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# Grief and resilience in children and families: Resources for counseling professionals, parents, and children

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Grief and Resilience in Children and Families: Resources  
for Counseling Professionals, Parents, and Children

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A research project submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Educational Specialist

Department of Graduate Psychology

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## Dedication

This research project is dedicated to all children and families who have experienced the death of a loved one. May you find the help and comfort that you need to ease your pain.

## Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the professors of the James Madison University Graduate Counseling Program for all of their support, guidance, and encouragement throughout this process. Special thanks to Dr. Anne Stewart, Dr. Lennis Echterling, and Dr. Jack Presbury for serving as members of my committee and continually challenging me to reach my full potential. I would also like to thank my peers for helping make this journey much more bearable and enjoyable. Thank you to my family for supporting and encouraging me even though it meant sacrificing time apart. I appreciate each and every person's contribution more than you know.

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## Abstract

Ninety percent of children in the United States will have experienced the loss of a significant loved one by the time they are 18 years old (McClure, 2007). Parents and other family members can provide a significant amount of support, provided that they are equipped with the necessary resources. The purpose of this project was to identify and develop tools that provide parents and other family members with the opportunity to learn ways to incorporate themselves as a support system for a grieving child in their family. Children express their feelings by showing rather than telling. Creativity allows bereaved children to express their grief in their own way, as well as recognize new strengths and abilities in themselves. Using creative methods provides children with developmentally appropriate activities in order to help them cope. Through the use of paper, paint, poetry, writing, books, clay, music, dance, pictures, theater, crafts, rituals, and other creative methods, children are allowed a safe space to express an unfamiliar and painful experience (Doka, 2000). The journal I created includes an overview of understandings regarding death for children, offers common signs and symptoms of bereavement, and describes important factors surrounding grief and death within a family. Each section includes a list of activities related to a different theme, and briefly describes its purpose or usefulness. This 365-day interactive journal includes enough activities to allow the family to participate in one activity a day for a year following the death of a loved one. Future recommendations include conducting a study to determine the impact of using this material with professionals, parents, and children. It would be helpful to explore anniversary reactions further, along with the long term negative effects of unresolved grief from childhood.

## Chapter 1 – Introduction

This paper is divided into four sections. Chapter One provides an introduction to the topic, including a grief-related vignette, research questions, goals, and the purpose of the project. Chapter Two is a review of the literature regarding grief and loss in children, and the role of counselors and family members. Chapter Three provides information for counselors working with bereaved children and families, including assessment tools, possible diagnoses and therapies related to bereavement, and interventions counselors have found beneficial in working with bereaved children and families. The Appendix includes innovative resources professionals have developed to help incorporate family members as a support in the coping process of bereaved children, such as therapeutic stories, activity books, videos, and online websites. Annotated descriptions of each are included. The Appendix also contains a 365 Interactive Journal which I developed as a contribution to this area of study.

Mary Ellen was two years old when her father died. At this age, she had not had much opportunity to get to know her father, nor was she able to remember, at a later age, the brief experiences she was able to share with him. Mary Ellen did not receive any counseling growing up, nor was she able to talk about the grief she was dealing with among her other family members. Mary Ellen's grief escalated through the years, and manifested itself through a variety of somatic, behavioral, academic, and emotional symptoms. Later on, in Mary Ellen's early adulthood, she found herself seeking love and attention from a variety of negative sources. She used smoking, drinking, and searching for a man to love to help fill the gap of her father. When she got pregnant, she felt a sense

of obligation to stay with the father of the baby, so she would not create the same life for her child, as she had experienced in her own.

The loss of her father at a young age affected Mary Ellen deeply and continues to still affect her emotionally today. She wishes she could have received counseling as a child in order to have had her grief validated, and to have learned effective coping strategies to help her work through her pain. It would have also been helpful to have had the opportunity to seek more support among her family members, instead of having them leave her out to “keep her away from the bad stuff.” This only left her confused and at times resentful because she was unable to process her grief with those she cared about. Mary Ellen realizes that her mother, who was left to care for four young children on her own, was probably unaware of the negative feelings and questions that emerged for Mary Ellen after the death of her father. “Maybe if we had been provided with some resources for how to support one another as a family, I would not have the same pain I have today grieving the loss of my father.” Death is a natural part of life, and although counseling can be beneficial for some, it is not required in order to successfully cope with grief.

Death and loss affect everyone – children, teenagers, adults, and families. However, death and loss can be more of a confusing, chaotic, and traumatic experience for children. By the end of high school, twenty percent of children will have experienced the death of a parent (Goldman, 2000). Ninety percent of children in the United States will have experienced the loss of a significant loved one by the time they are 18 years old (McClure, 2007). Children can be ignored, overlooked, or dealt with in a less than ideal manner by parents, caregivers, teachers, or other adult figures in the child’s life. Parents may be too caught up in their own grief and distress to recognize any in their own



children (Berns, 2004), which leaves children vulnerable to the neglect of their needs, and without someone to support them through the grief process (Di Ciacco, 2008). It may be that children do not seem to be struggling with any symptoms, and therefore do not catch the attention of teachers, caregivers, or others. Parents and other family members can provide a significant amount of support, provided that they are equipped with the necessary resources.

Children often have the same fears, questions, and concerns regarding death and loss that adults do, yet it is not uncommon for adults to think that children are not capable of having such reactions (Doka, 2000). It is especially important to recognize grieving and bereavement in children in order to help them develop positive coping strategies at an early age, which will assist them in creating patterns for future events in their lives. It is important because children are overlooked many times in their struggle to understand and cope with death and loss. Often, children are not taught appropriate ways to handle their grief, or are punished if they express themselves. Children are often encouraged to “get over it or to “stay strong” (Goldman, 2000). Grief is not only affecting their present emotional stability, but also impacting their future abilities to handle grief. This repression can lead to negative consequences in the future, such as the development of negative coping strategies to deal with their pain and confusion (Di Ciacco, 2008).

Children are not the only people affected by death within their world, and therefore it is important to incorporate the child’s family in the process of developing positive coping strategies. Incorporating different activities or special times, to give expression to the grief, within the daily schedule can be powerful coping strategies, and can be very helpful for children who are yearning for structure and support within their

family. While it can be helpful to define common reactions to death among children, teenagers, and adults, it is also important to recognize that people respond to death in their own way. Even members of the same family, those with similar beliefs and values, and those with similar demographics process grief and death in their own unique manner.

The purpose of this project was to develop tools and resources that provide parents and other family members with the opportunity to learn ways to incorporate themselves as a support system for a grieving child in their family. The project explores different facets of loss, death, and bereavement among children, teenagers, adults, and within families, while incorporating positive coping strategies and resources for professionals, parents, and children to utilize.

Questions to address throughout this project include: What are losses children and families face? What is bereavement? What are children capable of understanding about death? How do children, teenagers, adults, and families vary in their abilities to understand and cope with death? What are common reactions, questions, or feelings associated with death in children, teenagers, and adults? What counseling interventions or strategies are most beneficial when working with those who are dealing with death? What resources are available for professionals, parents, and children? What resources are needed or wanted? What are some ways that family members can be incorporated in the coping process of grieving children? What are benefits of including family members in this process?

My goal was to create resource guides for professionals, parents, and children with the hope of implementing positive coping strategies in their lives during a time of struggle. My hope was to provide ways in which families can come together to support

one another through the use of activities, journals, books, and other tools. I recognize that it can be difficult for parents to understand how to help their children, when often times they are unsure of how to help themselves. Through the use of activity books and interactive journals, parents and families are not expected to figure out what to do on their own, but are given the opportunity to gradually learn ways to interact with each other.

The interactive journal I developed is a booklet containing information for parents and other significant adults, which is to be used within the family setting after a death. The purpose of the interactive journal is to connect families together after a death, to provide information to parents and families, and to allow families the opportunity to learn ways to support one another through activities, role plays, storytelling, relaxation exercises, and other creative means. The journal includes an overview of understandings regarding death for children, offers common signs and symptoms of bereavement, and describes important factors surrounding grief and death within a family. Each section includes a list of activities related to a different theme, and briefly describes its purpose or usefulness. This 365-day interactive journal includes enough activities to allow the family to participate in one activity a day for a year. Through this project I hoped to learn new ways to interact with children, teenagers, adults, and families who are dealing with death in their lives and share these findings with others.

## Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Webster's Dictionary (2011) defines loss as deprivation, or the act of losing possession; the state of being deprived of or of being without something that one has had. Grief is a natural emotional response to loss and it affects each person differently. It can be difficult to talk about a loss, yet it is important in order to help prepare adults with children who experience it. Many adults and children are unprepared in the face of loss, and if left unrecognized or unresolved, it could lead to major problems over time, including depression, anxiety, or regression to earlier stages (Di Ciacco, 2008).

Common losses children experience within their family include death, divorce, abandonment, incarceration, illness, financial changes, abuse, or military deployment (Goldman, 2000). The main focus of this paper is loss by death. Death is not an easy topic for anyone to fully comprehend. It is especially difficult for children who are still developing emotionally, socially, psychologically, and cognitively (Di Ciacco, 2008). It is important for parents, counselors, and other adults to understand the developmental stage of the child, how they perceive death, and common reactions they have towards it. It is beneficial to learn about the grieving process and identify useful resources available for children and adults.

### Helping Children Cope

Helping children cope with death often means educating and providing support for significant adults present in the child's life (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999). Therefore, it is important to help parents and other adults determine what children are capable of understanding about death.

Results of a study conducted by Baker, Sedney, and Gross (1992) show that children understand more about death than adults realize. Children who were involved in different areas of the death had an increased cognitive understanding of death. This means that children who are prevented from participating in death-related functions are being limited in their opportunities to learn through first-hand experience (Weber & Fournier, 1985).

Although an infant is not able to comprehend the meaning of death, they are capable of perceiving changes in their environment and react to others' grief. An infant's routine might also be disrupted after a death, which will thus impact their behavior (Kroen, 1996). Children under the age of three typically have limited verbal ability, which makes it difficult for them to express their grief using words. It is important to understand that although young children do not express their feelings using adult vocabulary, they still experience similar feelings of loss (Seibert, Drolet, & Fetro, 2003). In order to help an infant through this process, it is important for family members to keep the infant's routine on schedule and minimize unusual sounds and behaviors (Kroen, 1996). Children, who were too young to know their loved one at the time of their death, are still vulnerable to grief symptoms later in life. They might feel sad at the inability to recall memories, or envious when they observe other children with a loved one (Emswiler & Emswiler, 2000).

Children under the age of six have a difficult time understanding the permanence of death, as they view it as a temporary state (Silverman & Kelly, 2009; Di Ciacco, 2008; Seibert, Drolet, & Fetro, 2003; Wolfelt, 1983). Due to their egocentric thinking, many children at this age believe the death to be a result of their actions. Family members and

other adults need to ensure children that the death was not their fault. Children of this age also have magical thinking, which leads them to believe that they have the power to bring the person back from the dead (Di Ciacco, 2008; Seibert, Drolet, & Fetro, 2003; O'Toole & Cory, 1998; Schuurman, Hoff, Spencer, & White, 1997; Granot, 2000; Jewett, 1982; Schaefer & Lyons, 1986).

Children between the ages of six and nine have a better understanding of death and its consequences than younger children, as they are starting to grasp the finality of it. At this age, children are able to comprehend that death is personal and may fear that others will die too. They will often ask many questions, especially about the physical details of the death. Children at this age sometimes personify death as an ugly monster and fear that it will take them away (Silverman & Kelly, 2009; Di Ciacco, 2008; Seibert, Drolet, & Fetro, 2003; Danielson & Bushaw, 1995; Schaefer & Lyons, 1986; Wolfelt, 1983). After the age of nine, most children are able to comprehend the concept of death similar to that of an adult using abstract thinking. They are still likely to have many questions, and need help with the coping process (Di Ciacco, 2008; Seibert, Drolet, & Fetro, 2003).

As children transition into adolescence they are able to conceptualize their own beliefs about death, yet they often have a difficult time determining how to express their grief. They are at an age where many changes are happening already in their life, and death can be a shock to their basic life system. Adolescents are likely to hide their emotions, and therefore, it is important for family members and other adults to remain aware of any unusual behavior (Kroen, 1996). It is not uncommon for adolescents to believe that their grief is unique and cannot be understood by others (Nolen-Hoeksema &

Larson, 1999). The Harvard Child Bereavement Study (Silverman & Worden, 1992a; as cited in Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999) found that most children understood the concept of death in the abstract, but lacked sufficient vocabulary and communication skills to express it.

“Grief does not focus on one’s ability to ‘understand,’ but instead upon one’s ability to ‘feel.’ Therefore, any child mature enough to love is mature enough to grieve” (Wolfelt, 1983; as cited in Goldman, 2000 & Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999).

Children are capable of grieving at any age, but the ways by which they express their grief will depend on the child’s age, development, and previous experiences (Doka, 2000; Wolfelt, 1983).

#### Differentiating Between Adult and Childhood Grief

Although there are some similarities, it has been found that there are differences between grief in children and adults (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999; O’Toole & Cory, 1998). The primary concerns of children who have experienced a death include thinking that they caused the death, wondering if it is going to happen to them too, and worrying about who is going to take care of them. Children and adults differ in their cognitive ability to understand death, which influences their grief response. Children who have not yet comprehended that death is permanent will have fewer grief responses, as they are anticipating that their loved one will return. Children’s limited vocabulary often makes it difficult to express their thoughts and feelings regarding the death. Adults use discussion and conversation to process their feelings about the death, while children use play to work through their loss (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999; Berns, 2004; Baker, Sedney, & Gross, 1992).

