

# Helping Children Transition Back to Their Daily Routines After the Death of a Loved One



Your Life Helper

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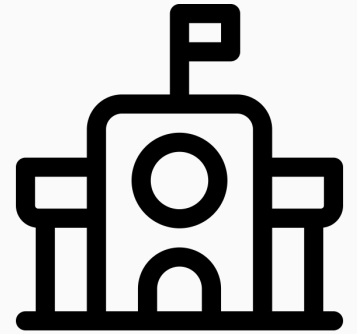
[www.lifehelper4you.com](http://www.lifehelper4you.com)

*The following information will help support children returning to their day-to-day activities after the death of a loved one*



# Preparing Your Child to Return to School Following the Death of Someone Significant

- Talk to your child. Help them understand how difficult it is to return to school and yet while it is hard you will assist them until they feel more comfortable. Tell them, “We will make it through this together.”
- Reassure your child. Give them instructions on how they may reach you during the day and permission to call you when they need encouragement. Tell them where you will be while they are at school. Your child is learning about mortality issues. With this concern for your well being they need to know that you are safe and in familiar surroundings. At first they may need to phone you frequently but over time they will adjust. Be patient with this process and do not force it along.

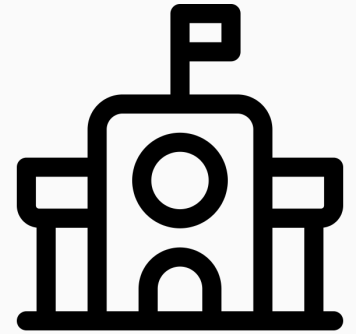


# Preparing Your Child to Return to School Following the Death of Someone Significant

- Talk to your child's principal, teacher and counselor. Give clear information about the death and what understanding the child has about those details. Determine a plan for emotional safety with their teacher. Teens may be resistant to this step but for their well being it is imperative that they have a plan of action.

This plan should include permission for your child to leave the classroom if necessary and go directly to a safer place. Children are easily embarrassed by their "grief bursts" and need to establish control.

Through a prearranged signal with their teacher, your child will understand they have permission to leave the classroom, go to the nurse or counselor's office. Self-esteem is increased as children learn to manage their emotions in appropriate ways. Leaving emotional reactions unaddressed teaches children that being resistant, unresponsive and acting out is the acceptable way to get attention or removal from the classroom.



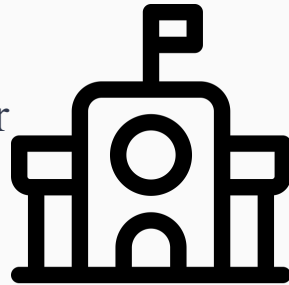
***NOTE:** Teach your school administrators and faculty about how children grieve differently from adults*

Remember that *children take breaks from grief* and appear to be "going on with their lives." Often when playing and laughing they appear to not be thinking about the death. *Children contain and express their grief in different ways*; therefore they may react more strongly to disappointments (low grades, reprimands or playground injuries), crying inconsolably or louder for long periods of time. When your child reacts to their loss we call this a "grief burst." This is normal behavior and may be a pattern for months and years following the death and can be overwhelming at times for those caring for your child. As children learn to manage their grief, the deep emotional pain changes.

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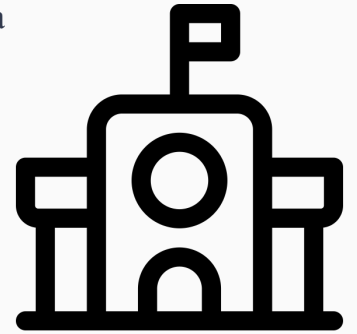
- Be patient. Children have difficulty concentrating and focusing on schoolwork following the death of someone significant. There is no magic timetable to determine when your child will have more energy to devote to the rigors of academics. Some children improve after 3 months while many more are still experiencing difficulty 1-2+ years after the death. This is normal just as it is for adults who have trouble finding a new routine at work or in their daily lives.

Many daily triggers remind children that their loved ones are dead. Often classroom work and subject matter, conversations or playground activities serve as painful reminders sending a child plummeting with these thoughts and memories. Listen carefully to what your child is telling you about their school day.



# Preparing Your Child to Return to School Following the Death of Someone Significant

- Teach your child about your grief. When you do not cry in front of your child or share with them how difficult your day has been they feel isolated in their grief. They make false assumptions about your love for the person who died and often get mixed signals about normal grief reactions. This is a difficult time for all family members and rarely will all the family be sad at the same time. Use this as a positive way to reach out for support or to open yourself to assist another. The pain will not be this intense forever; patient encouragement and support will promote healing.
- Young adults need support. While young people are eagerly establishing a place for themselves, in the adult world often away from home, it can also be a very painful, isolating and difficult process. Fears and worries intensify when your child is not home or around familiar faces. Some common thoughts and questions are: not feeling as connected to family and friends; increased loneliness; wondering if my loved ones will be okay while I'm away; trouble concentrating or going to classes or work. Be sure to establish a routine of initiating contact with your young adult. Expect this to be a one-way communication for a while.

