



Helping to link hearts, mend spirits, and transform lives.

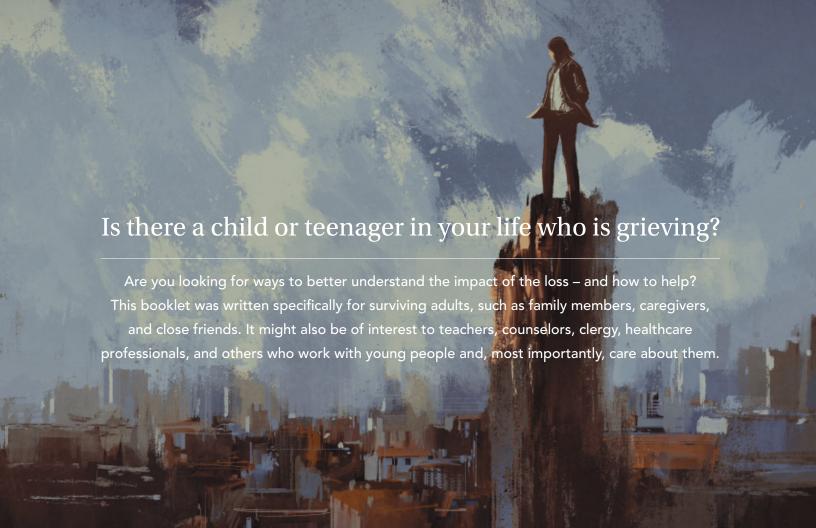
The Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas was founded in 1997.

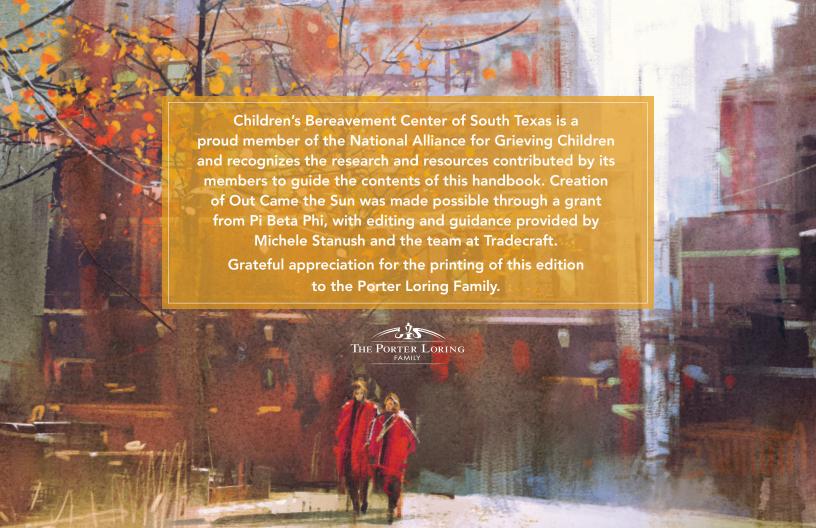
Our mission is to foster healing for grieving children and youth, their families, and the community.

Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas

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Nearly 1 in 20 children in the U.S. will lose a parent before age 16 and the vast majority of children will experience the loss of a family member or friend by the time they complete high school.

- New York Life Foundation

WHY THIS HANDBOOK?

his small guide explores the varied—and sometimes confusing—ways that young people grieve. It also gives ideas for supporting a child or teenager along that important grief journey. We realize that if you are a surviving adult, you are probably grieving as well. You, too, loved the person who died. Perhaps you feel as if you can barely cope yourself. So how can you help your child?

There is no one "right" way to help a child adjust to a death and move toward healing. Every young personand each story—is unique. You may choose to navigate this process within your own family or close community. You may seek help from outside. Either way, we at the Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas would like to share some of what we've learned over many years of working with grief professionals, caring volunteers, and those who know the subject best of all—the grieving young people themselves.

We would also like to give you and your child this message: **You are not alone.**





HOW YOUNG PEOPLE GRIEVE

here was a time in our country's past when the grief of a child was often overlooked or misunderstood. A surviving parent might see a young person laughing and playing after a death and think: "Well, they're already over it. They'll be fine." But there is a growing realization that children and teenagers can feel a loss just as deeply as adults and that it can affect them profoundly. They may just express their loss differently.

But first, what is grief? "Grief" describes the wide range of reactions – emotional and physical—that arise when somebody suffers a significant loss in their life. Grief is a natural and appropriate process. It affects people of all ages, and may express itself in different ways, at different times. In the case of a death, the survivors might go numb—not believing it has

happened—or be overcome with painful emotions, like deep sadness or fierce anger. Grief can also drain energy, upset stomachs, rob sleep, disrupt the ability to focus.

What grief says is this: "What you lost was important." Just like grownups, young people grieve. The way they understand and express their loss can be very different. For example, young children often grieve intermittently, in windows—one moment, they seem profoundly sorrowful, the next, they're happily playing. Remember this, childhood and adolescence are times during which the brain is maturing— through both age and experience. In the upcoming section, we explore factors that can affect a young person's adjustment to a loss, which can evolve and change over time.

AGE

The first factor in grieving we want to address is the fact that a child or teen will process information according to his or her developmental age. Because every person is unique, children of the same chronological age may have very different ways of understanding a death and reacting to it. But here are some typical ones:

INFANT/TODDLER (BIRTH THROUGH AGE 3):

Perception of death: Very young children do not understand the concept of death, and they have a limited understanding of time. However, they can sense when the adults around them are upset.
 Common reactions: May have separation anxiety, need more touching and holding. May have problems feeding, or with their digestion.