Children do not grieve alone, but rather within a social network of family members, friends, peers, cultural setting, and community. They are likely to mimic the coping and communication patterns observed in the significant adults and family members around them (Di Ciacco, 2008). Bereaved children need consistent support from adults during the grieving process in order to successfully progress. The grief process will be delayed during any point in which the support is not available (Baker, Sedney, & Gross, 1992).

#### Family Factors Influencing Grief

There are many factors within the family which influence a child's response and adjustment to death. It is important to consider the child's relationship with the person who died. The nature of the death including when, how, and where are important aspects to think about. If the death was the cause of an extended illness, the family may have had the opportunity to prepare the child. However, if the death was sudden and traumatic, it can often be more difficult for the family to explain. Some deaths, such as a suicide or substance overdose can elicit shame or embarrassment within a family, which can also impact the child's coping process. The child's personality, developmental abilities and previous experience with death also contribute to the child's ability to cope with the situation. A parent or family's own response to death is significant, as the child is likely to mimic the behavior they observe within their support system. If a parent is overwhelmed and grief-stricken, the child might be scared to express their own grief, in fear that they will increase their parent's sadness. If a family member does not outwardly express any feelings of sadness, this might confuse the child and inhibit them from



expressing any feelings of sadness or anger they might possess (Di Ciacco, 2008; Smith, Jaffe-Gill, & Segal, 2009; Schuurman et al., 1997; Wolfelt, 1983).

Factors such as mental illness, learning disabilities, or lack of social skills may lead to more challenges in a child's ability to cope with the loss, as they might have a more difficult time understanding or managing changes due to the loss, as well as lack the ability to seek support from others (Wolfelt, 1983). Children might also have a difficult time adjusting if the death was a result of a long illness, sudden accident, violence, or under uncertain conditions (Walsh & McGoldrick, 1991; as cited in Bosticco & Thompson, 2005). Families who encourage open communication are often beneficial for children coping with death as they feel safe and comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings. Life stressors, such as financial problems, difficult living situations, divorce, or illness, within the family can impact the child's coping process, as they might feel overwhelmed and as if they cannot handle further struggles. The family's access to resources and services are especially important when helping a child deal with their grief. Neighbors, family members, mental health professionals, or other community members can provide the family and the child with support to help them cope during a difficult time (Wolfelt, 1983).

#### Differentiating Between Grief, Bereavement, and Mourning

It is often difficult to differentiate meanings among the terms grief, bereavement, and mourning. According to Linda Goldman (2000), grief is defined as a normal, internalized reaction to the loss of a person, thing, or idea, or rather the emotional response to loss. Averill (1968, as cited in Payne, Horn, & Relf, 1999) described grief as a set of stereotyped responses, both psychological and physiological, and defined it in

terms of mental pain, distress, and sorrow. Bereavement is considered to be the state of having lost something (Goldman, 2000) or a significant other in one's life (Payne, Horn, & Relf, 1999). Mourning is considered the act of outwardly expressing the internal experience of grief (Goldman, 2000; Wolfelt, 1983). It is considered to be the cultural expression of grief, typically determined by society through such rituals as funerals (Goldman, 2000; Payne, Horn, & Relf, 1999). Bereavement is said to trigger a reaction known as grief, which is outwardly expressed in a set of behaviors known as mourning (Stroebe, 1993a; as cited in Payne, Horn, & Relf, 1999). It is not uncommon for bereaved children to mourn through behaviors rather than words (Goldman, 2000).

#### Emotional Impact

The emotional impact caused by the death of a loved one will be present with a child throughout their life. However, it is important for parents and other adults to be prepared for unexpected reactions especially throughout the first year. During the first few weeks and months there are likely to be many changes within the household including learning to adjust to different schedules and family members assuming new roles. Parents should contact the child's school to notify teachers, counselors, and any other faculty members working with child about the death and notify them if a child is going to be absent for an extended period of time. Children may not want to miss school, as they do not want to be different from their peers or they may be anxious about completing missed assignments. Some children may need to be absent from school longer, as they may be unable to concentrate or handle questions asked by their peers. Bedtime can be a difficult part of the day, as there are not any activities, friends, or school work to occupy them. Children might become clingy at night, fearing the dark,

unexplained noises, or visits from their dead loved one. It is important for parents to remain calm and patient while helping to reassure their child at bedtime (Lewis & Lippman, 2004).

#### Impact of Holidays and Special Occasions

Grief is often triggered by a holiday, an anniversary, or a special occasion (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999; Pennells & Smith, 1995). Special days, such as birthdays, holidays, and special events, can be difficult as they elicit memories of a loved one and remind a child that they are no longer able to celebrate with them. A child's birthday, as well as the loved one's birthday can trigger an emotional response. Mother's day, father's day, or grandparent's day can be especially difficult if a mother, father, or grandparent has died. Allowing the child to celebrate in their loved one's honor, by making a card, lighting a candle, or sharing happy memories about their loved one, can help with the coping process (Lewis & Lippman, 2004). Holidays tend to be a difficult time because they elicit feelings of separation and transition. Recognizing that a loved one is no longer present to share in these days is painful, but is part of the coping process. It may be difficult to feel thankful at Thanksgiving or joyful at Christmas, and it may be a struggle to make a New Year's resolution. It is important for family members to role model feelings of hope throughout these difficult days. Birthdays are a reminder that a loved one is no longer present, but it seems like an invisible holiday, since not as many people are aware of this special day. Therefore, it is important for parents and other family members to help children celebrate in honor of their loved one, as dismissing special days is likely to make them feel more different from their peers. Recognizing special days provides a sense of safety and security as it ensures bereaved children that although something bad

has occurred, positive things in life will continue. Holidays help young children further understand that their loved one is not going to return, allowing them to accept that death is final (Emswiler & Emswiler, 2000).

It is important for parents and family members to talk with their child about upcoming holidays and decide how they would like to celebrate the day. Parents and family members should allow the child to reminisce about their loved one and express their thoughts and feelings about what it is like for them to celebrate without their loved one. Parents and family members should encourage traditions to continue even in the absence of their loved one. Special events such as a graduation or extracurricular program such as a child's ballet recital or important baseball game can trigger an emotional response, as these are occasions where loved ones are especially appreciated. It is important to remain aware of these special days, particularly throughout the first year after the death, and to help the child learn skills to cope on these emotionally-charged days (Lewis & Lippman, 2004). Most changes in a child's behavior are typically observed within two years of their loved one's death (Di Ciacco, 2008).

The anniversary of the death might elicit feelings that might not have been present in a while. Children may vividly remember the day their loved one died and the feelings of anger, sadness, and guilt that accompanied it. Even if younger children do not remember the exact date of the death, they are likely to associate it with a season or event. If children want to participate in an activity to celebrate in their loved one's honor, this should be supported. However, children should not be forced to do so (Emswiler & Emswiler, 2000).

Anniversary reactions are a therapeutic part of the grieving process. However, when adults observe these reactions in children, they often mistake them as an indication that a child is regressing and unable to confront psychological issues dealing with the loss. Rather, these reactions should be considered an opportunity for children to reflect upon their previous reactions to the loss after gaining new insight and developing increased intellectual capacities (Baker, Sedney, & Gross, 1992).

Even though the first year is a particularly crucial time to help children adjust to changes in their life in response to a loved one's death, later events can also trigger renewed grieving (O'Toole & Cory, 1998). Holidays, birthdays, major transitions, first dates, career selections, marriage, and having children can re-elicite grief responses, especially as children get older and have a better understanding of their loss and its impact. The coping process can fluctuate as the child learns to deal with the loss and adapt to new phases of their life. Children can experience survivor guilt which can prevent them from coping appropriately with their loss, as they believe that they deserve to suffer. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for older children and adults to rely on unhealthy or negative means of dealing with their grief, such as using drugs, alcohol, sex, self-mutilation, high-risk behaviors, or dropping out of school (Di Ciacco, 2008).

Children often use repetition as a way to learn difficult concepts. It is important for adults to understand that this is true for children learning to understand and cope with death. Children might ask the same questions many times, even after discussing it moments earlier. This could mean that children are not grasping the concept as well as they would like, or they could be testing adults to see if they will receive the same response each time. This process can be tiring for adults, yet it is important to remember

that this is a child's method of coping and should not be discouraged (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999; Schuurman et al., 1997). Children will have questions about forgetting, clichés, closure, secrecy, facts regarding the death, being unable to express their grief, others dying, heaven and God, safety, and who is to blame. Common questions asked by children following a death include wondering why their loved one died, what it felt like to die, if their loved one was thinking about them when they died, what they looked like when they died, if they will forget their loved one, where they are now, why people do not talk about their loved one or the death, where or what is heaven, who is to blame for the death, if it is their fault, if others will die too, how to feel safe and secure, and why they do not cry anymore (Goldman, 2000).

The family plays an important role in the coping process. Families in one study reported that support they received from other family members was essential in dealing with their grief in a healthy and positive manner (Weber & Fournier, 1985). When children experience a death, they are affected by the loss as well as by the changes in their family as a result of the death. Family members might be expected to assume different roles in order to maintain balance within the family. Communication patterns can change within a family after a death occurs, which can be especially difficult for children figuring out ways to deal with their loss. However, communication is an essential part of helping children cope with death. Children need the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings with someone who can effectively communicate with them (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999; Baker, Sedney, & Gross, 1992; Weber & Fournier, 1985).

Family members might become overly protective of each other following a death, thinking that something might happen to them as well. However, if parents or other adults are too overprotective of children, it could interfere with the child's sense of autonomy and self-sufficiency, and could lead to generalized fear or anxiety. Trying to protect a child from the pain by refusing to discuss the topic of death creates a disruption in the relationship and decreases the opportunities for dealing with their grief (Bosticco & Thompson, 2005; Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999). Parents and other family members might have a difficult time setting limits or enforcing rules with children after a death. However, it is important for children to maintain structure during the coping process, and continue receiving discipline. Children often turn to parents and other significant adults to learn how to cope. If an adult copes by withdrawing emotionally, a child might feel abandoned, sad, or lonely. If an adult responds to the death with anger, the child might withdraw or become overly compliant, in an effort to decrease any anger outbursts from the adult (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999).

Emotional support from family members can help children cope following a death, but many families avoid discussing death and not prepared to deal with it when it occurs (Crosby & Jose, 1983; as cited in Weber & Fournier, 1985). When the topic of death is mentioned, many family members feel anxious and uncomfortable, indirectly teaching children that it should not be discussed (Schneidman, 1971; as cited in Weber & Fournier, 1985). This lack of learning often results in children displaying inappropriate responses to cope with their grief (Fears & Schneider, 1981; as cited in Weber & Fournier, 1985).

One prevailing reason family members often have difficulty addressing the topic of grief and coping is the lack of experience most families have dealing with it (Goldberg, 1973; as cited in Weber & Fournier, 1985). Previous generations of children were included in death-related activities, as many family members died in the home (Doyle, 1977; Plank & Plank, 1978; as cited in Weber & Fournier, 1985). Changes in culture have encouraged isolation about the topic of death, failing to integrate attitudes of acceptance of it as a natural part of life (Laing, 1965; as cited in Weber & Fournier, 1985).

It is important to understand that there are factors that can inhibit grief in children. When a parent or other significant adult has difficulty grieving, or is unable to accept a child's pain or mourning, this can impact the child's ability to grieve. A child, who is overly concerned about a parent or other adult, can become consumed in trying to prevent the adult from hurting, which denies them the opportunity to grieve. Children who lack an adult in their life to support or help them understand the coping process will have a difficult time expressing their grief appropriately. Other factors that inhibit grief in children include secondary losses, unstable family environment, and lack of opportunity to express feelings (Rando, 1988; as cited in Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999; Smith, Jaffe-Gill, & Segal, 2009).

All children will have different reactions to death and exhibit a variety of symptoms. Normal grief consists of physical, emotional, behavioral, and neurological symptoms. Common physical symptoms include sleep difficulty, headaches, stomachaches, changes in appetite, fatigue, dizziness, and increased illness. Emotional symptoms include fear, shame, guilt, anger, sadness, mood swings, depression, anxiety,



hysteria, loneliness, helplessness, relief, rage, illusions or hallucinations, and suicidal thoughts as a plan to reunite with their loved one. Behavioral symptoms include clinginess, increased temper tantrums, poor grades, nightmares, dreams of the deceased, social withdrawal, fighting, and regression to earlier stages before the death occurred such as bedwetting or thumb-sucking. Changes in thought patterns include difficulty concentrating or making a decision, self-destructive thoughts, decreased self-esteem, confusion, disbelief, and preoccupation. It is also common for children to replay events from their loved one's death or funeral, speak about them in the present tense, and search for medical information regarding their loved one's death. It is important for families and other adults to recognize that some children will ask many questions and feel comfortable displaying their feelings regarding the death, whereas other children might remain quiet and appear as if nothing has happened (Di Ciacco, 2008; Goldman, 2000; Wolfelt, 1983).

Adults and children often think that getting over their grief means forgetting their deceased loved one, without recognizing that their pain is what connects them to their loss. It is important to help children and families create alternative ways to connect them with their loved one, decreasing the pain, and turning it into a positive experience (Goldman, 2000).