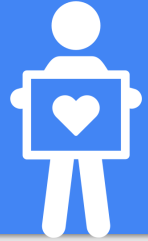


# For Families: When Families Grieve





# Helping Children Share Grief Through Creative Expression.



Children need other creative outlets to be able to share and express their grief. Here are some ways to help children explore their feelings through creative expression.

- Fold a piece of paper in half. On one side draw how it feels when people say things that don't make the child feel good, and on the other how it would feel if people asked or said the things they want.

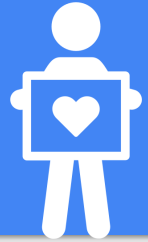
- **Use this as a guide to begin discussing the questions:**

- *Sometimes people don't know what to say when someone dies. What do you wish people would ask you or say to you?*
- *What are some things that people say that make you mad or sad?*

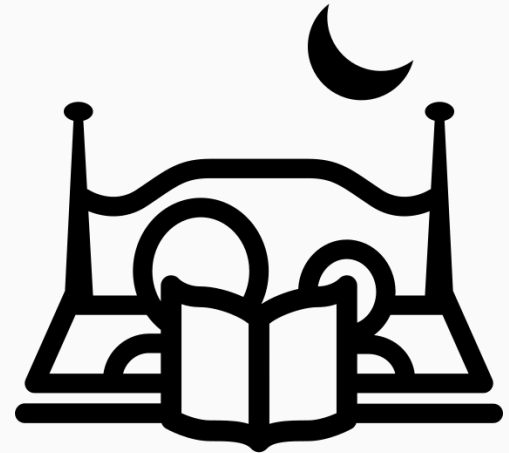


*~Moody, R. A., & Moody, C. P. (1991). A family perspective: Helping children acknowledge and express grief following the death of a parent. Death Studies,*

# Helping Children Share Grief Through Creative Expression.



- Set a timer for 5 minutes and together write as many memories as you can think of before the timer rings. Read the memories aloud to each other and see if you remember the same things.



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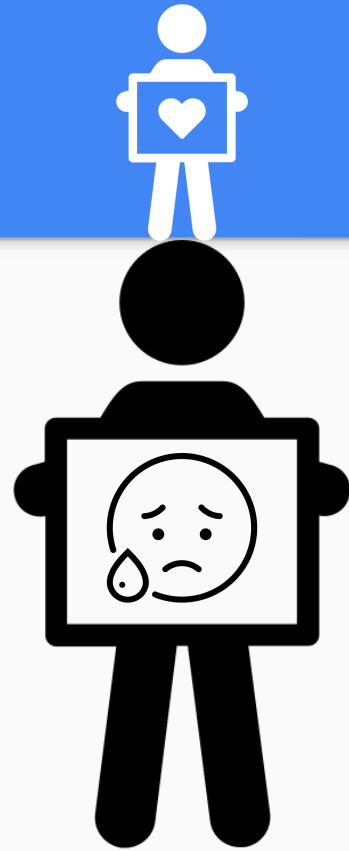
- Create a memory box by decorating a box and putting keepsakes of the person who died or memories the child wants to write down and include. They might want to put something in the memory box that's private and just for them. Take turns sharing thoughts, memories.
  - **Ask guiding questions to help begin conversation like:**
    - *How does it feel to have these memories and talk about them aloud?*
    - *We get to keep our memories forever, where is your special place for them?*



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# Helping Children Share Grief Through Creative Expression.

- Look around your house, or at school, and think about what grief looks like to help a child visualize their feelings. Have them draw a picture or use collage materials like magazine cutouts to represent what they think grief looks like.
  - Ask guiding questions that help a child understand their drawing:
    - *Is your grief messy, sad, or confusing?*
    - *What colors are in it?*
    - *What would you say to someone else who was going through the same things as you are?*
    - Afterward, encourage them to write down advice they would give to others to help them to connect to the tools and resilience that live inside of them.