PRESCHOOL (3-5 YEARS):

 Perception of death: Death is seen as temporary, or able to be reversed. Might have confusion over

- what is real, and can absorb only as much as they understand. "Magical thinking" is common; i.e., they think they can change reality by changing their thoughts.
- Common reactions: May not want to be left alone.
 May not understand the sadness around them, and also feel guilty—as if the death was their fault. May behave as if they are younger—sucking thumbs and wetting beds. May ask for what happened to be explained over and over again. Will take breaks from grieving by playing.

EARLY ELEMENTARY (6-8 YEARS):

- Perception of death: Starting to understand that death is permanent, but only for others (not "me").
 May view death as an actual person, spirit, or being—such as a "ghost." The child may believe things can change if they behave well or try hard.
- **Common reactions:** Feelings seem out of the child's control. May share emotions, or hold them in. Behavior may change; i.e., may become



After a death loss, more than two thirds of teachers "always" or "usually" see withdrawal, difficulty concentrating, absenteeism, and a decrease in academic performance

aggressive or withdrawn. Coping may take form of gathering information, such as becoming an expert in the disease or condition. Like younger children, may regress in behavior and also want repeated explanations of what happened.

LATE ELEMENTARY (9-11 YEARS):

- Perception of death: Knows death is permanent and irreversible. May question own mortality, asking "Am I next?" May want details of what happens after a person dies, and have vivid ideas about it.
- Common reactions: Similar to younger children in terms of regressive behavior, including increased separation anxiety. May have changes in behavior and moods; may want to talk about feelings, or

42%

of teachers at the high school level have witnessed self-destructive behavior

38%

have witnessed increased risk-taking, such as the use of alcohol or drugs

- New York Life Foundation

repress them. May take on the role of the person who died—trying to "repair" the loss. Relationships with other children are becoming more important; grades in school may suffer.

ADOLESCENTS (12 AND ABOVE):

- Perception of death: Full awareness of their own mortality, and their attitude toward death is similar to adults. Possible "survivor guilt" if a sibling or friend died. (Survivor's guilt is the feeling of having done something wrong by surviving when somebody else has died.)
- Common reactions: May strive for independence, but be fragile inside. Mood changes are common range of emotions may include anger, sorrow, and

guilt. May get stuck on the questions: "What might have been," "Why?," and "If only." Grades at school and extracurricular activities may suffer. Increased reliance on peers. May struggle with self-esteem and the need to feel "normal"—to fit in. Likely to turn to social media or the Internet to cope. May mask grief with risky behaviors, such as acting out or using drugs and alcohol.

TYPE OF DEATH

Another factor that influences how a young person processes and reacts to a loss is the way the loved one died. Was it a chronic illness that lingered? Was it a sudden death with no warning? How involved was the child with the death? Again, each story is different—as are the reactions and the emotional trauma involved. But here are some observed commonalities:

PROLONGED GRIEF: CHRONIC ILLNESS

Young people who watch a loved one go through a

lengthy illness may have already begun the grieving process long before the actual death—this is called "anticipatory grief." Here are other factors that may play into their grief journey:

- Caregiver stress: May be helping adults as a caregiver, or even serving as the primary caregiver and be stressed beyond their age.
- **Conflicted feelings:** Getting back to a normal routine after the death may cause a sense of relief, even if the loss is very difficult.
- **Unexpected emotions:** Even though prepared for the death, it may catch them off-guard.
- **Anxiety:** Might become nervous when a surviving adult becomes sick with a cold or other short-term illness and fear that person's death.
- Emotional triggers: The sounds and smells of hospitals or related medical issues may trigger memories.

SUDDEN DEATH

With a sudden death of any kind—such as a car accident

or a heart attack or other violent death—the world that the young person understands and trusts is shattered. The child may go numb or may feel particularly strong emotions, or both at different times. Here are some frequent commonalities:

- **Strong emotions:** May be angry and feel the world is unfair.
- Withdrawal: May be isolated—not only by anger, but also by shock and sorrow.
- **Clinging:** May want to be with a parent or caregiver, and not be left alone.
- Fear, anxiety: May become anxious, constantly checking on family members' well-being.

SUICIDE

- Confused questions: May have many questions, including: "Did they not love me?" or "Did I do something wrong?"
- Wide range of feelings: Common emotions range from shock and abandonment to anger and guilt to embarrassment and shame.
- Target of painful comments: May be hurt by

thoughtless reactions from other people: friends, classmates, community members. The comments may come on social media, at school, or even in church.

HOMICIDE

Similar to survivors of a suicide, the young person may be on the receiving end of painful, callous comments from others. He or she might also experience:

- Powerful, mixed emotions: Feelings may be intense
 —outrage, terror, distrust, desire for revenge.
- **Safety worries:** May worry about safety, their own and that of other loved ones.
- Flashbacks, triggers: If witness to the death, may have repeated flashbacks. Loud noises, guns and sirens may kick off strong emotions, such as fear or aggression.
- Post-traumatic stress disorder: PTSD symptoms are common. May have difficulty sleeping, nightmares, difficulty concentrating.
- **Legal interruptions:** Grief journey might be complicated by future lawsuits and trials.