According to Sandra Fox, past director of the Boston "Good Grief" program, children of any age who have experienced a loss need to work through four phases in order to grow. The four phases include understanding, grieving, commemorating, and going on. Understanding refers to the child's need to make sense of the death. Families will have different ways of explaining death and its accompanying aspects to their children. It is important to remain aware that children's understanding will depend on

their developmental level. Understanding can be influenced by magical thinking, or a child's belief that they are responsible for their loved one's death (Goldman, 2000; Carney, 2004).

Clichés can also misconstrue a child's understanding of death, as they do not concretely describe what is happening. Referring to a loved one's death using phrases such as "passing away," "going on a long trip," or "sleeping" can confuse a child and often lead them to believe that the death is not permanent, thinking that their loved one might someday "wake up" or "come back from their trip." When others mention going on a trip, this might elicit fear of abandonment. Spiritual phrases such as "God wanted them" can elicit confusion, as children might fear that others will be wanted and taken as well. Children could also develop a fear of God, or wonder why God did not take them. Children might learn to fear hospitals, thinking that anyone who visits a hospital will die, if that is where their loved one died. It is important for parents and adults to help explain to children that people can die in a hospital, but usually it is a place where sick people get better. Therefore, it is important to use concrete language to help explain the situation in terms that the child will understand. Providing children with the truth will establish an atmosphere of trust and confidence (Goldman, 2000; Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999; Kroen, 1996; Schaefer & Lyons, 1986). Researchers found that adults who were not provided with the truth as a child about a loved one's death, considered this the worst lie they were ever told. They reported that they felt deceived and had a difficult time overcoming this. When the parents were addressed about this, they believed that lying was helping to protect their child from the pain (Borba, 2009).

Stage models of the grief process differ in their details in clinical writings (Bowlby, 1980; Glick, Weiss, & Parkes, 1974; Horowitz, 1976; Kubler-Ross, 1969; Pollock, 1987; Shuchter & Zisook, 1993; as cited in Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999). Many would prefer to view grief as a process, not as a set of stages, as each individual experiences unique grief reactions (Parkes, 1971; Worden, 1982; as cited in Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999). According to Carol and David Eberling (1991; as cited in Goldman, 2000), grieving is an ongoing process for children and adolescents and consists of four phases. These phases are interchangeable and can reoccur at any time. The phases include shock and disbelief, searching and yearning, disorganization and despair, and rebuilding and healing. It is common for children to feel confused and search for answers or meaning after a death. During the phase of shock and disbelief, children might be in denial of the death, feeling numb and unable to comprehend that the death is real. During the searching and yearning phase, children may search for a loved one or imagine hearing or seeing them. During the disorganization and despair phase, children may experience intense feelings of sadness, loneliness, anxiety, hopelessness, and loss of interest in everyday life. During the rebuilding and healing phase, children begin to accept the loss and reengage in normal activities. Grief may still be present, but it is no longer the main focus of their life (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999). Families are an essential piece to the rebuilding and healing process needed for a child to cope with their loss.

Rituals are important for bereaved children as they offer structure during a chaotic time. Funerals and memorial services are rituals that provide an opportunity to share feelings with others, as well as a sense of control during a time that seems out of control. Rituals provide an opportunity to find meaning and social support. Rituals are an

important part of the coping process for grieving children because they provide meaning and structure allowing space, time, and support to recognize, respond to, and adjust to the loss. They also give an opportunity to face the loss in non-verbal and defined ways (Rando, 1984; as cited in Doka, 2000). Each culture has its own rituals, beliefs, and traditions regarding death and grief, whether they are clearly defined or implicitly understood. It is important to recognize that culture and faith will impact the ways in which families respond to their child's grief, and the ways in which they allow the child to remember their loved one (Corr & Balk, 2010).

Memories are an important aspect of the coping process for children. Children who experience a death at a young age will have fewer memories of their loved one. The absence of memories can be painful for children, especially later on in life. Parents and other adults can help children remember their loved one through stories, pictures, and home-videos (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999; Pennells & Smith, 1995).

Commemorating the death allows a child to remember their loved one in a special way. Commemoration rituals include memorial services, planting a memory garden, making a book of memories about the loved one, or donating a book in their loved one's honor (Goldman, 2000). Families can collaborate and brainstorm their own ideas for how to remember their loved one. Going on emphasizes the importance of participating in enjoyable activities after a loved one has died. It is important for families and other adults to encourage children to continue with their normal activities, despite the guilt they might experience. Children need reassurance that this process does not mean forgetting about their loved one, but rather is an opportunity to celebrate their life as well as the life their loved one once lived (Goldman, 2000).

It can be difficult for parents and other adults to help children cope with a death, when they are struggling to deal with their own emotional needs (Silverman & Kelly, 2009). Parents and other adults might avoid talking about the death with their child because they are anxious and uncomfortable with the topic. They might also think that avoiding the topic will prevent the child from feeling any pain or distress (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999). However, avoiding the topic can negatively impact the child's coping process, leading to problems later on. Feelings of insecurity and abandonment are the result of refraining from discussing death with children. If children are unable to receive the facts about the death from trusted adults, they might create their own images, which are often worse than reality. Children are unable to learn healthy coping skills for dealing with grief later in life, if they are not provided with the opportunity to discuss the topic with their parents or other family members (Rando, 1988; as cited in Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999).

Parents and family members of bereaved children need to be educated and supported in order for them to respond effectively and appropriately. Children who are not provided the opportunity to learn appropriate coping skills or express their thoughts and feelings about the death are at risk of problems later in life. These problems are also influenced by the response of the parents and family members, availability of social support, life circumstances, and consistency in a child's daily routine (Berlinsky & Biller, 1982; Brown, Harris, & Bifulco, 1986; Elizur & Kauffman, 1983; Norris & Murrell, 1987; Reese, 1982; as cited in Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999). It is important for parents and other adults to acknowledge a child's grief and include them in the mourning

process. Excluding them can make them feel angry, ignored, or unimportant (Pennells & Smith, 1995).

Children rely on their families and other adults to help them cope after a death. Therefore, it is important for families to understand the needs of children who have experienced a death in their life. Children need clear and concrete explanations regarding an impending death or after a death has occurred. It can be especially scary for children if they fill in missing pieces to the story on their own, as they usually imagine the worst. Children need to be reassured that they will be taken care of and have their basic needs met after a death (Corr & Balk, 2010; Schuurman et al., 1997), and they will continue to receive structure and discipline in an effort to stabilize the situation. They also need to be reassured that the death was not their fault, and that there is nothing they can do to reverse it. Busy parents and other adults might underestimate the need to genuinely listen to a child's feelings. However, it is especially important after a death for children to feel that they are being heard and assure that their feelings are not being minimized or brushed aside. Children might feel as if they are not allowed to express sadness or anger after a death, especially if they observe adults refraining from showing these emotions. It is helpful for children to observe adults expressing grief in constructive ways, in order to learn how to cope in their own way. Children need to be encouraged to express their feelings in a safe and individual manner. Death can often increase chaos and confusion in a home. Therefore, it is important for parents and other adults to maintain a routine as much as possible. Children especially need opportunities to remember their loved one, both immediately after the death and throughout their life (Corr & Balk, 2010; Jewett, 1982).

Parents and family members can help educate children about death starting at an early age. Having a conversation with a child when a pet dies (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999; Weber & Fournier, 1985), or after discovering a dead bird in the yard or squirrel in the street can help provide them with the skills necessary to cope with a death later in their life. Using books and movies can also be a way to help introduce the topic of death to children and to help them understand and answer questions about it. It is important to be cautious when choosing movies and books to read with them, as not all books and movies are meant to be used as a teaching tool (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999).

Children often encounter death in books, television, movies, on the internet, and through other media outlets. However, these sources usually depict death in a fantastical or unrealistic manner, which can create further confusion and more questions for children. Video games, television shows, and movies often portray death in a violent manner, and often do not include death as a natural part of life. Therefore, it is important for parents and other adults to remain aware of what their children are exposed to, and help clarify any misconceptions they might have from these media sources (Seibert, Drolet, & Fetro, 2003).

Children need support in order to cope positively with a loss. Researchers have found that having family members and friends providing emotional and material support reduces stress both immediately following and long term after a loss. Individuals without any support are more likely to become depressed and more distressed over time. Individuals with a positive support system are more likely to use adaptive coping strategies to deal with their loss (Bass, Bowman, & Noelkerm, 1991; Clayton, Halikas, &

Maurice, 1971; Dimond, Lund, & Caserta, 1987; Norris & Murrell, 1990; Schwarzer, 1992; Stroebe, Stroebe, Abakoumkin, & Schut, 1996; Vachon & Stylianos, 1998; Windholz, Marmar, & Harowitz, 1985; as cited in Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999). Silverman and Worden (1993; as cited in Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999) emphasized the importance of social support, family systems, resilience, and good adaptation in the study of childhood bereavement. Balmer (1992; as cited in Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999) reported that a positive family atmosphere was helping in the coping process for children. A positive family atmosphere is defined as one that is cohesive, with minimal conflict, and allows the expression of feelings.

Family members do not always grieve in the same way or at the same time as one another, which can create conflict and misunderstandings within the home (Bowlby-West, 1983; Walsh & McGoldrick, 1991; Worden, 1991; as cited in Bosticco & Thompson, 2005; Pennells & Smith, 1995). Problems can arise when one family member attempts to persuade another to try their coping style and to discourage the other person's way. They might misinterpret intentions and facts, creating conflict and isolation (Bosticco & Thompson, 2005). Sometimes, family members accuse those around them that they do not care enough or do not miss their loved one because they are not reacting the "way they should be." Some family members might have a difficult time when others speak about their loved one (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999). It is important for parents and other family members to recognize how their own beliefs and changes in routine and roles are being interpreted by children learning to cope with death (Pennells & Smith, 1995).



Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson (1999) identified two different methods used to cope with a loss. Problem-focused coping uses active approaches to overcome a loss, and emotion-focused coping responds to the emotional impact of the loss. The six types of emotion-focused coping include support-seeking, emotional expression, reappraisal, distraction, avoidance, and rumination. Support seeking incorporates family members, friends, and professionals in the coping process through emotional and practical support. Children seek support from parents and family members to help them learn how to cope. Emotional expression encourages articulation of feelings through conversation or personal reflection such as art or writing. Parents and family members can encourage children to express their feelings through conversations with a professional or within the home, and through play and other creative methods. Reappraisal is the process of thinking through the loss and attempting to identify something positive. Parents and family members can share positive stories about their loved one and help children identify positive memories. Distraction involves participating in positive activities to divert attention from the loss. Family members encourage children to engage in their normal routine and activities. Avoidance involves denying the loss or participating in unhealthy activities such as drinking alcohol, binge eating, or using drugs in order to avoid thinking about the loss. Although less common for younger children to use drugs and alcohol as a means to avoid thinking about their loss, parents and family members should not overlook this coping strategy, as it is likely to reappear as children get older. Younger children are still likely to avoid thinking about the loss, through over active involvement with extracurricular activities or spending time with peers. Rumination is the process of continually focusing on negative emotions elicited by the loss. Children might

constantly worry that they were to blame for their loved one's death or might be afraid to express their feelings openly with their family (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999).

Parents or other adults assisting children with their loss should remember that children grieve at their own time and in their own way. Parents and adults should not compare the child's behavior with typical adult responses or let their own understandings about death interfere. The most effective way to help and support the child is to be genuine, have an open mind, use appropriate and simple language, and listen to their thoughts and needs through conversation and observation. Children should not be told not to cry or to stay strong, but rather should be encouraged to share their feelings openly (Corr & Balk, 2010; Granot, 2000; Smith, Jaffe-Gill, & Segal, 2009). Adults should use terms that a child will understand, as the concept of death is difficult to grasp, especially if using complex language to describe it. Parents and adults should not have a timeline of when a child should grieve or what it should look like, but rather allow the child to do so in their own way. It is important for parents and adults to listen to a child, instead of dominating the conversation with their own thoughts. Parents and family members can also observe a child's behavior, if the child has a difficult time talking, and note any changes or unusual behavior not associated with the normal grieving process (Corr & Balk, 2010).

Helpful things to remember when helping a child cope with death include recognizing that children are aware of death and are capable of grieving. Children are inquisitive about life and death, and are likely to ask many questions in order to better grasp its meaning. Adults need to recognize that death and loss are present in many aspects of children's daily lives, including movies, books, television, and games, and

should use these as opportunities to converse about loss. In order to best communicate with children about their thoughts and feelings regarding the loss, adults need to develop and maintain a relationship of trust and honesty, by genuinely listening to their comments, questions, and concerns. It is essential to use concrete and accurate language when responding to children's questions, using "I don't know" when unsure about a topic (Corr & Balk, 2010).

Bereaved children need information, truthful explanations, help with expressing feelings, reassurance that they did not cause the death and that they will be taken care of, and help with other everyday stressors accompanied by the loss, including changes in routine and roles (Pennells & Smith, 1995). Parents and other adults should encourage play as this is a child's primary mode of communication and coping. Adults should try not to provide children with special attention, especially in front of their peers, as it makes them feel different from the group. Routines and daily schedules should be maintained in order to provide the bereaved child with some sense of consistency, stability, and security that might have been lost because of the death (Danielson & Bushaw, 1995; Granot, 2000; Schuurman et al., 1997). Children should be encouraged and provided with opportunities to remember their loved one through commemoration activities (O'Toole & Cory, 1998).

