



”EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT CHILDREN'S GRIEF BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK

Lauren W. Schneider, LCSW, MSW
Clinical Director of Children's Programs



WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED GRIEF?:

1. Thoughts, feelings and behaviors when someone close dies
2. Natural response to a life cycle event
3. Unique reaction for each person
4. Price we pay for love- Dr. Colin Murray Parkes

GRIEF is more than the 5 Stages of Death & Dying

Worden's Four Tasks of Mourning

To accept the
reality of the
loss.

**TASK
#1**



**TASK
#2**

To process the
pain of the grief.

To adjust to a
world without
the deceased.

**TASK
#3**



**TASK
#4**

To find an
enduring
connection with
the deceased
while embarking
on a new life.

Reference:
Worden, W. (2009). Grief
Counselling and Grief
Therapy - A Handbook for
the Mental Health
Practitioner. New York,
USA: Springer Publishing
Company.

habits for
wellbeing™

CAN YOU TELL WHICH ONE IS GRIEVING???



GOAL #1

To Assist Kids with Accepting and Understanding that their Person has Died

Corresponds to Worden's Task #1

- 1. Requires the ability to understand what Death means**
- 2. Dependent on:**
 - a. Developmental level**
 - b. Age of the child**
 - c. Previous history of loss**
 - d. Factors in the caregiving environment**

GOAL #1 (cont.)

To Assist Kids with Accepting and Understanding that their Person has Died

3. Strength Based Perspective- Grief is the universal and natural reaction to loss and each person has the ability to heal with age-appropriate care and support

4. Use Evidence Informed interventions-that aim to decrease **disruptive grief reactions and encourage **restorative** grief experiences.**

Pre-Schoolers (3-7 years)

Piaget's Pre-Operational Stage of Development

1. Magical Thinkers
2. Ego-centric
3. Cognitively unable to understand

death related concepts:

- a. Irreversibility
- b. Unpredictable
- c. Universality
- d. Causality
- e. Non-functionality



School Aged (6-10 years)

Piaget's Operational Stage of Development

- Concrete thinkers
- Death is permanent
- Somaticize or “act it out” their grief
- “Short sadness span” (Nancy Boyd Webb) –Can’t tolerate intensity so take breaks to play



ALL BEHAVIOUR IS COMMUNICATION!.

Ask: What happened to you? (not 'what's wrong with you")

PRE-Adolescents and TEENS

PIAGET: FORMAL OPERATIONS

- ❖ Lack emotional maturity to process grief like adults
- ❖ Ego- centric - blame themselves
- ❖ Magical- think they are invincible: Cope in ways that can be dangerous



TEENS (cont.)



- ❖ Identity vs. Role Confusion (Erickson) -peers
- ❖ Separation-Individuation process impacted
- ❖ May take on adult roles/worries
- ❖ Suffocated Grief: when person's grief is dismissed because they belong to a marginalized population

Young Adults



Common Grief Responses:

1. Shock, Anger, Guilt, Feelings of vulnerability
2. Difficulty with concentration, sleep, academics
3. Preoccupation with circumstances of the death

Developmental Considerations

- A. Identity formation
- B. Social, Emotional and Coping Skills still developing
- C. Navigating autonomy and independence

Young Adulthood- 18-25 yrs (cont.)

1. **Erickson's stage:** Intimacy vs. Isolation
2. **Fear of intimacy**
 - a. lack of social support
 - b. friends and family
3. **Emotional**
 - a. Depression, anxiety
 - b. Sadness, crying
 - c. stress,
 - d. shock, guilt, anger

Young Adulthood (cont.)

4. Physical:

- a. aches and pains
- b. tight chest
- c. change in appetite or sleep
- d. exhaustion

5. Cognition:

- a. disruption in academic or professional
- b. identity formation

**Bottom line: more vulnerable than adults
because social and emotional and ability to
cope are still evolving**

WHAT CAN YOU DO?



Explain "Cause" Truthfully in Age-
Appropriate Language
HAVE A RIGHT TO KNOW!

Language for Talking about Death

1. **Avoid Euphemisms-** will aid in understanding how the death occurred
2. **Top 5 Euphemisms?**
 - “lost”
 - “passed away”
 - “went to sleep”
 - “went to heaven”
 - “in a better place”

Explaining Suicide to Children

Define Suicide in simple terms: When someone ends their own life. Usually have an invisible disease/BRAIN disease.