I was isolated. Nobody had a dead mom. Nobody had one parent. Everybody had a mom and a dad, and that was it. I felt different. Nobody was like me.

— Katie, 15

THE LAYERS OF GRIEF

In addition to age and how the death happened, there are many other factors that play into how a young person grieves a death loss. Among them: What is the child's natural disposition and maturity level? Did the child have a close and consistently affectionate relationship with the loved one, or were there challenges? How are the adults around the child coping? Are there community influences, such as religious beliefs or cultural traditions? Has he or she experienced significant loss(es) before? How much did the death affect the child's everyday life? Who died? Was it a

parent, a sibling, a grandparent, an adored uncle, a favorite cousin, a close friend? Children can have deep, powerful reactions to the deaths of people outside the immediate family, such as cousins and friends. That grief shouldn't be minimized.

At the end of this handbook, we list resources where you can explore more about different aspects of loss. But we do want to make a few observations here: when a young person experiences the death of somebody important to them, it will take time for them to adjust to the loss. Grief doesn't move in a straight line, nor is it one single emotion. Many reactions can be mixed up together, and may even seem to contradict each other. Typical reactions among many young people of different ages:

- **Emotions:** disbelief, sadness, anger, relief, fear, guilt, anxiety, even curiosity.
- **Physical symptoms:** loss of appetite, headaches, chest pain, fatigue, insomnia, or upsetting dreams.
- Behavior: regressing to a younger age (even bedwetting for teens), restlessness, hyperactivity, difficulty concentrating, acting out, withdrawing.

Because the grief process is layered – there are three broad reactions to a death that tend to be very common.

- **Separation anxiety:** In simple language, the child just plain misses the person who died.
- Replaying the death: The child runs the circumstances
 of the death over and over in his or her head. Did
 he or she somehow cause the death? Was there
 something that could have been done to prevent it?
- A loss of identity and meaning: By this we mean
 that the young person has lost a motivating support
 in his or her life. This may express itself, for example,
 as losing interest in school or in planning for the
 future.

In the next two sections, we will address ways to help the child or teenager deal with these and other aspects of grieving. But first an overall comment: there is no "end point" to grief. It is an experience—a process—that the young person will be going through for quite a long time. In some ways, that process will continue for the rest of his or her life.



HOW TO HELP

hat does it mean to "help" a child during his or her grief journey? It does not mean rushing the process, nor does it mean taking away all the young person's pain, as much as we might want to do that. There is a reason for grieving—it acknowledges that something significant in our lives is

gone —and children are natural mourners. What you can do is be sensitive, empathetic, and supportive. Studies have shown that it is helpful for children to feel understood, and for them to be able to express their emotions openly and honestly—when they're ready, at their own pace.

AN IMPORTANT NOTE

Grief experts say that one of the top indicators of how well a child will cope after a death is how well the surviving adults are handling their own grief. Children look to adults for guidance. The young person also may worry about the adults: "How are you doing?" or "Will you leave me too?" If you are struggling with your own grief so profoundly that you don't feel able to help your children, seek help from others. If you want to stay within your close community, you might ask for help from an extended family member, a dear friend, the school counselor, your pediatrician, a religious leader, or a spiritual guide. We discuss other sources of help later in this handbook.

EXPLAINING DEATH

In the past, there was a tendency to shield children from death. In trying to soften the reality, surviving adults might say: "We lost Daddy" or "Samantha is sleeping." But there's a growing belief that this can confuse the child, erode trust, and hinder the natural grieving process. When young people have an incomplete idea of what happened, they may try to fill in the blanks themselves—or get answers from friends or online through social media. What we suggest is this: tell the truth and use age-appropriate words. For younger children, be clear that dying is not the same as sleeping, and that it's not the same as a cartoon where the character dies and then pops back to life. You might say that death means the body stopped working; which means that the person does not feel, think, or see anymore. They feel no pain. Here are suggestions for explaining different types of death:

• An illness: "Most of the time, when we get sick, we get better again. We see a doctor or take medicine,

- and the illness eventually goes away. Sometimes, a person's body gets so sick that there is nothing that can make it better. That's what happened to Daddy."
- An accident: "Most of the time, when our bodies get sick or hurt, there are things we can do to make it better, such as when somebody breaks an arm or leg. But sometimes a person's body is so badly hurt, there is nothing that can make it better, and the person dies."
- A suicide: (This too should be age-appropriate.

 The child may be too young to understand details.)

 "Daddy had an illness in his brain and he did
 something to make his own body stop working. The
 brain is an organ of the body just like the heart,
 liver and kidneys. Sometimes it can get sick, just like
 other organs."
- A homicide: (Avoid graphic details.) "A sad, terrible thing has happened. Daddy was walking to his car and a man shot him with a gun. The gun hurt Daddy very badly and made his heart stop beating and his body stopped working and he died."

If you have spiritual beliefs that give you comfort, you might share those. Be aware some thoughts might be abstract, and the child might have trouble understanding. Also, older children might be developing their own ideas about such issues – which might not match yours. We encourage open conversation without criticism. It's important that grieving young people feel safe to express their thoughts and feelings.

HEED CUES

Children, particularly the youngest ones, can only process small bits of information at a time. What they can't understand may be brought up later. Or they may not be ready to talk at all right now. Let them be in charge of what they're ready to hear. Say that you're ready to talk when they are. Check back at different times. A child may ask the same question repeatedly. This is normal; he or she is working hard to comprehend a difficult concept or change. Admit that the conversations might be painful – but that it's okay to talk about the person who died. Ask what they think about death.