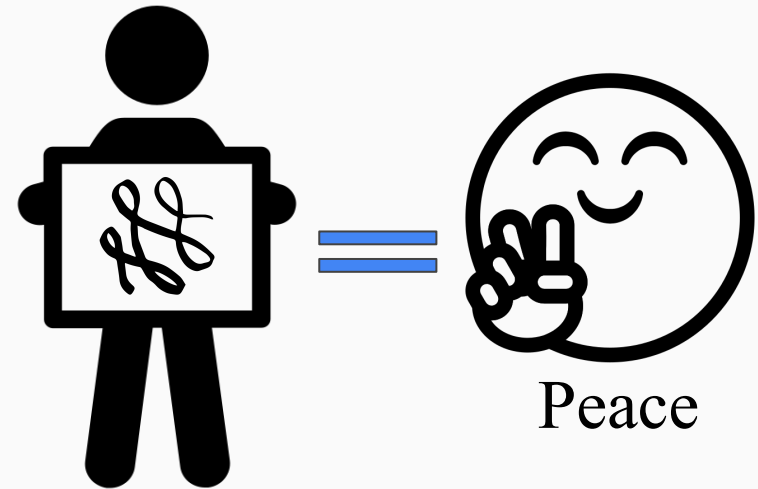
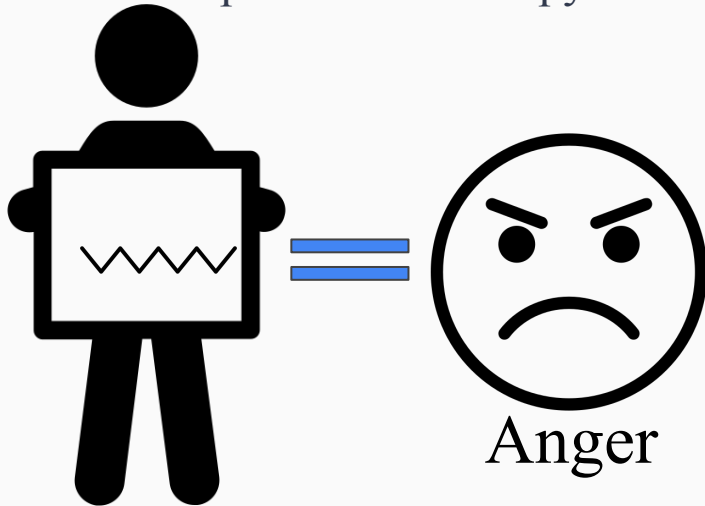


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# Helping Children Share Grief Through Creative Expression.



- On a piece of paper have a kid draw a line without lifting their pen to show what all the feelings they're experiencing right now look like. For example, anger could be a jagged line or peace a slow loopy line.



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# Sesame Street: When Families Grieve: Exclusive Preview



# The Grieving Person's Bill of Rights



- You have the right to experience your own unique grief. No one else will grieve in exactly the same way you do. So, when you turn to others for help, don't allow them to tell you what you should or should not be feeling.
- You have the right to talk about your grief. Talking about your grief will help you heal. Seek out others who will allow you to talk as much as you want, as often as you want, about your grief.
- You have the right to feel a multitude of emotions. Confusion, disorientation, fear, guilt, and relief are just a few of the emotions you might feel as part of your grief journey. Others may try to tell you that feeling angry, for example, is wrong. Don't take these judgmental responses to heart. Instead, find listeners who will accept your feelings without condition.

# The Grieving Person's Bill of Rights



- You have the right to embrace your spirituality. If faith is a part of your life, express it in ways that seem appropriate to you. Allow yourself to be around people who understand and support your religious beliefs. If you feel angry at God, find someone to talk with who won't be critical of your feelings and abandonment.
- You have the right to search for meaning. You may find yourself asking, "Why did he or she have to die?", "Why this way?", "Why now?". Some of your questions may have answers, some may not. Comments such as "It was God's will" or "He is better off", are not helpful and you do not have to accept them.
- You have the right to treasure your memories. Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved. You will always remember, so instead of ignoring your memories, find others with whom you can share them.



# The Grieving Person's Bill of Rights



- You have the right to move forward in your grief and heal. It will not happen quickly. Grief is a process, not an event. Be patient and tolerant with yourself. The death of a loved one changes your life forever.

~ Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD, Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition, Ft. Collins, CO

## Valuable online Resources:

1. <https://healgrief.org/> (this is the new link to Actively Moving Forward)
2. [modernloss.com/](https://modernloss.com/)
3. <https://www.dougy.org/grief-resources/>

# The Grieving Person's Bill of Rights



- You have the right to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits. Your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you feeling fatigued. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. And don't allow others to push you into doing things you don't feel ready to do.
- You have the right to experience "grief attacks." Sometimes, out of nowhere, a powerful surge of grief may overcome you. This can be frightening, but is normal and natural. Find someone who understands and will let you talk it out.
- You have the right to make use of ritual. The funeral ritual does more than acknowledge the death of someone loved. It helps provide you with the support of caring people. More important, the funeral is a way for you to mourn. If others tell you that rituals such as these are silly or unnecessary, don't listen.

# GOING FORWARD - MAKING A PLAN

Now what do I do? That is a process and each of us will handle it differently. It can help to make a plan that works for you!

<b>Goal Time Frame &amp; Goal</b>	<b>Tools I need</b>	<b>Support I need</b>
Next 24 Hours		
1 week		
1 month		
3 months		
6 months		
1 year		

If you or anyone you know is grieving and would like more resources or talk to someone, please use the contact information below to reach Board Certified Coach Melissa James.



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