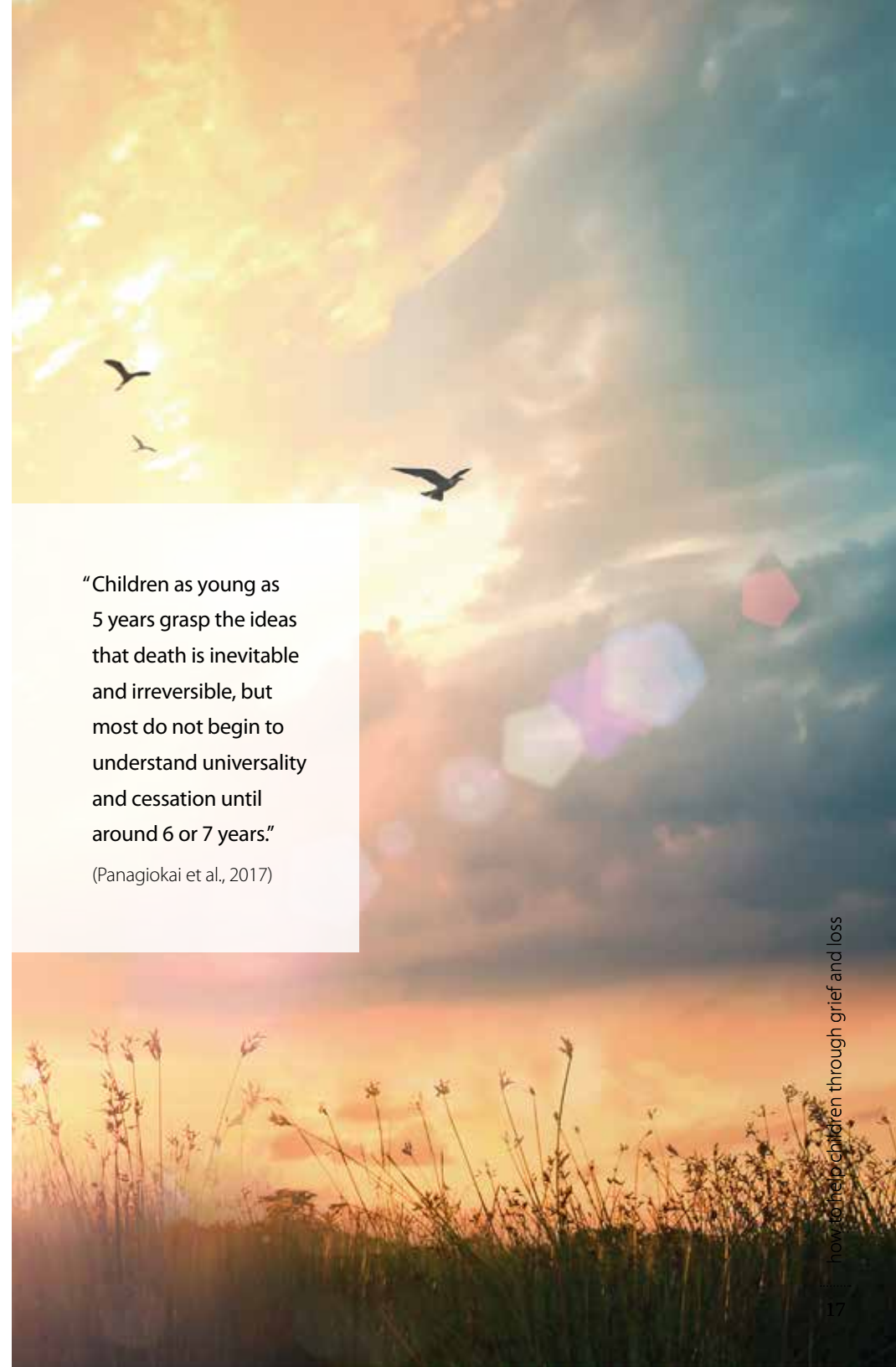
Understanding death is a complex subject for children and adults.