RESPECT FEELINGS

Tell your child that it's okay to express his or her feelings. Say that crying is fine—it can help adjust to hurt. Say it's okay to have other feelings as well—to be sad, mad or lonely. Children might have reactions that seem inappropriate, like laughing or being restless. Most probably, they've just reached their emotional limits. Older children and adolescents may establish distance with anger and silence. Just be patient. (At the end of this handbook, we discuss feelings that might require professional support, such as thoughts of suicide or numbing with risky behavior.)

SHOW YOUR OWN GRIEF

Don't lean on your children or teens for emotional support, but share your own grief journey. Tell them what you are feeling, and why you're feeling it. For example: "I'm sad because your brother and sister have died." Children tend to be very open to listening. Don't be afraid to show tears. This gives the young person permission to cry and express their own emotions.

"The children feel as if they have to be strong, but I would say, 'Let's miss Daddy together.' I would say it when something made me think of him. I wanted Stevie to know that was normal – that it's good to miss him; that means we loved him. We'd talk about him naturally, and after a while, we'd be smiling through our tears."

- Wanda, left with a young son after her husband died

ANSWERING THE HARD QUESTIONS

Children ask questions. It's a wonderful quality of the young. Often the questions are deep and profound, like: "Why is life unfair?" Respect the questions. And realize that you can answer with: "I don't know."

GIVING COMFORT - AT HOME, AND AWAY

Sometimes all a young person really wants is quiet time with family – to share memories or process what the

death means to him or her. In a high-tech world where so much of our time is spent staring at screens and pressing buttons, remember that being human involves all the senses—and simple touch is one of them. Family rituals that re-establish a sense of order and control are also important. As for strong emotions the child may be feeling, you can directly address those, but do so with tenderness. Also be aware of how you can help the grieving child or teen away from the home—whether during the funeral or at school. Of particular note: it's healthy and healing for young people to play, be creative, and move.

TENDERNESS AND REASSURANCE

The grieving young person in your life may need constant reassurance of love and safety – not only with words, but also hugs and kisses, cuddling, patience and warmth. Don't forget eye contact, loving facial expressions, rocking and singing. Also, consider a "transitional" object, such as a soft blanket or a stuffed animal. (Even teenagers might want a stuffed animal; they shouldn't be teased.)

Assure the young person that you hope to live a long life, and that one death doesn't mean others will happen soon.

EASING GUILT

Very young children with "magical thinking" might believe their thoughts somehow caused the death. Older children and adolescents often wonder if they could have somehow kept the death from happening. These reactions are particularly common if there were ongoing challenges in the relationship shortly before the death. (For example, a heated argument just prior to a heart attack.) But guilt can also be present for no logical reason. Tell your grieving young person that it is very common for survivors to wonder about being responsible for a death. Give reassurance that he or she didn't cause the death or, depending on circumstances, help the young person explore his or her feelings by listening, asking questions, and showing you care. Note: young people also might feel guilty if they have fun and/or feel happy. Assure them it's okay to feel joy.

ADDRESSING ANGER

Like guilt, anger is a typical emotion in grieving. The child or teen may be angry at whomever they felt caused the death; or at God (if the young person has spiritual beliefs); or even at the person who died: "Why did they leave me?" This is natural; don't be critical. Suggest the young person talk about their anger, or express it creatively (for example, through art or writing); or burn it off physically.

FUNERALS AND MEMORIALS

These are important family and community events. Children should be included in ways appropriate to their ages. Tell them who will be there, and what might happen. Explain that adults might be crying at the service, and that it is okay to cry. If a young child is at a memorial service, make sure you've arranged it so they can "take a break" to play or move around. It's hard for a little one to be quiet or still for long periods.

ROUTINE AND RITUALS

Before or after a death, the normal home routine may

be disrupted. The changes may be dramatic. A child may have to move to a new house; perhaps a new school. Perhaps a new city. He or she might have new caregivers. It is important that the young person feels as safe and secure as possible. If you are a surviving parent or a new caregiver, be aware that structure, rules and limits may be needed. They can give a young person a sense of safety and control. Studies have shown that rituals can also help ease grief. You might light a candle at dinner in honor of the loved one who died, or listen to a particular song. (Although be aware that music, in particular, can bring up very strong emotions.)

SCHOOL ISSUES

Going back to school after a death can be challenging. Talk to the young person's teacher and/or school counselor; tell them the child is grieving and may have a hard time concentrating or doing schoolwork. Stay in close contact. If your school district doesn't offer special teacher training for dealing with grieving students (most don't), suggest it. Or describe easy-to-find resources, such



Only 7% of teachers have had any amount of bereavement training

Nearly 70% of teachers have had at least one grieving student in their classroom



- New York Life Foundation

as The Dougy Center publication: "Helping the Grieving Student." (See page 37.) Socializing with classmates may also be hard. Your child has just gone through a cataclysmic event, but for fellow students, it's life as usual. For some grieving children, this is okay; they don't want special attention. But others might find it upsetting. You can help by finding an outside support group or bereavement camp so the young person can be around others of a similar age who've gone through a death loss.