- 1. Give honest, age-appropriate information about what actually caused the death**
- 2. Follow the golden rule about 'how much to tell them'**
- 3. Ask children to identify who they would go to for help if they ever felt so depressed they wanted to die**

Explaining Suicide to Children

- **Died of suicide**
- **Died by suicide**
- **Suicided**
- **Ended her own life**
- **Killed himself**

PLEASE DON'T SAY: COMMITTED SUICIDE

Defining Homicide

“When someone ends someone else’s life”

Narrative Options: she.....

.....died from homicide

.....got shot

.....killed by a drunk driver

**.....a bad man shot her with a
gun**

Defining Substance Related Death

Narrative : **“Died from a brain disease called Substance Use disorder”**

....complications of alcoholism

....taking “too much drugs

....taking the wrong medicine

....smoking cigarettes

....aka heart attack

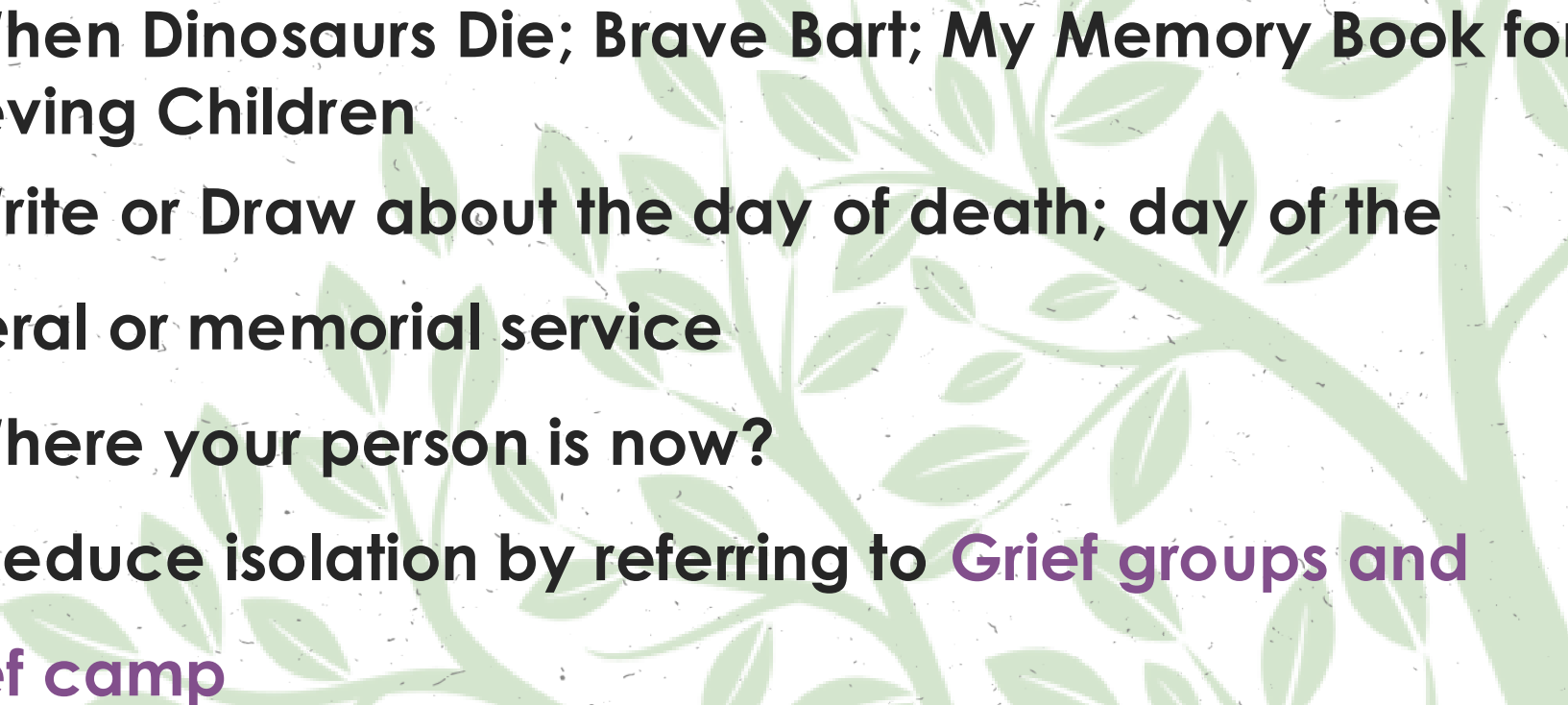