Younger children may believe that wishful thinking or good behavior can bring their loved ones back. Other children may feel some form of responsibility and need help understanding that there is nothing they could have done to change the outcome. You may have a child be direct and ask, "Do they see when they are dead? Can they come back to life? Do all people die?" Children often do not have the same verbal filter that adults have, and they ask what they are feeling. They speak the truth.

Recently, there has been more research focused on death and grief responses in children. In one particular study, "Across all focus groups, the children were curious about death and grief and had numerous questions that focused on: biological/medical issues..." It also acknowledges in the study that "there was a consensus across the focus groups and in the interview that death was not commonly discussed at home" (Paul, 2019).

Some children regress in development temporarily. All behaviors are forms of communication. For example, they may be more attached than usual, have nightmares or become aggressive. Older children may be more silent or more tearful.

We all grieve. It is a process and there is no perfect timeline to get the end of the process. Children look to adults to help them, to start a conversation, or just sit quietly and let them just be sad. It is alright to let a child know that you are also sad and that you are sad with them.



"Children as young as 5 years grasp the ideas that death is inevitable and irreversible, but most do not begin to understand universality and cessation until around 6 or 7 years."

(Panagiokai et al., 2017)

Developmental Concepts and Resources

The following is a useful outline and a list of resources for what your child might believe, how they may respond, and ideas to help them through their grief. Although these are divided up by age and stage of development, understand that a child's response to the death of a loved one will greatly vary based on many factors including personality, previous experience with death, and closeness to the loved one. Once again, every child grieves differently; there is no "normal" way to grieve. This is simply a starting place and reference point. If there are further concerns, don't hesitate to connect with outside professional support, such as a counselor, which can be found in the Resources section.

INFANT/TODDLER (BIRTH-2 YEARS)

Concepts and Beliefs

- No cognitive understanding of death
- Affected by the mood of others
- May confuse death with sleep
- Cannot differentiate short from long absence

Common Reactions

- Loss of sleep
- Loss of appetite
- Clinging to other caregivers/separation anxiety
- Regression (thumb sucking, etc.)
- Increased crying or fussiness
- Temper tantrums
- Nightmares

How to Help

- Give lots of attention

- Maintain routine
- Provide physical comfort, such as holding and cuddling
- Speak in simple and short explanations
- Help them name their feelings

Resources

BOOKS:

- *Something Very Sad Happened: A Toddler's Guide to Understanding Death* by Bonnie Zucker
- *The Goodbye Book* by Todd Parr

VIDEO:

- sesamestreet.org/toolkits/grief

PRESCHOOL AGE (3-5 YEARS)

Concepts and Beliefs

- Lack of permanence
- Lack of language to express themselves
- Cannot differentiate between short and long absence
- May think the deceased person lives underground

Common Reactions

- Asking the same questions repeatedly
- Magical thinking- such as blaming themselves for the death
- Talking about death as a common place
- Sadness
- Aggression
- Bladder or bowel problems
- Regression (potty training, etc.)
- Physical complaints (stomachache, headache, etc.)

How to Help

- Reassure their security
- Answer questions honestly and directly
- Use direct terms: death/dead
- Maintain normal routine and surroundings

- Name feelings expressed by the child and those he or she observes
- Don't shame for regressing

Resources

BOOKS:

- *I Miss You* by Pat Thomas
- *The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst
- *Where's Jess?* by Marvin Johnson
- *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf* by Leo Buscalia
- *When Dinosaurs Die* by Laurie Kransey Brown

VIDEO:

- [sesamestreet.org/toolkits/grief](https://www.sesamestreet.org/toolkits/grief)

SCHOOL AGE (6-11 YEARS)

Concepts and Beliefs

- Personification view of death
- Literal and concrete in thinking about death
- Understand death is permanent and universal
- Tests reality
- Concepts of death may be influenced by images from media, books, Halloween

Common Reactions

- Concern about the dead person's body
- Want to know details about the death
- Worried that someone else in their life might die
- Concern about their own health
- Can become afraid of school or have difficulty concentrating
- Regression and fluctuating moods
- Guilt
- Psychosomatic symptoms (stomachache, headache)
- Defiance

