

Dear Parent/Guardian,

You are likely reading this information because your child has experienced a significant loss or losses to a death. This packet contains general information and guidelines relating to grief and loss.

During this experience, it is important to inform the school of the death and request feedback regarding any changes in your child's behavior/performance at school. Loss can impact a child's social and psychological balance and challenge coping skills. This experience can be overwhelming, but also produce growth and maturity which reflects a confidence about dealing with life.

As a parent or caregiver, it is important to take care of yourself. Research shows that how well a child does after a death is linked to how well the adults in their lives are doing. By accessing support, you also model for your child ways to take care of themselves and provide reassurance that you will have the energy and presence to be there for them.

Hospice of Lenawee provides grief support to anyone in the community that has experienced a loss free of charge. This includes the *Kaleidoscope* Program.

What is the *Kaleidoscope* Program?

- Individual counseling
- Grief support groups
- Educational in-services for school personnel
- Grief educational materials

The Hospice of Lenawee *Kaleidoscope* Program provides school-based grief support services to students in Lenawee County. It is a universal goal to provide each student with the coping skills and supports necessary to becoming a healthy productive adult: mind, body, and spirit.

To request services or for more information about the *Kaleidoscope* Program, please call Hospice of Lenawee's Bereavement Department at (517) 263-2323 or visit hospiceoflenawee.org.

Sincerely,

Lee Ann Straub, LMSW
Director of Bereavement Services

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Grief Overview

What is Grief?

Grief is the normal and natural response to loss, a universal human experience. Grief takes place over time, sometimes over a lifetime. It does not take place all the time, but surfaces intermittently and usually in unpredictable ways. The experience is different for every student and can include powerful, often overwhelming combinations of reactions.

The Grief Cycle

One of the many struggles of grief is that it can resurface in the months, or even years to come, as the student progresses through life's developmental stages. There is no limit on grief, as it is a process and part of the child's ongoing experience as they develop. Children may need a break from grief. Having fun or laughing is not disrespectful to the person who died. This is a vital part of grief work. Grief is expressed through behaviors, emotions, physical reactions, and thoughts.

Trauma and Grief:

Trauma	Grief
Main feeling is terror or fear	Main feeling is sadness
Trauma includes feeling grief	Grief is not traumatic
The experience is hard to talk about	Can talk about the loss
Left with a sense of being helpless and powerless	Left with sense of sorrow
May experience being more angry more quickly and acting out towards others	May feel angry about the loss, but not so likely to act out in anger towards others
May feel guilt – i.e. “I should have prevented it” or “it should have been me instead”	If feeling guilt, it is more about regrets of what you wished you could of or should have done or said with the person who died
Leaves one feeling bad about self	Does not feel badly about self, just sadness and missing of the other person
Dreams of being victimized	Dreams about the person who died
Can't really forget – may have flashbacks or thoughts that keep coming back of the event	Remembers with sadness for loss, but not so much upsetting thoughts or memories of what has happened
Try to avoid anything that is a reminder of trauma – “numbing” (no feeling)	Want to remember the person who has died
Startle reactions, or hyper vigilance (keeping a look out for threats)	Mostly sadness, but not these other reactions

Trauma reactions are normal reactions that happen when a person experiences an abnormal situation that is very overwhelming and threatening. Grief reactions are normal reactions that happen when a person experiences a significant loss in their life.

A child may have a traumatic reaction after a death that was sudden and unexpected or a death that was anticipated. If the child's responses are prolonged and interfere with his or her functioning, it is important to seek the assistance of a qualified professional.

Grief Reactions

Grief is the normal and natural response to loss and can be expressed in a number of ways. This list is not all-inclusive or mutually exclusive. These grief reactions occur in no specific order or progression. They may occur near the time of death or many weeks, months, or even years later.

Physical:

Appetite – loss or increase
Breathing difficulties
Chest tightness
Cold hands
Crying, tearfulness
Dizziness or fainting spells
Dry mouth
Headaches

Hives, rashes, itching
Indigestion
Weakened immune system
Muscle tightness or weakness
Nightmares
Numbness or tingling
Rapid heartbeat
Shaking, trembling

Sighing
Sleeping difficulties (too much or too little)
Voice – change of pitch
Slowed speech and stuttering
Stomach problems
Sweating
Weight gain or loss

Social/Emotional:

Anger or angry outbursts
Anxiousness
Blaming others
Critical of self
Crying
Depression
Dread
Fearful
Freedom