Although children are inherently resilient, some need more support and encouragement following a loss. Therefore, it is important for parents and family members to remain aware of children's responses and behaviors throughout the grieving and coping process, and provide them with the necessary tools to help them learn and grow. Parents and family members can assist bereaved children in developing

characteristics of resiliency throughout their daily routine. These characteristics include hopefulness, awareness, self-acceptance, maintaining appropriate boundaries, assertiveness, congeniality, imagination, forgiveness, participating in rituals, and remembering. As parents and family members encourage and model these skills, children can observe and learn from them, which increases the likelihood that they will successfully cope with their grief (O'Toole & Cory, 1998).

Parents and family members can provide tremendous support to bereaved children. However, it can be difficult for some to fully understand their child's needs or know how to successfully assist with the coping process. Professional assistance might be needed for families who are feeling uncertain of how to proceed with their child following a loss. The next chapter is a review of information related to counselors working with bereaved children and families, including assessment tools, possible diagnoses and therapies related to bereavement, and interventions counselors have found beneficial in working with bereaved children and families.

### Chapter 3 – Information for Counselors

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fourth Edition Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR) uses the term bereavement to describe the reaction to the death of a loved one (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). The DSM-IV-TR code V62.82 is used when the clinical focus of treatment is Bereavement. Although some individuals may present symptoms related to Major Depressive Episode, this diagnosis should not be given unless symptoms are still present two months following the loss. Symptoms that are not associated with a “normal” grief reaction include feeling guilty about the death beyond those related to actions taken or not taken, preoccupation with death beyond a desire to be with their deceased loved one, overwhelming feelings of worthlessness, obvious psychomotor delay, enduring functional impairment, and hallucinations beyond thinking that the deceased has been seen or heard (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

Abnormal grief is also known as “pathological, complicated, morbid, unresolved, or atypical” (Middleton, Raphael, Martinek, & Misso, 1993; as cited in Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999). The term chronic or prolonged grief is used when symptoms last longer than typical, which the DSM-IV-TR has noted to be two months (Parkes, 1965; as cited in Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999). Abnormal grief can be used when acute grief symptoms are non-existent following a death, as grief is a normal and healthy response to loss (Deutsch, 1937; Lindemann, 1944; Parkes, 1965; as cited in Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999; Webb, 2010). The term delayed grief is used when symptoms of grief do not emerge until long after a loss has occurred (Parkes, 1965; as cited in Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999; Webb, 2010). Pathological grief reactions refer to symptoms

including suicidal preoccupation, fantasies of reuniting with the deceased, psychomotor delays, severe restlessness, intense guilt and depressed mood, traumatic and intrusive images of the death, and replaying the death over and over (Middleton, Raphael, Martinek, & Misso, 1993; as cited in Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999). However, using terms such as abnormal or pathological to describe grief symptoms can be controversial as they suggest that there is a normal way to react to death (Payne, Horn, & Relf, 1999).

Since children have a difficult time dealing directly with their grief at a young age, it is more appropriate to assess how much the loss is impacting the child's life, rather than the length of time a child is displaying a reaction. It is helpful to consider how well the child is able to participate in normal daily activities and continue with developmental tasks even while showing symptoms of grief. The term disabling grief is used when social, emotional, and physical development has been significantly impacted. Complicated grief is used to describe a child's inability to return to the same level of functioning seen before the loss. Children with complicated grief are often seen with symptoms of separation distress and trauma (Webb, 2010). The Inventory of Complicated Grief-Revised (ICG-R; Melhem et al., 2007; as cited in Webb, 2010) is used to identify complicated grief in children and adolescents.

Fox (1985; as cited in Webb, 2010) suggested that children should be assessed by professional mental health clinicians when the child is at risk for suicide or was involved directly in the death. Children who are identified as emotionally disturbed or developmentally disabled, have a serious illness, or are unable to participate in once normal activities are likely to need professional assessment. Fox also suggested that children who present psychosomatic symptoms, have difficulties with school, nightmares,

changes in sleep or appetite, and regress to previous stages should be assessed (Webb, 2010; Doka, 2000).

It is important to consider individual factors, factors related to the death, and family, social, and religious-cultural factors when assessing a bereaved child. Assessments should focus on the child's life before the death occurred as well as the current functioning of the child, in order to gain a better understanding of how the child is coping and adjusting. Individual factors include age, developmental stage, cognitive abilities, temperament, previous coping mechanisms, medical history, child's experience with other losses, and previous ability to adjust at home, in school, and with peers (Webb, 2010). Wolfelt (1983; as cited in Webb, 2010) developed The Loss Inventory to help children understand that grief responses occur not only with death but also with other everyday losses.

Factors related to the death include whether the death was anticipated or unexpected, existence of violence or trauma, the child's relationship to the deceased, and the child's response to death. Other factors related to the death include the child's contact with the deceased; such as whether they were present at their loved one's death, if they saw the body after the death, participation in formal ceremonies, and opportunities to visit the burial site (Webb, 2010).

Family, social, religious, and cultural factors include grief reactions of the immediate and extended family, response to the death by the child's peers, school's recognition of the death, and religious and cultural beliefs such as typical beliefs and rituals (Webb, 2010).

It is important for children to be assessed following a death, in order to determine the child's ability to cope and adjust. Children who have a difficult time expressing their grief might need assistance developing appropriate coping methods. Some professionals recommend that the child's family also be assessed in order to determine their ability to support and guide the child following the loss (Walsh & McGoldrick, 1991b; as cited in Corr & Corr, 1996).

Baker, Sedney, and Gross (1992; as cited in Corr & Corr, 1996) identified a list of details important to gather in the assessment process. The assessor should gather information about the specific details of the death including who was present, what the child observed, and what they were told. It is important to know who has been caring for the child since the death, any changes in the child's schedule, and any opportunities for the child to attend a formal ceremony, such as a funeral. The assessor should gather information about the child's understanding about death and any prior experiences with loss. The assessor can compare the child's current understanding and emotional responses with the child's previous ability to adjust to changes and tolerate painful emotions associated with grief. The assessor will attempt to understand the child's ability to work through their grief, including reviewing memories and feelings of the deceased (Corr & Corr, 1996).

The assessor should also gather information regarding the family and their ability to support the child emotionally and financially, and to learn the grieving styles of each family member. The assessor should talk to the family members about conversing with the child about the loss, and modeling appropriate grief responses, while allowing the child to express their feelings. The child's family is an important piece of the assessment,



as they are likely to provide much of the information regarding the child's current and previous behavior as well as emotional state (Corr & Corr).

It is important to understand that the assessment is a part of the intervention process. Multi-dimensional assessments are the most beneficial; as they take into account the perspective of the bereaved child, as well as parents, family members, teachers, counselors, and any other significant adults. Following the assessment, it is important to determine whether the child and family need further professional help. If the child is having a difficult time adjusting or expressing their grief, or if the family is unable to provide adequate support to assist the child in their coping process, treatment may be an option (Corr & Corr, 1996).

Common symptoms in children who typically need further assistance include an absence of grief responses, denying that there has been a death, continuous expression of anger aimed at the deceased, and fantasizing of reuniting with the deceased. There are situations that increase the potential that a child will experience difficulty in the grieving process, such as an unexpected death including murder, violent accident, or suicide, or if the child is under the age of five years old at the time of the death. Other situations that might increase the child's likelihood of a difficult coping process include observing a loved one die after a painful and extended illness, having guardians who are unable to function after the death, adjustment difficulties preceding the death, or having had a conflict with the deceased before they died. Although these situations increase the likelihood of a child having difficulties with the coping process, they do not necessarily guarantee that a child will need individualized treatment. However, it is important to

monitor these children closely, as support and guidance from their family and other significant others will be especially helpful (Corr & Corr, 1996; Doka, 2000).

The following assessments can be used with bereaved children and families:

Children's Loss Inventory Checklist: A Complete Picture of the Whole Child, The Hogan Sibling Inventory of Bereavement (HSIB), The Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL), The Beck Depression Inventory for Youth (BDI for Youth), Childhood Death Awareness Inventory (CDAI), Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales (FACES-III), Smilansky Death Questionnaire, and Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales (F-COPES). It is most helpful to use a combination of mental health assessments as well as death or grief-related measures to assess children and their families after a loss. Before using any of the assessment tools, it is important to determine whether they are appropriate for the child or family. It is important to consider age, gender, cultural norms, ethnicity and dominant spoken language, in order to increase the usefulness of the tools.

The Children's Loss Inventory Checklist: A Complete Picture of the Whole Child is a checklist designed for use during an intake session with a child and parent. It provides the counselor with background information about the child. It asks for identifying information about the child, referral information, identification of recent significant losses, previous loss and grief history, parents' losses, family structure and history, medical and school history, assessment history, child's attitude toward significant others, likes and dislikes, and behaviors at home, school, and with peers (Goldman, 2000).

The Hogan Sibling Inventory of Bereavement is used with adolescents who have experienced the death of a sibling after a prolonged illness, rather than an unexpected

death. This self-report instrument assesses coping and adaptation characteristics in adolescents following a death (Hogan, 1990; as cited in Touliatos, Perlmutter, & Straus, 1990).

The Child Behavior Checklist is used to assess a child's social and emotional behavior. The CBCL/4-18 is designed for use with children between the ages of four and sixteen years old, and the CBCL/1-5 is for children under the age of four years old. This self-report instrument is completed by parents after observing their child's behavior. The 1991 version includes behavioral syndromes such as social withdrawal, somatic complaints, anxiety and depression, social, thought, and attention problems, as well as delinquent and aggressive behavior (Achenbach, 1991; Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983; as cited in Worden, 1996).

The Beck Depression Inventory for Youth gathers information about a child's feelings of sadness, self-perceived behaviors, and negative thoughts. It also looks for feelings of hopelessness and suicidal preoccupation (Beck, 2001; as cited in Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2006).

The Childhood Death Awareness Inventory is used to determine a child's experience and understanding of death. It is completed by parents to gather information regarding the child's relationship to the deceased, previous experience with death, familiarity with rituals such as visiting a cemetery or attending a funeral, beliefs about death held by the family and by the child, what has been explained to the child about death, the body, and services, how they expect the child to react to the death and any possible difficulties with adjusting, and available support systems. This instrument can

also be used with families to help initiate a conversation about death along with family intervention (McCown, 1988).

The Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales is helpful when identifying the relationship family members have with one another, especially on an emotional level, and their ability to cope and adjust to stressful situations. It measures the ability of a family to adapt to different roles, power structure, and rules. This is helpful information when determining the level of support a child is likely to receive after a death (Olson et al., 1985; as cited in Worden, 1996).

The Smilansky Death Questionnaire examines five thoughts children have about death including irreversibility, finality, causality, inevitability, and old age (Smilansky, 1987; as cited in Worden, 1996). It does not measure complicated or traumatic grief.

The Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales measures coping responses within a family to different problems and difficulties, using resources within and outside of the family. It looks at confidence in family problem-solving, reframing family problems, family passivity, religious resources, extended family, friends, neighbors, and community resources (McCubbin et al., 1982; as cited in Worden, 1996).

Possible diagnoses listed in the DSM-IV-TR, aside from Bereavement, children might develop in response to a death include Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Acute Stress Disorder, a Depressive Disorder, Separation Anxiety Disorder, Hypochondriasis or Pediatric Hypochondria. However, it is important to determine if the symptoms were present before the death or in response to the death. It is also important not to diagnose a child too soon, especially if their reactions are attempts to cope with a difficult situation (Corr & Balk; 2010; Webb, 2010).

Interventions with bereaved children include counseling techniques from expressive or creative therapies such as the use of music, arts, games, or bibliotherapy, family therapy, play therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, as well as bereavement groups.

Counselors working with bereaved children should be compassionate and patient listeners, who allow children the opportunity to work through their grief in a safe space. The use of play, art, music, and other creative methods allow children to express their feelings that they might not be able to articulate in words. It is important to understand that children usually have little experience dealing with grief, and therefore express their feelings in brief spouts. This is also typical in therapy, as children will spend only a portion of the time expressing feelings about the grief (Doka, 2000; O'Toole & Cory, 1998).

Children express their feelings by showing rather than telling. Creativity allows bereaved children to express their grief in their own way, as well as recognize new strengths and abilities in themselves. Using creative methods provides children with developmentally appropriate activities in order to help them cope. Through the use of paper, paint, poetry, writing, clay, music, dance, theater, crafts, rituals, and other creative methods, children are allowed a safe space to express an unfamiliar and painful experience. Creative expression can disclose deep pain that might not have been revealed otherwise (Doka, 2000).

Activities such as drawing, sculpting, writing, playing, and other forms of non-verbal expression are helpful in facilitating tasks of mourning and giving bereaved children a positive means of expressing their feelings, including ways to focus on fears

and concerns. They are also useful in providing answers to questions, clarifying misconceptions about death, and framing the discussion of death as a normal part of their experience (Carney, 2004).

Children need to learn that it is acceptable to have fun (Doka, 2000; Webb, 2010) and continue being a child, and using creative means such as decorating a candle in a loved one's honor, or making a memory box can help facilitate this process. Children may not be able to express their feelings immediately, or they might re-experience their grief years later, as their cognitive development allows them to understand the impact of the death (Doka, 2000; Pennells & Smith, 1995). It is part of the growing process to want to look at pictures, or write a letter to their loved one, as a remembrance later on. It can also be helpful to use creative tools when talking with a child about something painful. Allowing the child to manipulate clay or scribble on a page with an adult as they are having a difficult conversation can decrease tension and provide focus and the ability to process the information. Parents and other family members can facilitate creative activities with bereaved children at home, as this provides the child with support and a safe space to tolerate intense and painful feelings elicited by the death (Doka, 2000).