How to Help

- Provide physical outlets
- Model constructive expression and coping skills
- Remind children they are not alone
- Invite children to share memories
- Have discussions of death that include the proper words (i.e. death and died)

Resources

BOOKS:

- *The Memory Box* by Joanna Rowland
- *When Someone Very Special Dies* by Marge Heegaard
- *The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst
- *What On Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies?* by Trevor Romain
- *Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way To Explain Death To Children* by Bryan Mellonie
- *A Taste of Blackberries* by Doris Buchanan Smith

CAMPS:

- Camp Erin (45+ locations) | ourhouse-grief.org/camp-erin
- Comfort Zone Camp | comfortzonecamp.org
- Camp Hope (Livermore, CA) | camphopeca.com

ADOLESCENT (12-18 YEARS)

Concepts and Beliefs

- Death is final and irreversible
- Understand abstract concepts relating to death
- Understand what happens after someone dies
- Death is unpredictable and happens to everyone

Common Reactions

- Use humor to hide feelings
- Don't want others to know so they don't stand out
- May rely on friends for emotional support

- May offer to take on adult responsibilities
- Reactions often reflect what has been learned from a loved one
- Capable of empathy
- Risk-taking behavior
- Increased sexual activity
- Psychosomatic symptoms
- Defiance or anger

How to Help

- Encourage open dialogue
- Find peer support groups
- Invite them to help plan the memorial
- Have them create a memory book of the loved one
- Provide an opportunity to explore and discuss spiritual or cultural beliefs
- Model direct and constructive
- Discuss changes in family roles and dynamics

Resources

BOOKS:

- *Healing Your Grieving Heart For Teens: 100 practical tips* by Alan Wolfelt
- *Straight Talk About Death For Teens* by Earl A Grollman
- *I Will Never Forget You: A Journal of Love and Remembrance* by Emilio Parga
- *Sunshine* by N. Klein (1974)
- *Learning To Say Goodbye* by E. LeShan (1976)

CAMPS:

- Camp Erin (45+ locations) | ourhouse-grief.org/camp-erin
- Comfort Zone Camp | comfortzonecamp.org
- Camp Hope (Livermore, CA) | camphopeca.com

SUPPORT GROUP:

- Hospice of Santa Barbara | hospiceofsb.org/supportgroups

VIDEOS:

- The Grieving Process: Coping with Death (youtube.com/watch?v=gsYL4PC0hyk)
- Grief Out Loud: Teens Talking About Loss (youtube.com/watch?v=qgrRoJyljeQ)

RESOURCES FOR ALL AGES AND PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

BOOKS:

- *A Child Dies: A Portrait of Family Grief* by J Arnold and P Gemma
- *Don't Take My Grief Away: What to Do When You Lose a Loved One* by Doug Manning
- *Talking About Death: A Dialogue Between Parent and Child* by Earl Grollman
- *Teen Grief: Caring for the Grieving Teenage Heart* by Gary Roe
- *When Your Child is Sick* by Joanna Breyer, PhD

PODCAST:

- "Grief Out Loud" hosted by The Dougy Center

SUPPORT GROUP:

- Hospice of Santa Barbara | hospiceofsb.org/supportgroup

WEBSITES:

- sesamestreet.org/toolkits/grief
- dougy.org
- childrengrieve.org
- ourhouse-grief.org
- newyorklife.com/foundation/bereavement-support

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- Hospice of Santa Barbara: provides various bereavement services such as counseling, support groups, spiritual care and informational resources | hospiceofsb.org
- Find a program near you (if you aren't from the Santa Barbara area) | childrengrieve.org/find-support/9-find-support/9-programs-in-california
- Hospice Center of America - Helping a Child Deal with Death: [hospicefoundation.org/Grief-\(1\)/Children-and-Grief](http://hospicefoundation.org/Grief-(1)/Children-and-Grief)
- Dougy Center- Tips to Support Children: dougy.org