istock.com • 549397639

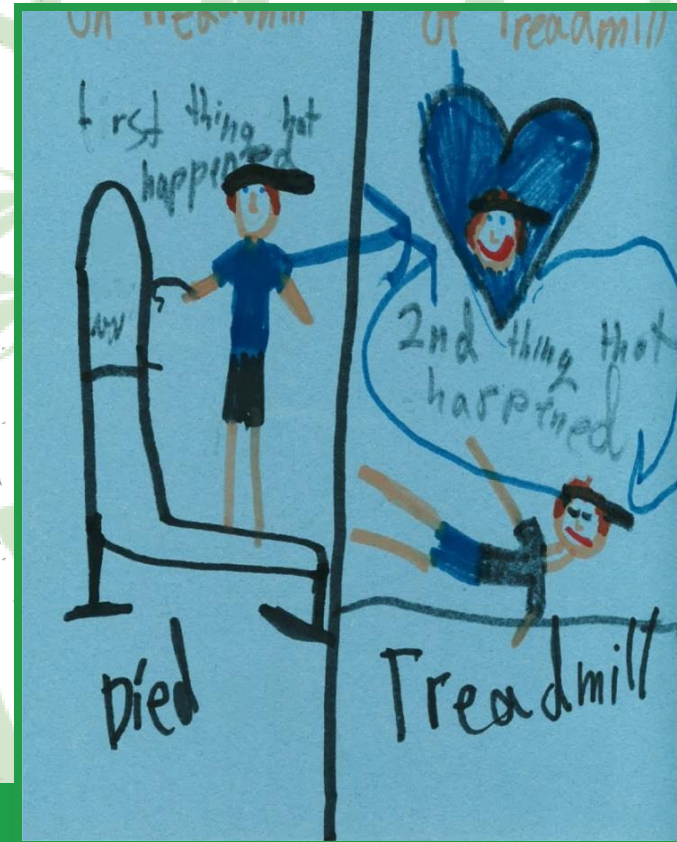
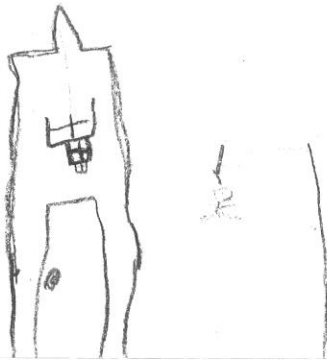
Aka: overdosed. Avoid saying: Addiction

GOAL #1

Activities

1. When Dinosaurs Die; Brave Bart; My Memory Book for Grieving Children
 2. Write or Draw about the day of death; day of the funeral or memorial service
 3. Where your person is now?
 4. Reduce isolation by referring to **Grief groups and Grief camp**
- 

How did your person die?



Sharing Grief. Finding Hope.

What Happened to their Body?



Sharing Grief. Finding Hope.

Where is she now?



Sharing Grief. Finding Hope.

GOAL #2:

To Support Kids While they Experience the Feelings Associated with Grief

Corresponds to Worden's Task #2

To Process the Pain of the Grief

1. SADNESS
2. ANGER
3. FEAR
4. RELIEF OR HAPPINESS
5. GUILT: AVOID SAYING IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT

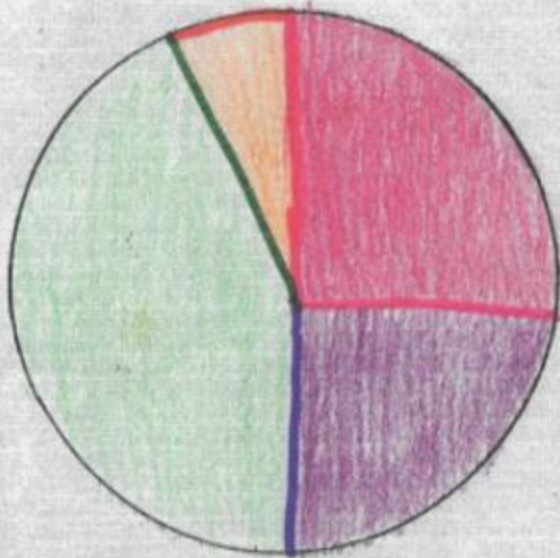
GOAL #2:

Activities

1. Explore Feelings
 - a. Feelings Pie
 - b. Feelings Ball
 - c. Angry Bags



MY FEELINGS PIE



COLOR

FEELING

- Love
- Grieving
- Lonely
- Thoughtful
-
-

<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 20px;"></div>	_____
<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 20px;"></div>	_____
<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 20px;"></div>	_____
<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 20px;"></div>	_____
<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 20px;"></div>	_____
<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 20px;"></div>	_____



- sad carrots
- happy onions
- scared beans
- lonely pepper
- mad tomatoes
- confused peas

GOAL #3:

To Help Kids Adjust to their New Normal and Get Their Needs Met in a World Without their SPECIAL PERSON

Corresponds to Worden's Task #3

To Adjust to a World Without the Deceased

1. "secondary losses" - **housing, health, income**
2. Prepare child for special days
3. Collaborate with **TEACHERS** to make sure they understand how long grief lasts
4. **NO SUCH THING AS A GRIEF CARD!**

AND WHAT ABOUT THE HOLIDAYS?



GOAL #4:

To Maintain The Bond And Find Ways To Memorialize

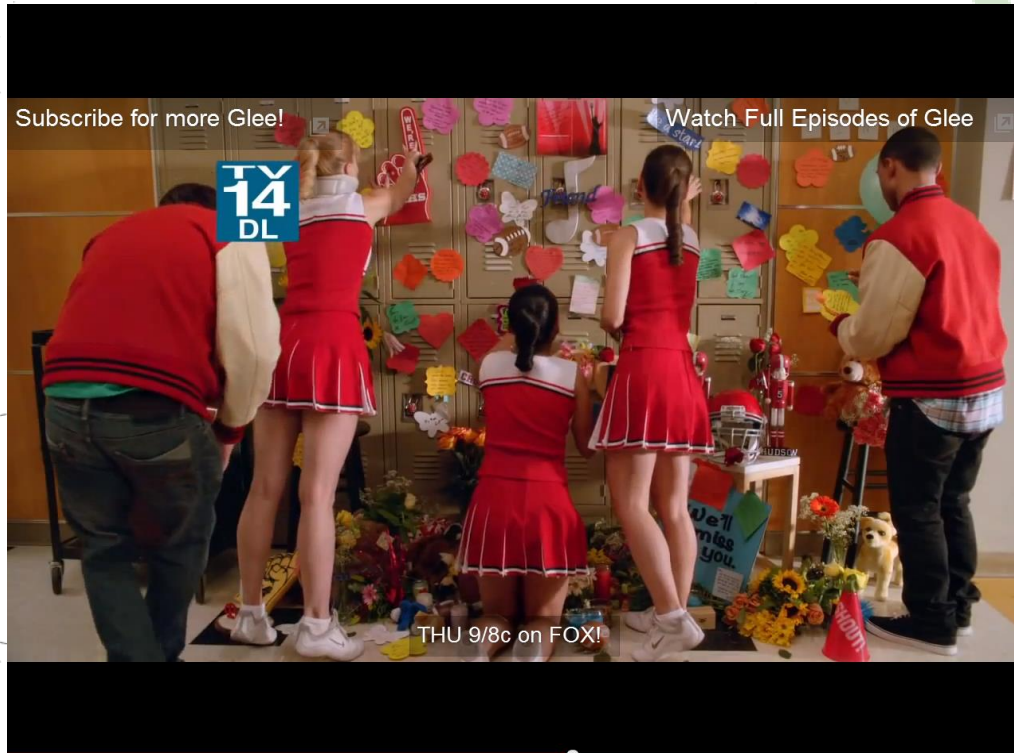
1. Engage in on-going rituals to maintain the bond and memories