Storytelling, creative writing, and using photographs are expressive techniques to help initiate conversations and provide an opportunity to explore feelings with bereaved children. Some common creative writing activities include writing letters to loved ones, journaling, poetry, essays, autobiographies, and memory books. Writing letters allows the child to express their thoughts and feelings they might have been unable to share with their loved one before they died. It is important for the child to understand that their loved one will not be physically receiving or responding to the letter, and they can choose

what to do with it when it has been completed. Journaling is most effective with older children, and can be used as an opportunity to write down thoughts, feelings, dreams, or questions about their loved one. Memory boxes are helpful with bereaved children as they are a collection of objects that their loved one possessed or remind them of their loved one. Decorating the box is also a helpful process, which can also represent memories of their loved one. Picture albums and memory books also stimulate discussion and provide a tangible item for the child to have to remember their loved one, as many fear that they will forget them. They can include pictures, drawings, and writings to help express feelings about their loved one (Goldman, 2000; Worden, 1996).

Since children have a difficult time expressing their thoughts and feelings about loss using words, it can be useful to engage the child in a conversation using third person such as a person, cartoon, or animal in a book. This allows the child to talk about the character instead of themselves. Reading about others dealing with similar issues can decrease their feelings of isolation, fearfulness, or awkwardness, and create a sense of hope (Pardeck, 1990; Timmerman, Martin, & Martin, 1989; as cited in Berns, 2004). However, the similarities among the characters and the child should not be overemphasized, but rather should focus on the message that everyone responds to death in their own way. Children should be reassured that there is not just one way to deal with their grief, and that there is no wrong way to cope, aside from hurting themselves or others (Berns, 2004; Granot, 2000; Smith, Jaffe-Gill, & Segal, 2009).

Bibliotherapy is used with bereaved children to help normalize grief reactions to loss, encourage positive coping, decrease feelings of isolation, and emphasize creativity and problem-solving through the use of books. It is effective when caring and supporting

adults are available to participate in the reading with their child (Jalongo, 1983; Oberstein & Van Horn, 1988; Pardeck & Pardeck, 1989; as cited in Berns, 2004). Through the use of books, bereaved children are able to identify emotionally with the characters and events in the story, increase a sense of companionship, express emotions in a safe environment, have their feelings and thoughts validated, develop critical thinking skills and hope for the future, and gain insight as a result of identifying solutions for characters in the story and for themselves (Berns, 2004). Activity books are also helpful for informing, explaining, and helping children understand death. They provide a source for repetition to increase understanding and learning (Carney, 2004).

Punching bags and stuffed animals allow a child to express their anger in a safe way. Stuffed animals, puppets, and dolls can also be used to initiate conversation with a child in a less intimidating manner, as the child does not have to speak for themselves but rather feelings can be projected onto the inanimate objects (Worden, 1996). Expressing thoughts and feelings on a tape recorder can allow a child to share their feelings privately out loud with the ability to erase until they feel comfortable sharing with someone. Artwork provides the child with choices to draw or paint whatever they feel. Art allows the bereaved child freedom of expression and should not be judged for interpretation or accuracy. Using clay is helpful as it provides a calming effect, as they manipulate it by squeezing, poking, pinching, or pounding it to express their feelings in a safe way (Goldman, 2000).

Music can also be a helpful resource for children as a way to explore and express feelings. Children can listen to or create their own music, as well as use movement through dance to express themselves. Although it can differ for each child, drums can be



used to represent anger, harmonicas for loneliness, cymbals for shock, bells for sadness, harps for an Angelique effect, and the tuba for awkwardness. However, children should be encouraged to create their own meaning and representations on their own (Goldman, 2000).

Younger children do not have the developmental or cognitive capacity to use abstract thinking to express feelings. Books and stories provide situations that can elicit responses like those in real life (Seibert, Drolet, & Fetro, 2003). Research has found storytelling to contribute to a child's ability to be resilient after a loss (O'Connell Higgins, 1994; Flach, 1988; Walsh, 2006; Kobasa, 1985; as cited in Webb, 2010). Storytelling helps bereaved children validate and organize their thoughts and feelings, remember their loved one, and find meaning after a death. Reading stories of others who have faced similar losses also encourages grieving children to move forward with hope, compassion, and power. Stories are helpful to use with bereaved children and families because they provide insight and distraction from the pain, encourage imagination and opportunities for questioning, offer validation of feelings, and suggest alternatives. Stories can provide information to replace faulty assumptions and help normalize the grieving process. Stories allow children to observe others dealing with similar issues, which decreases feelings of isolation and encourages hope (Webb, 2010; Di Ciacco, 2008). Stories provide opportunities for parents and other adults to support their child as they are learning to adjust to new perspectives and preparing to experiment with new experiences (Di Ciacco, 2008).

When choosing a story it is important to consider the needs and developmental stage of the child. It is important to follow some guidelines in order to promote resilience

and growth with grieving children. Webb (2010) suggests that characters in the story should possess hopeful qualities and face their fears, rather than avoid them. The use of imagination should be encouraged as well as a focus on forgiveness and blame.

Characters and the story plot should focus on acceptance of needs, emotions, values, and mental and physical well-being. Stories should encourage commemoration of loved ones and recognize the loss, its value, and meaning (Webb, 2010). Books using abstract language and euphemisms to explain death should be avoided (Berns, 2004).

It is important to evaluate the story before engaging in the reading process together, in order to confirm that it is appropriate for the situation and developmental level. Stories should be reviewed for word choice and illustrations. Stories should present death in a direct and honest manner, using age-appropriate language. The story should contain accurate facts regarding death, and present death as a natural part of life rather than creating fear and confusion (Seibert, Drolet, & Fetro, 2003). Parents and other family members should be prepared for children to ask questions elicited by the story, even if the response is "I do not know." Reading stories together provides an opportunity for parents and family members to interact and connect with their children, which is an essential piece of the coping process (Doka, 2000; Webb, 2010).

Jones (2001) presented characteristics that bereaved children and adolescents identified as most helpful in stories related to bereavement and coping. They preferred stories that are easy to read and understand, with dialogue rather than completely narrated. Stories should address the effects of grief both emotionally and behaviorally, and offer relevant coping strategies that encourage hope for the future. They suggested few illustrations, so they could imagine their own (Jones, 2001).

Parents and families often fail to recognize the beneficial role they play in the coping process of a bereaved child. Children are not affected by grief alone, rather within the context of their family (Pincus, 1974; as cited in Corr & Corr, 1996). Studies have shown a strong connection between pathological grief and the family's lack of support in the coping process (Rosen, 1988a; as cited in Corr & Corr, 1996). Families attempting to help children in the coping process should openly express and acknowledge the reality and finality of death, as well as feelings regarding the death. Families should encourage children to express these feelings and help them manage them. Children observe parents and other adults, and learn how to cope from them. Therefore, it is important for families to deal with their grief as well (Corr & Corr, 1996; Webb, 2010).

Children have a difficult time expressing their feelings verbally, especially after a significant loss. Play therapy is a helpful tool for bereaved children, as play is the prominent way children communicate. Play therapy is possible for the initial assessment as well as the continuing treatment method (Doka, 2000; Corr & Corr, 1996). It provides children with the opportunity to play out their feelings rather than verbalize them. However, this does not mean that talking is discouraged, but rather is not forced. Play therapy with bereaved children is helpful in facilitating the child's mourning process as well as attempting to clarify any confusion the child may have about death (Doka, 2000; Webb, 2010). Parents and families can also use play as a way to communicate and connect with their child during the coping process.

Although not all bereaved children will need professional therapy to cope, they all need support (Doka, 2000). It is common for professionals to suggest group work for bereaved children as a beneficial aspect of the coping process (Corr & Corr, 1996; Webb,

2010). Groups can provide therapy or peer support with the goal of assisting in the grieving process following a loss. Benefits of bereavement groups include normalizing grief reactions, since many children fear that they are crazy following a death. The group allows them to hear from others of a similar age and situation to confirm that their reactions are common and normal. The group also alleviates their fear of feeling alone or different from their peers. Support from the group lets a bereaved child know that someone cares and understands where they are coming from, as their feelings are validated and shared. Some groups may use talking as the primary mode of communication, while others might use art, music, puppets, punching bags, sand trays, toys, and games to express feelings (Doka, 2000; Corr & Corr, 1996). Parents and other family members can also participate in bereavement groups to learn how to best assist their grieving children or to share their own feelings regarding the loss (Corr & Corr, 1996).

Refer to the appendix for resources created by other professionals, including books, videos, and online websites, as well as a journal created by the author containing enough activities to allow a family to participate in one activity a day for a year following the death of a loved one. When choosing assessment tools, resources, or activities, it is important to consider the child's developmental abilities, age, gender, culture, faith, support from others, and history with other losses. Providing bereaved children with the resources and skills to successfully cope with their loss can help them prepare to deal with other losses in the future.

It is important for counselors to reflect upon their own history regarding death and fears surrounding it, as this will impact their capacity to interact comfortably with their

client. Resources in Appendix I include books, activity books, videos, and online sites that have been designed by others with the goal of assisting children and their families cope with death and loss. Before referring or providing clients with the resources, familiarize yourself with them in order to answer questions and to ensure that they are appropriate for the situation.

The activities listed in the Interactive Journal of Appendix II are based on a Western culture and are from a Christian perspective. This is not meant to imply that these are the only holidays to remember, but rather is meant to use as a reference for the possibilities around different holidays (Hanukkah, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, etc). It is important for counselors to identify the faith, culture, or rituals recognized by their clients and families and avoid forcing their own beliefs onto their clients. Although the activities can be used with children and families or varying ages, it is important for them to feel connected to the activities through a sense of purpose.

As you work with clients and families dealing with death and loss, continue to reflect upon your own comfort level and previous experiences, as this will impact your response and ability to be with your client. As you use these activities, personalize them to fit the needs of your client and families, based on their own input as well as yours. After you have used the activities, reflect upon what was successful and what, if anything, could be changed to better contribute to the coping process.

## Appendix I: Resources

Support and communication from parents and other significant adults and family members is essential in the coping process of bereaved children. Books, activity books, videos, and online resources can be useful tools for interacting with bereaved children and initiating conversation with them. They are helpful for encouraging expression of feelings, which might be difficult for children to do with words alone. The following are recommended resources for parents, family members, and other significant adults to use with bereaved children, with information describing each source.

### Books

Althea (1988). *When uncle Bob died*. London: Dinosaur Publications.

A children's book for 5-8 year olds that talks about expressing anger, fear, memories, and sadness. It helps explain the facts of death to children through the story of Uncle Bob's death, his funeral, and the effect on his children and nephew.

Brown, L., & Brown, M. (1996). *When dinosaurs die: A guide to understanding death*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.

A children's book that helps to explain death in simple terms. The book goes through what it means to be alive and dead, feelings regarding death, how to say goodbye, ways to remember someone after they have died, and other related contents that help go through the process of death. It also contains a glossary of death-related terms simply defined.

Cohn, J. (1987). *I had a friend named Peter*. New York: William Morrow and Company.

A children's book that focuses on issues regarding feelings of sadness, fear, and guilt, as well as questions that many children ask following a death. The book provides an introduction for parents, which gives an overview of what children are able to understand about death and grieving, as well as some suggestions on how to approach children about the situation.

Holmes, M. M. (2000). *A terrible thing happened*. Washington, DC: Magination.

A children's book for 4-8 year olds who have witnessed violent or traumatic situations, including physical abuse, accidents, homicide, suicide, or natural disasters.

Moser, A. (1996). *Don't despair on Thursdays*. Kansas City, KS: Landmark.

A children's book for 5-10 year olds which explains the grief process as a normal response to death. Emphasizes that grief will last more than just a few days or weeks and offers ideas children can use each day to cope with their grief.

Schildkraut, B. (2007). *Goodbye Jake*. Massachusetts: Operation Outreach-USA Press.

A children's book about a little boy who is dealing with the death of his dog. He is able to remember his dog by creating a Memory Garden. The boy puts down a stone for each memory he had with his dog.

Temes, R. (1992). *The empty place: A child's guide through grief*. New Jersey: New Horizons Press.

A children's book about a third grade boy whose sister dies. It is written in very simple terms, with few words on each page, making it easier for children to read. The little boy expresses feelings that are typical for children at this age to experience. The book also talks about things that the little boy can do to cope and still remember his sister.

Varley, S. (1985). *Badger's parting gifts*. London: Collins.

A children's book for 5-10 year olds, which focuses on remembering their loved one in positive ways. Badger's friends are sad and overwhelmed when he dies but learn to appreciate the memories he left them. By sharing their memories of his gifts, they are able to find the strength to look towards the future with hope.

Wilhelm, H. (1993). *Waldo, tell me about dying*. Connecticut: C.R. Gibson Company.

A children's book about a dog that explains death to a little boy after his grandpa dies. The boy wonders why his grandpa died and where he went. The book is of a religious nature so it relates many things to God and Heaven. The boy is sad and wants to be able to spend more time with his grandpa. The dog suggests that the little boy write a letter to his grandpa, since he feels bad about trampling the flowers in his grandpa's garden. The dog also helps the little boy remember things that his grandpa taught him.