SPANISH RESOURCES

- *El hilo invisible* (The Invisible String)
- *Cuando alguien muy especial muere: Los niños aprender a enfrenar la adversidad* (When Someone Very Special Dies)
- *Cuando Muere Alguien: Un Libro de Actividades para Niños y sus Cuidadores* (When Someone Dies: A Child/Caregiver activity book)
- Sesame Street: sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/afliccion
- Hospice Center of America- Helping a Child Deal with Death: hospicefoundation.org/Hospice-Care/How-to-Choose/Spanish-Language-Resources

(Walsh, 2012) (McNiel & Gabbay, 2018)

Visitation And Funerals

At whatever age a child attends a visitation, funeral or memorial service it can be an event filled with emotion, questions and uncertainty. From a developmental perspective, children do best with honesty and when they are prepared for what to expect from all of their senses (see, hear, feel, touch). Every background and belief system has its own unique way of offering how to prepare a child for the experience of saying goodbye. It has been shown that

“Unlike adults, children do not always have the ability or attention span to sit still for an extended period of time. Children may need to have activities to do, be given a place to play, or have multiple breaks if a service is long. Even young adults may need to step away if they feel overwhelmed. Again, everyone processes emotions in their own way.”

(Highmark Caring Place, 2016)

children may want to be an active part in a service or memorial. They are grieving alongside the adults and may wish to add their support. Allowing a child to do a drawing, write a note, create a collage, sing a song or tell a story can help them feel they did their part if this is what they have asked to do.

Depending on the age of the child, they may not understand the relevance of what the service is about. Having a conversation about what they may experience (see, hear, smell, touch and feel), using true and accurate words will help them be better prepared. Showing pictures of

a casket or urn will generate a conversation that will help both you and your child process what is understood or is unclear. When a child cannot be present and needs to attend virtually, it is helpful to prepare the child ahead of time for what they will be seeing. As stated above, children may wish to be an active part in the service and wish to add their portion to the service ahead of time.

Whether virtual or remote, it is important to let children know that any service—visitation or funeral—can be a very emotional experience. Some families are more emotional than others. It is encouraged to have an adult designated to each child in the event they need a break or need additional emotional support.

You may ask, why is the funeral or visitation ritual important?

These rituals can assist in:

- Acknowledging the reality of the death
- Moving toward the pain of the loss
- Remembering the person who died
- Helping to develop a new self-identify
- Being able to receive ongoing support from others

(Highmark Caring Place, 2016)

WORDS TO DEFINE

The following are relevant terms related to the topic of grief, loss and death accompanied by child-friendly definitions that you can adopt to help in explaining concepts or answering questions.

Dead: the person's body stops working. They cannot breathe, eat, sleep, walk, talk, etc., anymore. They also cannot feel pain or feel emotions like being sad or happy.

Funeral: a ceremony where friends and family honor, remember, and say goodbye to the loved one who died.

Suicide: when the person causes their own death on purpose. They did not want to live anymore.

Casket/Coffin: a special box where they put the person who died.

Cemetery: a place where many people who died are buried.

Bury: when the casket or coffin containing the loved one is placed underground.

Cremation: when the person's body is turned into ashes using a lot of heat, and then placed into a special container- another choice along with getting buried.

Grief: the way we feel when someone we love has died.

Trauma: a very bad injury to your body; your body's response to a very scary and overwhelming experience.

(Schnieder, 2018).

Activities to Do With the Family

LONGER ACTIVITIES

THE CHATTER BOX:

- All ages—do together as a family
- *Purpose:* To provide an appointed time and safe space for family members to discuss questions, thoughts and feelings regarding the death of the loved one and their grieving process.
- *Materials:* a box, bowl, cup, etc., sticky notes or pieces of paper, pen
- *Instructions:*
 - Place the box or bowl in an area where the whole family has access to it throughout the day. Put the stack of paper and pen next to it.
 - If the family has a comment or question about the death or grieving process that they would like to bring up for a conversation, they can write it on the sticky note and stick it in the bowl.
 - At the end of the day or week (or during any previously designated time), the family sits down together to go through the sticky notes in the bowl, giving everyone a voice and an opportunity to have the conversation that is important to them.