2. Become more future oriented over time

1. Good News: Most kids adapt without developing mental illness

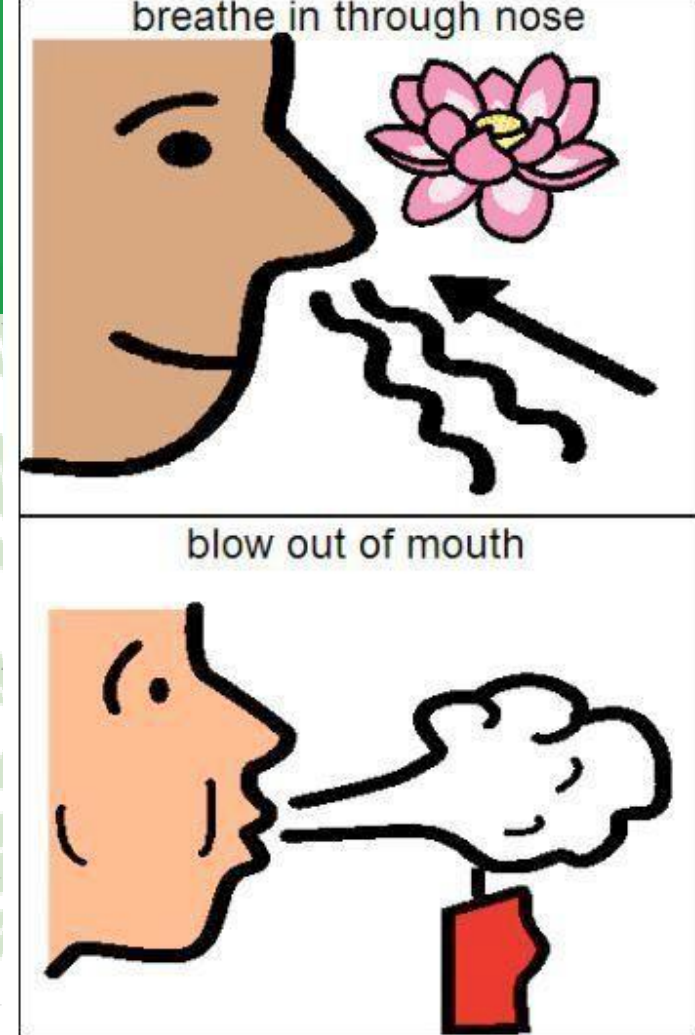


Kids Grieve and Remember



Sharing Grief. Finding Hope.

GOAL #5: To Learn Coping Strategies



1. Breathing Techniques
 - a. candle flower
 - b. pizza or spaghetti breath
 - c. butterfly breathing
2. Visualization
3. Releases emotions through movement
4. Comforting self with music, journaling, pets, etc.

Prolonged Grief Disorder & Children

Criteria A: Death: Can diagnose after 6 months in Children

Criteria B: Intense Yearning & Longing

Preoccupation with thoughts or memories of the deceased and circumstance of the death

Present in a clinically significant way, nearly every day , for at least the last month

10-25% of Children at risk for developing a mental illness in addition to natural grief response (Kaplow, 2021)

Prolonged Grief Disorder & Children

Criteria C:

- **Identity disruption (e.g., feeling as though part of oneself has died)**
- **Marked sense of disbelief about the death**
- **Avoidance of reminders that the person is dead**
- **Intense emotional pain (e.g., anger, bitterness, sorrow) related to the death**
- **Difficulty moving on with life (e.g., problems engaging with friends, pursuing interests, planning for the future)**
- **Emotional numbness**
- **Feeling that life is meaningless**

Prolonged Grief Disorder & Children

- **Intense loneliness (i.e., feeling alone or detached from others)**

Criteria D: The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

Criteria E: The duration of the bereavement clearly exceeds expected social, cultural, or religious norms for the individual's culture and context.

Criteria F: The symptoms are not better explained by another mental disorder.

WHAT'S A THERAPIST OR PARENT TO DO?

OUR HOUSE Programs:

- School-based grief groups
 - Family Support Program
 - Camp Erin LA
 - Virtual or in-person groups
- For caregivers English or Spanish



PUT CLOSURE TO THE WORD "CLOSURE"

Doka)

(Ken



Grief is not a problem to be solved,
it is a Process to be Lived