#### Coloring and Activity Books

Boulden, J. & Boulden, J. (1997). *Goodbye forever*. Weaverville, CA: Boulden Publishing.



An activity book designed for 5-8 year olds which defines the word “dead” and addresses feelings of grief, saying good-bye, and remembering a deceased loved one.

Carney, K. L. (2001). *They're part of the family: Talking to children about pet loss*. Wethersfield, CT: Dragonfly Publishing.

An activity and coloring book that defines death, and addresses issues such as veterinarian-assisted death, sudden death, and accidental death. It provides ideas for commemoration and expression of grief.

Heegaard, M. (1988). *When someone very special dies: Children can learn to cope with grief*. Minneapolis: MN: Woodland Press.

A structured workbook that gives children information about death and coping with grief and useful images. It offers methods for children to express themselves through drawing and writing.

Leeuwenburgh, E. & Goldring, E. (2008). *Why did you die: Activities to help children cope with grief and loss*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

An activity book for children that with activities emphasizing that there are things that can be controlled and others that cannot, every living thing has a life span, people have different ideas about death, people grieve differently, it is acceptable to be happy even when grieving, and memories of loved ones are important. It provides a note to parents with a description of developmental stages and recommendations for each age

level, an overview of how children grieve, symptoms of complicated and traumatic grief, and activities for children involving drawing and writing.

Myhre, C. & Boulden, J. (2004). *Joey and Scout: Activity book on the loss of a pet*. Boulden Publishing.

A children's book and activity book about a little boy who loses a pet. It explores the boy's feelings, while allowing the reader to explore his/her own feelings. It has questions on each page which allow the child to share his or her own experiences about the loss of a pet. Activities include sentence completion and art exercises to help children express themselves. There is a parent guide, which offers suggestions for providing positive emotional support when a pet is lost or dies.

Wolfelt, A. (2001). *Healing your grieving heart for kids: 100 practical ideas*. Fort Collins, CO: Companion Pres.

An activity book written for children 6-12 years old who are dealing with the death of a loved one. It provides 100 ways for children to express their grief and lets them know that it is acceptable and necessary to mourn. Each activity offers space to write or draw about it.

### Videos

Clark, M. (1997). *The tomorrows children face when a parent dies*. Sherborn, MA: Aquarius Productions.

A video (47 minutes) that discusses the topic of losing a parent by exploring children's views of spirituality, going back to school, grieving as a family, surviving the holidays, and grief after time.

O'Toole, D. (1988). *Aarvy Aardvark finds hope*. Burnsville, NC: Compassion Press.

A video about Aarvy's grieving and coping process after his family dies. He feels all alone, sad and without hope. With the help of a rabbit who shares his experiences and pain, Aarvy finds hope and strength to imagine a brighter future. Aarvy uses rituals of remembrance to help him with his coping.

Rogers, F. (1993). *Mr. Rogers talks about living and dying*. Pittsburgh, PA: Family Communications.

A video (30 minutes) for children and families that explores many questions young children have about what it means to be alive, grow old, and die. Mr. McFeely, Mr. Roger's neighbor, finds a dead bird in the yard and Mr. Rogers reflects on some feelings he had when his pet cat died.

### Online Resources

[www.dougy.org](http://www.dougy.org)

The Dougy Center for Grieving Children provides a safe place for children and families who are grieving a death to share their experiences.

[www.erols.com/lgold](http://www.erols.com/lgold)

Helping Children Deal with Grief provides detailed information discussing complicated grief as a result of traumatic death, AIDS, abuse, or violence.

[www.griefnet.org](http://www.griefnet.org)

This site offers support for children and families dealing with grief, death, and major loss. It has online support groups for children and adults, as well as a list of resources.

[www.grievingchild.org](http://www.grievingchild.org)

The National Center for Grieving Children and Families provides a list of national grief programs and resources for children and adults. It is a service of the Dougy Center.

[www.kidsaid.com](http://www.kidsaid.com)

Provides a safe space of children and families to find information and ask questions. It has an email support group and a place to share and view artwork and stories.

[www.kidspeace.org](http://www.kidspeace.org)

Kids Peace, The National Center for Kids Overcoming Crisis, provides tools, tips, publications, brochures, links, and workshops created for children to help deal with death. It offers hope, help, and healing to children and families.

[www.kidsource.com/sids/childrensgrief.html](http://www.kidsource.com/sids/childrensgrief.html)

Provides a chart with developmental considerations concerning children's grief, developmental stage, concept of death, grief response, signs of distress, and possible interventions.

Appendix II: 365 Day Journal

A Journey of Hope: Getting Through the First Year  
365 Activities for Bereaved Children and Families

Ashley Smith Hall

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### Note to Adults

This journal is for children and families who are dealing with the death of someone they care about. The purpose of this journal is to encourage children to express their feelings so that they can learn to cope with their grief. They need the support of loving adults and family members to help them on their healing journey. This journal was created with the hope that parents, family members, and significant adults would participate in these activities together with their children while providing a safe space for communication and learning. Talk with them about their feelings and allow them the opportunity to explore. Your child needs your love, understanding, support, and guidance to help them through this difficult time.

The first year following a death is especially difficult, as there are many “firsts” with which children and family members must learn to adjust. This journal is meant to be a guide for the first year, addressing many of the common themes that are likely to arise within your family.

This 365-day interactive journal includes enough activities to allow you and your child to participate in one activity a day for a year following the death of a loved one. Some of the activities or ideas in this journal might not be appropriate for all situations or families and some might take multiple days to complete. Feel free to create your own activities in addition to the suggested list or repeat any activity multiple times. Be open to new possibilities and don't be afraid to have fun!

When responding to your child, be sure to validate their feelings (it is acceptable to cry, be angry, to have fun), help explain any confusion or misconceptions they might have (the death was not their fault), tell the truth, be honest if you don't know an answer, use simple, concrete language, encourage, but do not force them to talk about their loved one, and avoid clichés such as saying that their loved one is on a journey or is sleeping. Be prepared to answer questions many times over. Keep in mind that all children grieve in different ways, depending on their age, cognitive level, experience with previous losses, availability of coping strategies and supportive adults to guide them.

Although different for each child, common symptoms following the death of a loved one include sleep difficulty, headaches, stomachaches, changes in appetite, fatigue, dizziness, and increased illness. Other symptoms include clinginess, increased temper tantrums, poor grades, nightmares, dreams of the deceased, social withdrawal, fighting, and regression to earlier stages before the death occurred such as bedwetting or thumb-sucking. They might have difficulty concentrating or making decisions, and have self-destructive thoughts. It is important to recognize that some children will ask many questions and feel comfortable displaying their feelings regarding the death, whereas other children might remain quiet and appear as if nothing has happened (Di Ciacco, 2008; Goldman, 2000; Wolfelt, 1983).

While you are focused on helping your child cope, make sure you are also taking care of yourself and your own grief!



### Note to Children

It can be a scary and confusing time when someone dies. People might cry or act different around you and you might not know how to respond or how to help yourself feel better.

It is ok for you to feel sad, angry, confused, or happy, as these are your own ways of telling others how you are feeling. It is also ok to ask questions when you are unsure about something.

This activity book is for you and your family to use as a way to help you remember your loved one and continue doing fun things, even though you might feel sad or angry. Even though your loved one is not physically present in your life anymore, you can still take time to remember all of the things that made them so special! You can also start doing things for you that your loved one would want you to do.

## Introduction

The emotional impact caused by the death of a loved one will be present with a child throughout their life. However, it is important for parents and other adults to be prepared for unexpected reactions especially throughout the first year. During the first few weeks and months there are likely to be many changes within the household including learning to adjust to different schedules and family members assuming new roles (Lewis & Lippman, 2004).

Children express their feelings by showing rather than telling. Creativity allows bereaved children to express their grief in their own way, as well as recognize new strengths and abilities in themselves. Using creative methods provides children with developmentally appropriate activities in order to help them cope. Through the use of paper, paint, poetry, writing, books, clay, music, dance, pictures, theater, crafts, rituals, and other creative methods, children are allowed a safe space to express an unfamiliar and painful experience (Doka, 2000).

Each page of the journal contains a topic or theme for which the activities will be based. The top portion at the top of the page is provided for the adult, as an explanation of the purpose for the activities listed on the page. The directions and activities listed below the description are written more on a child's level, with the hope that adults and families will participate and read along with their children.

## Writing

Writing can help bereaved children express themselves without having to verbalize their thoughts and feelings out loud. Parents and other family members can encourage children to keep a journal, write letters, poems, prayers, or stories. Children should not be forced to share their writing, but have the opportunity to do so if they desire (Kroen, 1996). Parents and family members can also participate in writing activities with their children.

## Journaling

Directions: Find a special journal or diary to write about the following statements. Write as much or as little as you would like. Adults and family members can answer the questions as well or they can help you.

- Write down some feelings you have had today.
- Write about the thing that makes you feel the saddest.
- Write about what you would ask your loved one who died if you could talk to them.
- Write about what your family has not done since the death.
- Write about your worst memory.
- Write about what you would change if you could.
- Write about something that you would like to do with the person who died.
- Complete the following sentence: When the person died I...
- Write about what your friends have been like since the death.
- Write about what school has been like since the death.
- Complete the following sentence: When I am alone...
- Write about the thing that makes you feel the happiest.
- Write about the thing that makes you feel the safest.
- Write about the person who understands you the most.
- Write about the thing that makes you feel the angriest.
- Complete the following sentence: I feel better when...
- Write about the funniest television commercial you have seen this year.
- Write about the best joke you have heard recently.
- Write about the funniest person you have ever met.
- Write about the most dramatic thing that has happened in your life.
- Write about the funniest thing that has happened to you.
- Write about the scariest thing that has happened in your life.
- Write about the most mysterious thing you have experienced.
- Write about the most beautiful thing you have experienced in nature.
- Write about the most interesting place you have been.
- Write about a recent accomplishment.
- Write about a problem you have solved.
- Write about who you admire most.
- Write about a lesson you have learned.
- Write about what you think others will remember you for.
- Write about what you want to be remembered for.
- Write about what you remember most about your loved one and what you think others remember about them.
- Write about a tradition you have in your family.
- Write about the first person you would talk to if you had a bad dream.
- Write about things in your life you can change.
- Write about your favorite emotion.
- Write about things that you cannot change in your life.
- Write about where you would like to travel in the world.

## Poetry

Directions: Write the following poems on special paper or in your journal. Have each member in your family write a poem and then share your poems with each other.

Write a poem about the person who died.

Write a poem using your favorite quote, motto, or song lyric.

Write a poem using each letter in your name (Example: Susan = Smart, Understanding, Sweet, Artistic, Nice).

Write a poem using each letter in your loved one's name.

## Stories

Directions: Write stories about the following topics. Put your stories in a binder or notebook after everyone has had a chance to share their story out loud. Children and family members can write their own stories first and then share or write one story together for each topic.

Write a story about the person who died.

Make a book about how you felt after your loved one died and what you are doing to help yourself feel better.

Write a story about your dream job.

Make up a story about meeting a celebrity.

Write a story about the best time you ever had with your family.

Write a story about your ideal vacation.

Write a story about your favorite memory with your loved one.

Write a story about what your life will be like in 10 years.

Write a story about what you would do with a million dollars.

Pretend you are writing a newspaper article about your loved one's death. Include how old your loved one was when they died, where they were, the date they died, what happened, and any other information you would like to include.

Start by saying "Once upon a time..." letting each person add a sentence to the story until you all feel it is complete.

### Letter writing

Writing letters allows children to express their thoughts and feelings they might have been unable to share with their loved one before they died. It is important for the child to understand that their loved one will not be physically receiving or responding to the letter, and they can choose what to do with it when it has been completed (Goldman, 2000).

Directions: Write different letters including the following information. Place your letters in an envelope and decide together what you would like to do with it.

Write a letter to the person that died telling them all the things you miss about them.

Write a letter to the person that died telling them about things you are doing now.

Write a letter to the person that died telling them anything you wish you could have told them before they died.

Write a letter to yourself about the things you hope to accomplish this month. Open it next month.

Write a letter to yourself about the things you like about yourself. Open it in two months.

Write a letter to someone in the year 2097 telling them about what life is like now.

Send a sympathy card to yourself.

## Lists

Directions: Making a list helps you see things on paper that you might be thinking about. Choose what kind of paper you would like to use and make a list about the following topics.

- Make a list of people you feel comfortable talking to.
- Make a list of places you can go where you feel comfortable.
- Make a list of things that you can do to help you deal with your anger without hurting yourself or others.
- Make a list of activities that help you express your feelings (examples: writing, drawing, singing, cooking, playing sports, dancing, etc).
- Make a list of people that care about you.
- Make a list of things you are worried about.
- Make a list of things that calm you down.
- Make a list of things that have changed since your loved one died and things that have stayed the same.
- Make a list of body parts that help keep people alive.
- Make a list of things you are angry about.
- Make a list of things you are happy about.
- Make a list of things that help you feel better.
- Make a list of people who take care of you.
- Make a list of things you are sad about.
- Make a list of things you are good at.