THE MEMORY BOX:

- All ages—do together as a family
- *Purpose:* This activity is based on the book *The Memory Box* by Joanna Rowland. This activity reminds the family they will never forget their loved one and that they will always keep happy memories with them. They are able to support each other as a family and recognize that they are not alone in their feelings of grief.
- *Materials:* a wooden or cardboard box, art and coloring materials, letters from family and friends, and objects that represent memories with the loved one.

• *Instructions:*

- Decorate the cardboard box with photos of the deceased loved one and art materials.
- Have each family member contribute a couple of items to the box that remind them of their loved one (for example, a letter to the loved one, a feather because birds were their favorite animal, a movie ticket to a fun movie they saw together, a sea shell from the beach they vacationed at every year, etc.)
- As each person is putting something in the box, they can share the memory that is associated with that item or why it reminds them of their loved one.

SHORTER ACTIVITIES

Art and creative expression:

Sometimes children (and adults) struggle to find the words to describe their feelings while grieving. Providing children art materials such as paint, markers or collaging materials gives them the opportunity to express their feelings of grief in a more meaningful and reflective way. It also makes them feel in control in a situation that is unpredictable.

Cook a meal that reminds you of your loved one:

This activity is a way for children to feel connected to their loved one by making a meal that they always made with them or a meal their loved one enjoyed. It is also a time to talk about other memories they have with the loved one.

Write a story, poem or letter to the loved one who died:

This can be kept with the child to look at often or put in a memory box.

Listen to the loved ones favorite song

Bibliotherapy:

Read a book about grief with the child such as, *When Someone Very Special Dies* by Marge Eaton Heegaard. This book and workbook are designed to help children understand concepts of death and learn coping skills. It also encourages parent and child conversation and opens up the opportunity to ask questions the child may have.

Plant a tree or garden in memory of the loved one:

Seen as a symbol of life and hope, the tree gives family and friends a special place to visit and remember the loved one.

Allow for daily activities that the child normally participates in:

(For example, soccer practice, playing outside, reading time, alone time, playing with friends, etc.). This helps stabilize and normalize routine and add familiarity and security in their life.

Drawing and searching for meaning:

Have the child draw a picture of their family or life before the death and another picture of their family or life after the death. Talk about the differences between the two pictures to create an open dialogue and address and discuss feelings around the changes that the death has created.

Volunteer at or donate to foundations or charities that the loved one was involved in to keep the memory and impact of the loved one alive.

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HOPE

Okay, let's imagine that 'Hope' is an animal.
Now what does he look like?

...Slowly and thoughtfully they began to put together this mythical animal that had been such an important part of their lives.

...Hope is about two and a half feet tall. He is covered with fur and it's fluffy. And soft.

...Hope smiles a lot and has blue eyes and a short bottle brush tail that wags. It is the color of sunshine and happiness. One ear stands up and the other flops down.

...Hope giggles. When it talks, you're the only one who can hear it.

...Hope raises its voice sometimes. It has to talk louder than fear. Occasionally, Hope is shy and likes to hide.

...Sometimes you can coax it to come to you, but most of the time you have to be patient and wait. Then it will come to you.

...It has to sleep with you as it's too fragile to sleep outside. If you don't take good care of it ... it can die.

...You mustn't cling or hug it too much because then it will become too big ... and it will control you.

...It's an animal you can't buy or cage. You have to keep looking till you find it. It will come to you only when you need it.

...Hope has offsprings like any other animal. They're called 'Hopelets'. You don't keep them. You share them with other people who need one.

... To these kids, "Hope" came out looking suspiciously like a thirty-inch, sun-drenched rabbit.

- Erma Bombeck

This resource is written for families, loved ones, parents, siblings and all those who care for children that are going through an event that is causing grief. We acknowledge that all family systems are unique and the common ground is that they all come together to support each other in a time of sadness.

These resources are guidelines and suggestions, tools to support you in your journey. Know that we, the staff at Cottage Children's Medical Center, care about you and your family, and are here to help.

Compiled by the Child Life team at Cottage Children's Medical Center

For questions or more information, the Certified Child Life Specialist may be contacted at jwood@sbch.org.