PLAY, CREATIVITY, & MOVEMENT

Young people should be allowed – even encouraged – to participate in activities we adults might not associate with grief. For example, children are naturally wired to play – and when grieving, play also gives them a break from painful feelings. This goes for teens, too. Other healthy activities include art and design, making music, dramatic expression, creative writing, journaling, and similar projects that engage the imagination. Movement can include: dance, games, sports, even yard work. (We list specific creative ideas in the Healing section.)



"Greater than any education, information or advice we can give to children who are grieving is to allow children who are grieving to connect with other children going through a similar experience."

— the National Alliance for Grieving Children

HELP FROM OTHERS

Ithough it is important for children to receive information from somebody they know and trust, there are also a growing number of outside resources dedicated to helping grieving youth: counseling professionals; caring people in both the secular and spiritual "helping" communities; online communities and organizations offering stories, research

and ideas; old-school books, and children's bereavement centers like ours (there are now many similar centers around the country). In the meantime, many experts believe that one of the most powerful tools for healing is what's called "peer support" – grieving young people connecting with other grieving young people.



BOOKS

Seeking help can be as simple as finding a good book. There are a growing number of books about grief for young people of all ages, as well as helpful guides for caring adults. We give a sampling of titles on pages 35-36, but a few words here about old-school children's picture books. A picture book can address difficult, painful concepts - including an impending death - in a format that's familiar and soothing. Some are made-up stories with engaging characters, like a pointy-nosed badger or a maple leaf named Freddy or a "Grandy" who makes soup out of tears. Others answer a child's curious questions directly, but gently. When Dinosaurs Die even has a glossary defining words such as autopsy and cremation. Reading a book as a family, or even having an older child read to a younger one, can provide calming time together – and also spark further conversation. You, as the adult, might want to review the book first, to make sure the messages it gives are ones you want for your child. But of interesting note: Many



41%

of children who lost a parent pretended to be okay so they wouldn't upset their surviving parent

- New York Life Foundation

adults report that children's picture books have helped the grownups in the family with their own grief.

ONLINE HELP

There are several online sites devoted to children's grief which offer an array of information and resources. Although most are directed at adults (surviving loved ones, professionals, caring others), a few are devoted specifically to youth. We give a sampling of web addresses later, but to mention two here: the *Shared Grief Project* includes short inspiring videos featuring well-known

athletes and other celebrities who lost a parent or sibling at an early age. Another interesting site, *SLAP'D: Surviving Life After a Parent Dies*, was started by a Chicago teenager whose father died while saving two boys from drowning in Lake Michigan. It includes a discussion forum (including a place to discuss "awkward" topics), articles and interviews with experts, and a personalized scrapbook where teens can create a memorial.

"What does it feel like to be only thirteen years old when your dad dies? When you're hardly even a teenager, with two siblings even younger than yourself and a heartbroken mother? When the road ahead has virtually disappeared?... SLAP'D is not a substitute for meeting with other teens or experts face-to-face. It is, however, a safe, supportive, accessible community for teens who have lost a parent to know that they are not alone, and a place to gain strength from each other."

— Genevieve, SLAP'D founding teen



PEER SUPPORT

While books and websites that connect grieving teens are one type of peer support, face-to-face sharing is particularly powerful. This can happen in various ways: support groups that meet on a regular basis; special camps; or simply just playing together. The benefits are many: children feel less isolated; they share feelings, memories, and updates on their lives; they gain a greater sense of control; they trade coping ideas; ultimately, they see how their grief journey can help others. Surviving adults are sometimes invited; or they have their own groups nearby. Perhaps the best comments about peer support come from the participants themselves...



of Americans who lost a parent growing up agree that after the loss, they felt that there was no one they could talk to



of surviving parents say friends/ co-workers seemed uncomfortable around them after the loss "Grieving people often feel indescribable isolation.

We're not sure how we should act. Survivors of suicide in particular, unwittingly make people feel terribly awkward.

Coming to group meant we could leave our public selves outside, and we were free to authentically engage with those who shared our grief. Having permission to express the anger and confusion we felt—but could not share with our families, friends or acquaintances—was an integral part of our healing. Saying what we felt, and feeling heard by people who can honestly say 'I understand'—gave us support in a way no other counseling could have."

— Deb, left a widow with two daughters after her husband died by suicide



of surviving parents say many friends stopped talking to/socializing with them

- New York Life Foundation

WHAT IS GRIEF COUNSELING?

It is one-on-one therapy for the child—or for families and caregivers—with licensed professionals. It can help grievers understand the depth of their reaction to the loss—as well as develop or deepen skills needed to cope and adjust. It can also help families stabilize and better communicate. Individual counseling might be particularly appropriate if a child is shy or fearful around others, or just not yet ready for peer groups. Note: Children's grief counseling often includes play therapy—like art, drama, and movement.



WHAT IS HEALING?

hat does it mean to heal from a death loss?
And is healing even possible when a young person has lost somebody so significant in his or her life? A simple dictionary definition of healing is "To become healthy or well again." Of course, when somebody dear has died, the surviving child will never be the same again. The young person will likely miss that person for a long time, probably for the rest of their life. In fact, they may need to re-grieve or re-experience their losses at multiple developmental stages. Strong feelings may hit when important things happen: going to the prom; scoring a touchdown; graduating from

high school; getting married; having one's own child. This is all perfectly natural. Our hope is, if the death was processed and grieved in a healthy way, that these grief experiences may be sad—but not devastating. And that the young person will have been able to move forward in his or her life in a way that allows them to find peace and smile again. Meanwhile, the bereaved may have developed important new strengths along their grief journey, including a growth of compassion as well as a deeper appreciation of time with friends and family — and of life itself.