## Art

Art provides bereaved children with an opportunity to express themselves without using words. Parents and other family members can encourage bereaved children to draw pictures of how they feel, portraying memories of their loved one, events following the death, and ways they are coping. Children should not be forced to draw anything that they do not want, but rather provided with suggestions in order to help them express themselves (Kroen, 1996). Art allows the bereaved child freedom of expression and should not be judged for interpretation or accuracy (Goldman, 2000).

## Drawing

Directions: Find a special sketch pad or drawing notebook to draw the following things.

- Draw something that worries you.
- Draw something that makes you mad.
- Draw yourself before your loved one died. Draw yourself now.
- Draw your family.
- Draw a picture of the person who died.
- Draw your favorite memory of your loved one.
- Draw a dream you have had.
- Draw something ugly.
- Draw something that makes you happy.
- Draw something that surprises you.
- Draw faces that look happy, scared, angry, sad, worried, and tired.
- Draw different size hearts all over a piece of paper. Write down things and people you love in each heart.
- Draw a picture of your favorite food and your loved one's favorite food.
- Draw a fear.
- Draw a picture of your favorite thing in your room.
- Draw a picture of your favorite thing to do with your family.
- Draw a picture that represents the biggest problem in your life now.
- Draw a picture of something you do not like doing.
- Draw a picture of something you have always wanted to do.
- Draw a picture of your favorite childhood memory.
- Draw a heart. Write a list of all the feelings you have had today and label each one a different color. Divide your heart into sections and color it to represent your feelings.
- Draw a picture of something your loved one gave you.
- Draw a picture of what death looks like.
- Draw a picture of where you think your loved one is.
- Draw a memorial for your loved one.
- Draw yourself doing something that helps you feel better.
- Draw an animal that represents how you felt when your loved one died.
- Use chalk to draw pictures on the sidewalk or pavement.

## Painting

Directions: Find your favorite paint to complete the following.

Sometimes it is hard to find a way to let out your frustrations. Use finger paints to scribble all over a page.

Paint how you are feeling today.

Paint a picture of the person in your family who helps others the most.

Paint a picture of the person in your family who laughs the most.

Paint a picture of people at a funeral or cemetery.

## Clay

Using clay is helpful as it provides a calming effect, as they manipulate it by squeezing, poking, pinching, or pounding it to express their feelings in a safe way. Children can create molds of their family, friends, animals, or themselves, and engage in dialogues between them (Goldman, 2000).

Directions: Use sculpting clay or play-dough to complete the following.

Make play-dough. (Ingredients needed: 1 cup of flour, 2 teaspoons of cream of tartar, ½ cup of salt, 1 cup of water, 1 teaspoon of oil, food coloring; Directions: mix dry ingredients in a bowl; add water and oil; once mixed, add food coloring; pour into stove pot; stir over medium heat; allow dough to cool; store in an air tight container)

Sculpt your family.

Sculpt something that reminds you of your loved one.

Sculpt the first thing that comes to mind.

Sometimes it is hard to figure out a way to say out loud that you feel sad, worried, or angry. Play with play-dough. Squeeze it and pull it a part to show how you are feeling.

Sculpt two things that can die.

Sculpt a creature that reminds you of death.

## Create

Directions: The following activities will use your imagination. Be creative and help each other figure out how to complete the following.

Make a necklace that represents your loved one (using beads, string, shells, etc).

Make friendship bracelets (using a kit or your own materials).

Decorate a t-shirt in memory of your loved one (using patches, fabric glue, etc).

Decorate a mirror and hang it in your room. When you look in the mirror, point out positive things about yourself.

Create a treasure box for all of your special items.

Make a paper link chain listing different things you love about the person who died. (Cut out strips of construction paper. After you have written your items on the paper, staple them together in circles like a chain.)

Butterflies represent new life. Make an outline of a butterfly on a poster board and glue pieces of colored construction paper on it. Hang it somewhere in your house.

Decorate a piggy bank.

Create your favorite room in your house using a shoebox.

Design a rocket that can send your thoughts to the moon.

Decorate your journal.

### Reading/Storytelling

Books can provide information about death, grieving, and coping. Children can read books out loud or have an adult read it to them (Kroen, 1996). Since children have a difficult time expressing their thoughts and feelings about loss using words, it can be useful to engage the child in a conversation using third person such as a person, cartoon, or animal in a book. This allows the child to talk about the character instead of themselves. Reading about others dealing with similar issues can decrease their feelings of isolation, fearfulness, or awkwardness, and create a sense of hope (Pardeck, 1990; Timmerman, Martin, & Martin, 1989; as cited in Berns, 2004).

Directions: Find books that can be read out loud and enjoyed by the entire family.

Pick out your favorite book and read it to your family or have someone read it to you.  
Read a book about dealing with death (ask your local librarian for help finding one).  
Take a trip to the library to check out books.  
Read your loved one's favorite story.  
Create your own library in your house with your favorite books.

## Memories/Pictures

Memory boxes, scrapbooks, picture albums, and collages are important tools that help children express their feelings and ideas. Memory boxes are helpful with bereaved children as they are a collection of objects that their loved one possessed or remind them of their loved one. Decorating the box is also a helpful process, which can also represent memories of their loved one. Picture albums and memory books also stimulate discussion and provide a tangible item for the child to have to remember their loved one, as many fear that they will forget them. They can include pictures, drawings, and writings to help express feelings about their loved one (Goldman, 2000; Worden, 1996).

Directions: Some of the following activities might take multiple days to complete. Take your time and be creative!

Make a scrapbook to remind you of your loved one. (Use old photographs, stickers, objects from your loved one, etc.)

Make a memory box. (Take an old shoebox and decorate the outside. Fill the box with memories of your loved one).

Put together a picture album of your family.

Take pictures outside.

Take pictures of things that remind you of your loved one.

Take pictures of favorite things in your house.

Cut out words in a magazine that remind you of your loved one and glue them on a poster board with their name in the middle of the page.

Create a collage representing your loved one. (On a poster board, glue cut-outs from magazines, old photographs, stickers, etc.)

Create a collage representing things about you.

Look at old photographs.

Make a frame for your favorite picture of your loved one. (Glue together popsicle sticks and decorate it using glitter glue and markers.)

Make a pillow using loved one's old t-shirts.

Create a family tree.

Find old newspapers and circle words that remind you of your loved one.

Create a family flag.

### Music/Movement

Music can also be a helpful resource for children as a way to explore and express feelings. Children can listen to or create their own music, as well as use movement through dance to express themselves (Goldman, 2000).

Directions: Singing and dancing can often make you feel embarrassed or shy. Talk about these feelings together as a family and brainstorm ways to overcome them so that you can show off your talents and express your feelings through music and movement!

Create a dance that reminds you of your loved one.

Dance as silly as possible to crazy music.

Create a music playlist that reminds you of your loved one.

Make a CD of your loved one's favorite songs.

Decorate a cover for the CD you made.

Sing a song about the person who died.

Write a song about your loved one.

Write a song about how you feel today.

Listen to music that represents your feelings when your loved one died.

Make a musical instrument using items around the house. After each family member has created their instrument, play them together as a band.

Do the "Hokey Pokey."

Create a music list that makes you feel happy.

Sing karaoke.

Play freeze dance – turn on music and freeze when the music stops.



### Imagination/Pretend/Drama

Punching bags and stuffed animals allow a child to express their anger in a safe way. Stuffed animals, puppets, and dolls can also be used to initiate conversation with a child in a less intimidating manner, as the child does not have to speak for themselves but rather feelings can be projected onto the inanimate objects (Worden, 1996). Be cautious with the use of punching bags and aggressive activities, as research has shown that children exposed to violent images or toys, are more likely to express themselves in a violent manner (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961). Puppets can be used to have an imaginary conversation between a child and their loved one. Dress-up is a way to express feelings through role-play, allowing them to become their loved one or someone who embodies characteristics they are striving to possess. The use of props, costumes, and puppets can help them act out their thoughts and feelings. Through plays and skits children can take on the role of a different character, creating their own fantasies. Using a tape or video recorder can allow a child to share their feelings privately out loud with the ability to erase until they feel comfortable sharing with someone (Goldman, 2000).

Directions: Using your imagination can help make some of the scary and sad parts of your loved one's death seem less yucky. The following activities will use your creativity to make some fun things!

Make a puppet of your loved one who died using a paper bag and markers.

Create a skit or play and act it out (with puppets or real people).

Make new home-movies.

Create puppets to represent your family members using toilet paper and paper towel rolls, pipe cleaners, feathers, and buttons.

Record yourself talking about your loved one.

Make a wish on a star.

Make a costume.

Dress up to look like your loved one.

Build a fort in your living room.

Make a robot out of empty boxes.

Find things around your house to create a superhero.

Pretend to be each member of your family and have each member pretend to be you.

Find things that can be recycled around your house and figure out new ways to use them.

Sometimes you might feel like hiding. Decorate a mask.

Sometimes children think death is like a monster. Pretend that you are a monster.

Sometimes you might feel pretty small after a loved one dies. Pretend that you are a giant.

Show each other the funniest face you've ever seen someone make. See how much you can laugh.

Use toys in the sand to show what it looked like before your loved one died.

Use toys in the sand to show what it looks like now.

## Play

Play is the main way children communicate (Landreth, 2002; Doka, 2000; Corr & Corr, 1996). Children are able to express themselves better through play as this is the mode through which they feel most comfortable. Playing out their feelings and experiences is part of their healing process (Landreth, 2002). Play allows a grieving child to proceed with normal developmental processes where they can “just be kids,” without having to focus on their grief (Emswiler & Emswiler, 2000). Adults can provide a supportive atmosphere by observing children as they play, and making positive comments based on what they see, rather than direct their play (Landreth, 2002).

Directions: Sometimes you might need some time to take your mind away from your loved one’s death. Playing is a fun way to pass the time while trying to make yourself feel better.

Play hide-and-go-seek.

Play freeze tag.

Create your own game. Teach it to your family.

Blow bubbles.

Play follow the leader. Take turns being the leader.

Play “I Spy.”

Make and throw water balloons.

Do a crossword puzzle or make your own.

Put together a puzzle.

Go through a maze (on paper or in real life).

Play tic-tac-toe with a family member.

Do a word search or make your own.

Connect the dots or make your own.

Play in a sandbox.

Use toys in the sand to make a scene of your family.

Build something with LEGOS®.

Build a tower using marshmallows and toothpicks.

Play rock, paper, scissors.

Play Frisbee.

Make and decorate a paper airplane.

Play Pictionary®.

Have a scavenger hunt.

Using a flashlight in the dark, make shadow figures on the wall.

Play “Simon Says.”

Play musical chairs.

Play your family’s favorite game (video game, board game, card game, etc).

Play your loved one’s favorite game (video game, board game, card game, etc).

Play child’s favorite game (video game, board game, card game, etc).

Choose a game from the following list and learn how to play it: Charades, card games (Uno®, Old Maid®, Go Fish®), board games (Monopoly®, Life®, Operation®, Sorry®, Trouble®).

## Remembering/honoring

Memories are an important aspect of the coping process for children. Children who experience a death at a young age will have fewer memories of their loved one. The absence of memories can be painful for children, especially later on in life. Parents and other adults can help children remember their loved one through stories, pictures, and home-videos (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999; Pennells & Smith, 1995). Commemorating the death allows a child to remember their loved one in a special way. Commemoration rituals include memorial services, planting a memory garden, making a book of memories about the loved one, or donating a book in their loved one's honor (Goldman, 2000).

Directions: Even though your loved one is no longer present, there are still ways you can keep their memory alive and with you each day. The following activities will help you honor and remember your loved one.

Plant a flower or garden in memory of your loved one.

Visit the cemetery (if your loved one was buried), or have a memorial service with your family in honor of your loved one.

Look up information about your loved one (family history, etc).

Make a list of your loved one's favorite things (color, food, TV show, movie, season, song, actor, singer, store, restaurant, car, school subject, holiday, etc).

Write a note to your loved one and put it in a balloon and let the balloon fly away.

Decorate a candle and light it at dinner in memory of your loved one.

Make a quilt using things from your family and your loved one.

Learn how to do something your loved one knew how to do (crochet, juggle, wood-working, etc).

Write down memories you have of your loved one and put them in a bag. Pick one out of the bag each day.

Trace your loved one's name in the sand.

Decorate a flower pot and plant a seed in your loved one's honor.

Create a birth certificate for your loved one that died.

Make a family shield or crest that represents your family.

Make a banner to remind you of your loved one.

Interview each person in your family and ask them to tell you their favorite memory of your loved one and their favorite memory with you.

## Communication

Families who encourage open communication are often beneficial for children coping with death as they feel safe and comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings (Wolfelt, 1983). Communication patterns can change within a family after a death occurs, which can be especially difficult for children figuring out ways to deal with their loss. However, communication is an essential part of helping children cope with death. Children need the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings with someone who can effectively communicate with them (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999; Baker, Sedney, & Gross, 1992; Weber & Fournier, 1985).

Directions: Sometimes it can be hard to figure out what to say or how to say it after a loved one dies. The following activities will help you and family keep talking.

Play telephone. (The first person thinks of a funny sentence and whispers it in the ear of the next person. Each person whispers what they heard into the next person's ear. Only repeat the sentence one time. The last person will share what they heard out loud and ask the first person to say the sentence they first whispered. It is helpful to write it down first so that the first person does not forget what they said.)

Have a conversation about whether you would rather sleep in or get up early. What do you think your loved one would have chosen?

Talk about whether you would rather go to a big party or small dinner party. What do you think your loved one would have chosen?