AN IMPORTANT NOTE:

In some cases, a person can get "stuck" in grief. We call that unresolved grief. By that we mean, the bereaved is having trouble functioning in his or her life, or is experiencing intense, debilitating emotions. Young people with unresolved grief may suffer from depression, aggression, anxiety, hyperactivity, violence, suicidal thoughts, alcohol and drug abuse, decreased academic performance, and other emotional problems or disorders. If you are worried about this, please seek professional help at our center or elsewhere. (If the issues are beyond the scope of our services, our staff can make an appropriate referral.)

ACTIVITIES

Many young people find it healing to keep memories of the deceased loved one alive which can happen in a variety of ways, including natural conversation or cherishing physical mementos. We offer a few other ideas:

INTANGIBLE GIFTS

Talk about gifts received from the person who died that are not "things." For example: "She taught me about love." Or more specifically: "He taught me how to draw." Or "She taught me how to make *enchiladas*." The young person can write these things down, with details. Example: How did the smell of the enchiladas baking fill the house—and make everyone's mouths water? Wrap your piece of writing like a present, and discuss how these are gifts from the person that you will always have.

CREATE YOUR HEART

Provide a variety of art supplies—like Play-Doh, clay, construction paper, beads, glue, markers, feathers—for

the child or teenager so that they can create what their grieving heart looks like. Different hearts can be created that show the child's heart before the death, at the time the death occurred, and several months after the death.

A CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Write a letter and tell your loved one what you would like to say if he or she were here, perhaps things you never had the chance to say, things you wish you'd said differently. Or you may want to tell your loved one about things in your life right now. You might also draw a picture, write a poem or a song, or something else creative. When you're done, think about what you might want to do with what you've created. Take it to the cemetery, perhaps, or keep it in a special place.

A PHOTO ALBUM

This is a great "together" activity. Make an album together—parent and child, or as a family. Talk about what is going on in each picture, even if the child is too young at the time to know. A double benefit: Young people often fear their memories will fade as time passes, and a photo album cannot only be a conversation starter, but also a memory preserver.

LOSS—AND STRENGTH—LINE

Draw a line across a sheet of paper, like a timeline. Have or help the young person write in all the big losses that have occurred in his or her life thus far, things like deaths (pets count too); divorce or a parent leaving or moves. Discuss these with the child or teen, and then talk about how coping with these losses may have made the young person stronger in certain ways.

A NEW FAMILY RITUAL

This ritual can honor the person who died. Idea: on his or her birthday, buy a helium balloon, attach a written message to the string, and release together. Ask the young people in your life if they'd like to share what they wrote to their loved one. If they don't, make it okay not to share. Consider planting a memorial tree or garden you can visit as a family. Or visit the cemetery every season or the place where the ashes were scattered, if there was a cremation. Spend quiet time in silent memory. On the way home, share your thoughts, but leave it to each family member to share theirs.

ALLIE'S STORY

When Allie's father died unexpectedly in 2010, he left behind a wife and three young daughters. Allie, his middle child, was a seven-year-old who felt especially close to her father. This is a recounting of her grief journey, which began the morning she learned about his death.

I had just woken up, and I was laying on my bed in the dark, under the covers. I could hear my younger sister in the other room, laughing. She was two. And my older sister was crying. She was nine or ten at the time. It was pretty confusing because of the differentiation in emotions. I went into my parent's bedroom and my mother said, "I need you to come sit on the bed." I guess she didn't want me to collapse to my knees on the floor. It took me some time to process, when the closest person to you in the family is gone.

I was absolutely a daddy's girl. All my favorite things

to do, I did with him. He was incredibly sweet. He had been this big tough offensive lineman in college—and he still had that build. But he was just a giant stuffed teddy bear. And he was a comedian for sure. He could make you laugh—wherever, whenever, whoever you were.

After it happened, my entire class wrote me letters. I had very supportive classmates. My sister and I took a week off from school because we needed time to adjust, and when we got back the first week everybody was trying to make us feel better. But then it kind of faded away and they went on with their lives – and you felt like you were missing something that you had before.

I don't think that "dead" is the right word. Their body and their life is gone, they're not here—but their spirit is still here. I knew that he was there—he was with me. But since I was younger and I didn't know how to control my emotions—I didn't have the tools—I got really mad at everybody. Everything just turned to me being upset, and I kind of isolated myself for a little while. Later on, at school, I was this "happy person." And I was happy, but

there were so many different emotions that I couldn't really tell what was going on.

I remember a lot about the Children's Bereavement Center. Even before we sat down to talk about feelings and how we were coping, I remember having this sense of being able to let loose—and just enjoy myself with these other kids. It took a burden off your chest to be able to play and have the same experiences with other children who'd also been through a death. They understood that things weren't the same—and you couldn't act like they were. There were sad moments, of course, because of what we had all gone through, but we were able to help each other in a way so we could forget about it. We were having fun in a different way.

As you get older, your grief becomes more private. I've had my share of bad moments. When I get upset, I block people out. I try not to hurt other people's feelings, but sometimes I will distance myself. It helps to have other people, but grieving people do need time—in isolation—to work it through themselves. I wouldn't

have felt this well now if I wasn't given my time to work through this myself.

Even though I don't play anymore, I like to lose myself in art. There are canvases and sketchbooks all around my room. I learned that at the bereavement center. When I do art, I like to look at the different feelings I put into it. Feelings that you don't know how to express, like through talking or explaining to a person. With art, you don't have to have the right answer. Your best try is going to perfectly explain the feeling.

The amount of anger I had got smaller and smaller as I got older. Last year—in the 8th grade—it completely went away. I don't know what my life would have been like if he was still here. But the loss taught me to look at other people in a different way: Everybody's going through something, you don't know what it is. So it's better to be kind and help people than to say your pain is worse than theirs. I've learned things about myself and other people and how to help—and how to accept the help sometimes. That's the harder thing, to accept that

help that people are trying to give you. So many people helped me then—so now I can become this person who can help other people through it.

As a 7-year-old child, I didn't understand a lot: Just that my dad was gone and I'm not going to see him until I die. Because I do believe in God and I do believe that there will be a place for me after with him. But that's such a long time to think about. He just was there one second and gone the next. I don't think "healing" is the right word when dealing with grief, or maybe when it comes to grief, it has a different meaning. It's not like healing from a wound, where you get better and you forget about it. Healing with grief is: Getting better, but not forgetting. If you forget, that's not healing —that's just walking out. And that's not good because it just hurts in the long run. Knowing my dad, he would never want me to block out my feelings just because I was hurt—and he definitely wouldn't want me to be hurt because he wasn't there. You have to think: How can I honor them because I'm living and they're not? You don't want to honor

them in a way that involves alcohol and drugs and bad relationships. You have to think about what they would want you to do.

I'm coming up on that anniversary of spending the same time with him and the same time without him. You can't remember the first few years of your life, so I actually have more memories without him than with him. The people who knew my dad well, they tell me I'm basically a clone of him, which is the best compliment I can get—along with the biggest reassurance. I've gotten to learn about parts of my dad that I didn't get to meet as a child by being told that they're parts of me. I'll say something and people would look to me and say, "That's just what your dad would have said."

And so it's just the best feeling. I'm getting to know him.

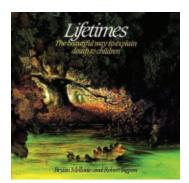


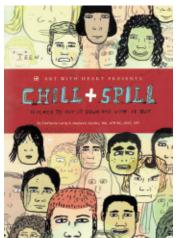
EXPLORING FURTHER

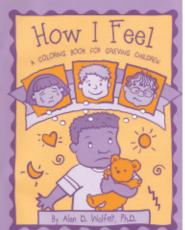
f you would like more detailed discussion about any of the topics from previous pages – or if you've decided to seek out more help – this section offers a sampling of resources. We start here with more information about the place with which we're most familiar: our own center. But we are only one of hundreds of children's bereavement centers around the

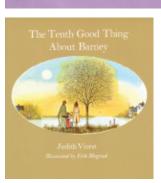
country. We've also included a sampling of books and websites. One word of advice: Don't hesitate to seek help. No child should grieve alone and no family should have to grieve without support. Support comes in many different places: friends, family, community support groups or professionals. You are not alone, please reach out if you need assistance.



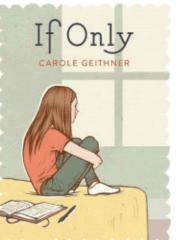


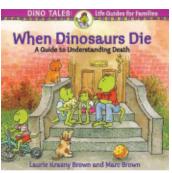


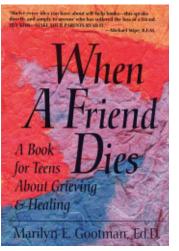












BOOKS

For other suggestions, try online grief support websites —or ask your librarian

CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS

- Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children by Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen
- Tear Soup: A Recipe for Healing After Loss by Pat Schwiebert and Chuck DeKlyen
- Badger's Parting Gifts by Susan Varley
- I Miss You: A First Look at Death by Pat Thomas
- Gentle Willow by Joyce C. Mills
- The Invisible String by Patrice Karst
- The Fall of Freddie the Leaf by Leo Buscaglia
- When Dinosaurs Die by Laurie Krasney Brown and Marc Brown
- Michael Rosen's Sad Book by Michael Rosen
- You've Got Dragons by Kathryn Cave
- The Tenth Good Thing About Barney by Judith Viorst

CHILD'S WORKBOOK

- How I Feel: A Coloring Book for Grieving Children by Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D.
- When Someone Dies: A Child-Caregiver Activity Book by the National Alliance for Grieving Children

LOSS OF A PARENT

 Samantha Jane's Missing Smile by Julie Kaplow and Donna Pincus

LOSS OF A SIBLING

- Where's Jess? by Marvin Johnson
- I Miss My Little Brother by Lydia Allen

TRAUMA

- A Terrible Thing Happened by Margaret M. Holmes and Sasha Mudlaff
- When Something Terrible Happens by Marge Heegaard
- Brave Bart by Caroline H. Sheppard

SUICIDE

- But I Didn't Say Goodbye: Helping Children and Families After a Suicide by Barbara Rubel
- Someone I Love Died by Suicide by Doreen Cammarata