Discuss whether you would rather dance or listen to music. What do you think your loved one would have chosen?

Talk about whether you would rather go to a football game or concert. What do you think your loved one would have chosen?

Talk about if you prefer foods sweet or salty.

Talk about if you would rather do homework or the dishes.

Talk about if you would rather learn to skate or surf.

Talk about a wish you have.

Talk about if you would rather be a deep sea diver or an astronaut.

Talk about if you would rather be a giant hamster or a tiny rhino.

Talk about if you would rather be invisible or fly.

Interview each family member and find out their favorite pizza topping, sport, TV show, holiday, vegetable, fruit, song, color, candy, animal, vacation spot, celebrity, type of car, season, time of day, restaurant, movie, and thing to do with their family. Have a family member interview you.

Talk about what superpower you would choose to have.

Talk about what three things you would bring with you to a deserted island.

Talk about if you would rather have a kangaroo or koala as your pet.

Talk about if you would rather meet an alien visitor or travel to outer space.

Talk about how others would describe you to a stranger.

## Feelings/Self-Esteem

Children are likely to feel a range of emotions while learning to cope with their grief. Common feelings include anger, sadness, guilt, fear, worry, happiness, loneliness, relief, and shame (Di Ciacco, 2008; Goldman, 2000; Wolfelt, 1983). Helping bereaved children express their feelings in safe and appropriate ways is an important part of the coping process.

Directions: Sometimes it is hard to figure out how to talk about your feelings using words. You might be feeling angry, mad, sad, worried, and happy all in the same day.

The following activities will help you show your feelings.

Make a “feelings can” – write down what you are sad, happy, mad, angry, and worried about on different pieces of paper and put them in a can.

Trace your hand and write one word on each finger that describes something you like about yourself.

Write “I am beautiful/terrific because...” at the top of a piece of paper and make a list of 10 words or phrases to complete the sentence.

Create a face on a paper plate to show how you are feeling today.

Make different faces to represent different feelings and have other people guess the feeling you are showing.

Draw a picture of a rainstorm. What feeling does this remind you of? Have you felt this way lately?

Draw a picture of a rainbow. What feeling does this remind you of? Have you felt this way lately?

### Angry/Mad

When you are angry or mad, you can...

Pop balloons.

Tear up pieces of newspaper or magazine.

Build a tower with blocks and knock it down.

Punch a pillow.

Punch a punching bag.

Make a scream box (Stuff a cereal box with crumpled paper. Close the cereal box and cut a hole in the top. Tape a paper towel roll to the hole in the cereal box. Decorate the box. Scream into the box when you are feeling angry.

Stomp your feet outside in the grass.

Stomp on clean, empty egg cartons.

Stomp on bubble wrap.

### Sad

Make a puzzle – what pieces feel missing in your life?

When you are sad, you might feel cloudy. Glue cotton balls to a piece of paper to make your own cloud.

### Guilt

Look up the word guilt in the dictionary or have someone in your family explain it to you.

Make a mask – write down things you feel like hiding on the backside of the mask.

Write down things that you feel guilty about on small pieces of paper. Put the pieces of paper into a box and tape it shut. Jump on the box while you repeat the words “It’s not my fault” or “I am sorry.”

### Worried/Scared

Make worry beads using string and colorful beads. When you are worried rub the beads and talk about your worries out loud.

Make worry dolls.

Blow a whistle when you feel scared.

### Happy

Think of three phrases, sayings, or words that make you feel good and write them on three separate index cards and decorate them. Look at them when you are feeling sad.

On a piece of paper, draw a large star. Put your name in the middle of the star. Around the star, put the names of people who love, care about, and support you. On the five points, put your 5 best qualities. On the outside of the points, write how it feels to have these people supporting you.

## Health/Well-being

Grief can be tiring as it takes a lot of time and energy to deal with different changes and emotions. It is important for children to maintain healthy eating and sleeping habits, as well as maintain personal hygiene such as brushing teeth and taking baths (Leeuwenburgh & Goldring, 2008). Parents and adults should monitor children's sugar intake, as this provides them with an increase in energy, followed by a quick decline. Children should drink water and refrain from caffeine, which can increase stress (Emswiler & Emswiler, 2000).

Directions: Sometimes when you are sad, you feel like eating junk food. Sometimes there are so many things to get taken care of that you do not have time to focus on eating healthy. You might also feel scared or lonely at time and have a hard time falling asleep. The follow activities will help you focus on being healthy.

Make a recipe book of your favorite healthy meals.

Make a recipe book of your loved one's favorite foods.

Learn how to make a fruit smoothie.

Decorate a water bottle to use when you go for a walk.

Go out to dinner and dress up for fun – order healthy items off the menu!

Make popsicles using juice.

Go to your local farmer's market to pick out your favorite fruits and vegetables.

Learn how to make your own orange juice.

Find a favorite blanket or stuffed animal to sleep with at night.

Give hugs and kisses before bed.

### Physical Activity

The death of a loved one can decrease a child's strength, leaving them feel tired and worn down mentally and physically. Bereaved children should be encouraged to participate in physical activities such as joining a sports team, taking up martial arts, dance, gymnastics, or taking a walk at the park or in the neighborhood (Kroen, 1996). Exercise decreases stress, and increases a sense of control (Emswiler & Emswiler, 2000).

Directions: Physical activity can make you feel better because it wakes up good chemicals in your brain. Be sure to stretch before doing any exercise, drink plenty of water, and stay safe!

Go for a walk in the park.

Go for a walk around your neighborhood.

Play your favorite sport.

Try to learn some martial arts moves.

Play with a pet (your own, a neighbor's, or go to your local pet store or SPCA). Make sure that the animals are people-friendly before petting them!

Go camping (or camp in your back yard or bedroom).

As a family, participate in your loved one's favorite outdoor activity (going to a baseball game, going to the beach, fishing, hiking, etc).

Go for a bike ride with your family (be sure to wear a helmet and knee and elbow pads and obey traffic signs!)



## Routines

Routines and daily schedules should be maintained in order to provide the bereaved child with some sense of consistency, stability, and security that might have been lost because of the death (Danielson & Bushaw, 1995; Granot, 2000; Schuurman et al., 1997). Creating daily schedules and charts can be a helpful way to establish routine and a sense of normalcy. Following a death, children might become afraid of the dark or fear that they will not wake up. Having a night time routine can help create a sense of stability and security. The primary concerns of children who have experienced a death include thinking that they caused the death, wondering if it is going to happen to them too, and worrying about who is going to take care of them (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999; Berns, 2004; Baker, Sedney, & Gross, 1992).

Directions: Some of these activities might not be the most fun on the list, but they are helpful because they keep things running smoothly and focus on keeping you safe and organized!

Create a chore chart.

Create a daily or weekly schedule of activities and appointments – hang it in a special place for everyone to see. Make changes or add information as needed.

Get a night light

Read a happy story before bed.

Have a special stuffed animal sleep in or near the bed.

Clean your room.

Help with washing the dishes.

Help with doing laundry.

Start a collection (rocks, stickers, stamps, baseball cards, etc).

Make a list of ways to be safe at school, at home, and in the community.

Create a list of people to contact in case of an emergency.

Develop a fire safety plan and escape route for your house.

## Five Senses

## Touching

- Give hugs to each person in your family.
- Trace each family member's hands.
- Have your family trace your hands.
- Go outside and collect leaves.
- Have a family member trace your whole body on a big piece of paper. Decorate it to look like you.

## Tasting

- Make your favorite dessert.
- Make your loved one's favorite dessert.
- Make your favorite meal.
- Make your loved one's favorite meal.

## Smelling

- Go outside and smell flowers.
- Smell your loved one's favorite perfume or cologne.
- Burn a candle that reminds you of your loved one.
- Smell your laundry when it first comes out of the dryer.

## Seeing

- Watch the sunrise/sunset. Draw a picture/take a picture/write about it.
- Watch a movie with a family member.
- Watch home movies.
- Go outside during the day and see how many butterflies you can count.
- Go outside and look for your shadow when it is sunny.
- Go outside at night and see how many lightning bugs you can count.

## Hearing

- Listen to your loved one's favorite radio station or CD.
- Sit outside and listen for sounds of nature (crickets chirping, birds singing, wind blowing, etc).
- Listen for sounds that remind you of things your loved one enjoyed (train whistles, car horns, dogs barking, etc).

## Helping others

It is helpful for children to externalize and feel that they can offer assistance to someone else (Wolfelt, 2001). Helping others is a way for bereaved children to distract themselves from their own grief and focus on the needs of someone else. Participating in community service activities with family members also provides an opportunity for bonding.

Directions: Helping others is a good way to focus your attention on something else. Some activities on the list might bring up memories of your loved one, which might make you feel sad. Some activities will make you feel good because you know you are doing a good thing and making someone else happy.

Volunteer at school or at church.

Write down what you would say to a friend who had a loved one die.

Write down what has been the most helpful thing someone has done for you to help you feel better since your loved one died.

Talk about what your friend could do when they feel sad.

Visit a pet shelter.

Visit a children's hospital.

Donate a toy to charity.

Write a thank you note to someone who has done something or given you something.

Volunteer at a food shelter or soup kitchen.

Pick up trash around your neighborhood or in your local park.

Visit a local nursing home.

Donate a book to a local library with a label on the inside cover "in memory of your loved one."

Make cards for members of a local nursing home.

Make cards for children at a children's hospital.

Make muffins to share with someone you love.

Give compliments to each person in your family.

Write thank you notes to service men and women.

Write thank you notes to local emergency workers (police officers, firefighters, rescue squad).

Give a gift to someone outside of your family.

Help out around the house.

Recycle plastic bottles and cans.

Send a postcard to a family member who you do not see often.

## Holidays/Special Days

Grief is often triggered by a holiday, an anniversary, or a special occasion (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999; Pennells & Smith, 1995). Special days, such as birthdays, holidays, and special events, can be difficult as they elicit memories of a loved one and remind a child that they are no longer able to celebrate with them. Allowing the child to celebrate in their loved one's honor, by making a card, lighting a candle, or sharing happy memories about their loved one, can help with the coping process. It is important for parents and family members to talk with their child about upcoming holidays and decide how they would like to celebrate the day (Lewis & Lippman, 2004).

Directions: Make a list of other activities that you would like to include on the following holidays or special days.

### Birthdays

- Make a birthday card for your loved one that died.
- Bake a birthday cake in honor of your loved one.
- Talk about a gift you would like to have given your loved one.
- Talk about a special gift you received from your loved one.

### New Year's Eve

- Write down a new year's resolution.

### New Year's Day

- Write down your goals for the upcoming year.

### Valentine's Day

- Write a Valentine for your loved one that died.
- Make Valentines for people you care about.

### St. Patrick's Day

- Make St. Patrick's Day cards for people you care about.
- Fill a pot with gold coins with memories of your loved one.

### First Day of Spring

- Make a list of the different activities you enjoy doing during this season.
- Write down what you are looking forward to most about this season.
- Write down what you are looking forward to least about this season.

### April Fool's Day

- Tell jokes.
- Talk about the best practical jokes you have heard people do.

### Easter

- Make Easter cards for people you care about.
- Decorate Easter eggs.
- Have an Easter egg hunt.
- Write down positive messages on little pieces of paper. Put them in plastic Easter eggs and hide them around your house.
- Talk about your favorite Easter memory of your loved one.

### Cinco de Mayo

- Look up information about another culture.
- Draw a flag representing another country.

### Mother's Day

Make a Mother's Day card.

#### Father's Day

Make a Father's Day card.

#### First Day of Summer

Make a list of the different activities you enjoy doing during this season.

Write down what you are looking forward to most about this season.

Write down what you are looking forward to least about this season.

#### Independence Day (Fourth of July)

Go see fireworks.

Draw a picture of fireworks.

Draw a picture of the American Flag.

Talk about your favorite Fourth of July memory of your loved one.

#### First Day of School

Write about what you are looking forward to most about school.

Write about what you are looking forward to least about school.

#### Grandparent's Day

Make Grandparent's Day cards.

#### First Day of Fall

Make a list of the different activities you enjoy doing during this season.

Write down what you are looking forward to most about this season.

Write down what you are looking forward to least about this season.

#### Halloween

Make Halloween cards for people you care about.

Dress-up.

Make Halloween cookies.

#### Thanksgiving

Make Thanksgiving cards for people you care about.

Write or draw about reasons you are thankful you knew your loved one.

Write a list of things you are thankful for.

Talk about your favorite Thanksgiving memory of your loved one.

#### First Day of Winter

Make a list of the different activities you enjoy doing during this season.

Write down what you are looking forward to most about this season.

Write down what you are looking forward to least about this season.

#### Christmas

Make Christmas cards for people you care about.

Make a list of things that are different about this holiday compared to when your loved one was alive.

Make Christmas ornaments.

Decorate Christmas stockings.

Hang a Christmas stocking in honor of your loved one.

Make a Christmas ornament in memory of your loved one.

Put up a Christmas tree.

Hang Christmas decorations and lights.

Make gingerbread cookies to represent different members of your family.

Make Christmas cookies and share them with neighbors.

Make a Christmas wreath.

Sing Christmas carols.

Create a Christmas ornament with your loved one's name on it and hang it on the Christmas tree.

Create a star ornament with your family's plans and goals for the future in each point of the star.

Hang a stocking in your loved one's honor and fill it with memories of them.

Watch your loved one's favorite holiday movie together as a family.

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