MURDER

 After a Murder: A Workbook for Grieving Kids by The Dougy Center

FOR TEENAGERS

- If Only (a novel) by Carole Geithner
- Healing Your Grieving Heart For Teens by Alan D.
 Wolfelt Ph.D. (related journal also available)
- The Grieving Teen: A Guide for Teenagers and Their Friends by Helen Fitzgerald
- Straight Talk about Death for Teenagers: How to Cope with Losing Someone You Love by Earl A.
 Grollman
- When Will I Stop Hurting?: Teens, Loss, and Grief by Edward Myers
- Fire in My Heart, Ice in My Veins: A Journal for

- Teenagers Experiencing a Loss by Enid Samuel-Traisman
- Reactions: A Workbook to Help Young People Who Are Experiencing Trauma and Grief by Alison Salloum
- Chill & Spill: A Place to Put it Down & Work It Out by Steffanie Lorig and Jeanean Jacobs
- Grief Skills for Life: A Personal Journal for Adolescents About Loss edited by Judy Davidson

TEEN LOSS OF A PARENT

- You Are Not Alone: Teens Talk about Life After the Loss of a Parent by Lynne B. Hughes
- Motherless Daughters: The Legacy of Loss by Hope Edelman

TEEN LOSS OF A FRIEND

 When a Friend Dies: A Book for Teens About Grieving & Healing by Marilyn E. Gootman Ed.D.

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WEBSITES

If you don't have a computer or a mobile device, try your local library for free online access. For online resources specific to type of death, please visit our website: www.cbcst.org

FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

(also appropriate for professionals):

- Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas www.cbcst.org
- Children's Bereavement Center of Rio Grande Valley www.cbc-rgv.org
- Coalition to Support Grieving Students www.grievingstudents.org
- The Dougy Center www.dougy.org
- National Alliance for Grieving Children www.childrengrieve.org
- New York Life Foundation www.newyorklife.com/achildingrief

 Our House Grief Support Center www.ourhouse-grief.org

FOR CHILDREN/ADOLESCENTS:

- Kids Aid www.kidsaid.com
- The Shared Grief Project www.sharedgrief.org
- Sesame Street Grief Website www.sesamestreet.org/content/grief
- Surviving Life After Parent Death www.slapd.com
- What's Your Grief? www.whatsyourgrief.com

FOR PROFESSIONALS

- National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement www.schoolcrisiscenter.org
- New York Life Foundation www.newyorklife.com/achildingrief
- Scholastic's Grief Resources for Teachers www.scholastic.com/childrenandgrief/

CHILDREN'S BEREAVEMENT CENTER

OF SOUTH TEXAS

We have many programs but one goal: to help young people find healthy ways to move forward after being devastated by a death loss.

The nonprofit Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas was founded in 1997 by Dr. Martha Atkins, who realized during her academic studies that although a death loss can have a profound and permanent impact on a child, there were very few local resources directed specifically at grieving youth. Starting with one support group of 19 families, the Center now serves more than 1,500 children and their caregivers every year. Our hope is to make the Bereavement Center feel like a comfortable "home"—it even has a kitchen. Because each child's story is unique, the Center starts with a telephone conversation, followed by an appointment with the family to find out which services would be most

appropriate for their family. We then offer peer support group and/or counseling services aimed at helping families experience and work through the healing process. Our peer support groups are offered at no cost to the families and are open-ended; meaning, come as long as you like. Currently, the Center offers support for the following:

- Beyond Illness (death due to chronic illness)
- Beyond Sudden Death (unanticipated death)
- Beyond Violence (death by homicide)
- Beyond Self Hurt (death by suicide)
- **Sibling Group** (children who've lost a sister or brother to death)
- Beyond Family (death of grandparent, extended family member, or friend)
- Little Hearts (children 3-5 years old)
- Teens Take on Grief (monthly gatherings)

The Center also offers one-on-one counseling with a licensed professional staff member for families, children

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and teens. We realize that family issues will arise during the grieving process—so we not only provide a safe environment to discuss feelings, we also teach healthy coping strategies using expressive therapeutic techniques. Therapeutic activities incorporate dramatic play, art, poetry, journaling, music, meditation, guided imagery, dance and movement. Knowing that grief can manifest itself physically, we have different areas where children can burn off energy and painful emotions. For example, there is a "rumpus" room with padded walls and large stuffed figures that can represent Mommy's cancer or the drunk driver who hit Daddy.

As the Center continues to expand services, it is through the Teen Grief Reach Initiative that we are able to offer off-site teen support groups in local high schools and community centers, targeting youth in underserved areas and at-risk students. Also, we now offer children's grief "camps" both on-site and at outdoor overnight camps. The camps are offered at no cost to the families. Along with our core services, the Center has recently created the Grief Education Institute that provides healthcare professionals, educators and clergy with the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills that will strengthen their ability to assist children and families grieving the loss of a loved one. It is through these efforts that the Center can fulfill its vision that every grieving child in South Texas will have access to competent, compassionate care.

While the Center strives to provide services to all families in need and ensure that no child will have to walk the journey of grief alone, we recognize in rare instances, some children are not ready or appropriate for the scope of services we offer. Some children may need more specific, intense, clinically targeted care and in these cases will be referred to the most appropriate level.



Betore I die I want to travle the world

Antes de morir quiero Time to Say Goodbyc

Before I die I want to always want to be happy

Antes de morir quiero SEE MY NOM HARRY 7

Before I die I want to Explore the World

Antes de norir quiero be l'in my family to go to college

Before I die I want to.

Antes de morir quiero Cambiar el mundo.

Before I die I want to Swimwith sharks

Antes de morir quiero CEN A BARRER SHOP