Guilt
Helplessness
Hopelessness
Impulsive behavior
Indecisiveness
Irritability
Jealousy
Loneliness and longing
Loss of interest in living

Low self-esteem
Moodiness or mood swings
Relief
Restlessness
Sadness
Shock
Suspiciousness
Withdrawal from activity
Worthlessness

Behavioral:

Absent mindedness
Accident proneness
Clumsiness
Eating difficulties

Fingernail biting
Hair twisting
Restlessness
Searching and calling out

Teeth grinding
Treasuring objects of deceased
Visiting places of deceased
Nightmares

Cognitive/Intellectual:

Concentration difficulties
Confusion
Disbelief
Fantasy life increased or decreased
Forgetfulness

Preoccupation
Worrying
Inattention
Lack of awareness
Loss of creativity
Loss of productivity

Over attention to detail
Perfectionism
Sense of loved one's presence
Errors in: judging distances, grammar, pronunciation, use of numbers

Flare-ups of:

Allergies
Arthritis

Asthma
Canker/cold sores

Diabetes
Migraines

How to Explain Life and Death to a Child

Death is a difficult subject to discuss with children, but it is a natural part of life. Sometimes it is less stressful to talk about this topic when we are not experiencing personal grief and loss, but that's not always an option. Below is an interactive approach which helps children to understand that all living things grow and change and eventually die. Plants die, animals die, and people die too. Death happens when a body becomes very old, sick, or injured that it stops working and breathing. Try to use terms such as "died" and "dead." Although phrases such as "went to sleep," and "passed away" may seem gentler, but they may also be confusing.

Participate in the following exercises to understand the differences between being alive and being dead:

Take a deep breath and slowly let it out. You are alive, which means you are breathing. When a person is dead, they do not breathe.

Put your hand on your heart and feel it beating. You are alive, which means your heart is beating. When a person is dead, their heart stops beating.

Hop in one place two times. You are alive, which means you can hop up and down. When a person is dead they cannot hop up and down.

Pinch your arm (not too hard!) You are alive, which means you can hurt and feel pain. When a person is dead they do not hurt or feel pain.

When someone or something is alive, it can move, breathe, and feel. Draw a picture of an animal, insect, plant, or person that is alive:

When someone or something is dead, it cannot talk, breathe, or feel anything. Draw a picture of an animal, insect, plant, or person that is alive.

Ways to Support a Grieving Child/ Teen

Listen and be available

- Respond with sensitivity
- Try not to offer opinions or judgements
- Remember to be present without the need to “fix” or “problem solve”
- Build trust by listening and understanding; your child will then be more likely to come to you when they are hurting
- You may be the focal point of intense emotions, try not to take it personally

Be open to their way of grieving

- There is no right or wrong way to grieve
- Allow them to grieve in their own individual style; this reinforces that there are many ways to respond to death
- Remember that grief is individual, as long as it doesn't hurt others or themselves

Allow them to make choices

- A death can leave children feeling powerless. Choices can help re-establish a sense of power, control, and trust.
- Choices can be simple, such as what shirt to wear. Choices can also be complex, such as whether or not to participate in sorting through the person's belongings.

Provide outlets for self-expression

- Grief can be expressed through many avenues (For example, art, writing, music, or play)
- Be open to your child's suggestions for projects
- Physical activity is also a means of expression
- Be sure to create time for outlets

Talk about the person who died

- This is an important part of the grief process
- It's okay to say their name and share what you remember about them
- This gives your child permission to share their feelings and memories
- Allow your child to participate in commemorating significant days, such as birthdays or holidays

Provide consistency and routine

- Times before, during, and after a death can be disruptive. Try to re-establish a routine, with appropriate expectations and limits.
- Teens as well as younger children need the reassurance and sense of security that comes from structure, rules, and limits.

Promote Safety

- It is important for children/teens to feel safe. Here are some areas of interest:
 - I know what to expect
 - I am prepared
 - I have a plan
 - I do not feel physically or emotionally threatened
 - I do not feel judged or wrong
 - I have someone I trust by my side

Know when extra help is needed

- While family and friends provide support to children, some may require additional assistance. If you notice ongoing behaviors that interfere with a child/teen's daily life, seek the advice of a qualified mental health professional.

Supportive Words

Words that can help:

Offering support to a grieving child can begin with a simple statement or open-ended question that allows them to share their story. Here are some examples:

- I'm sorry your mom/dad/sister died.
- What was your dad/mom/brother like?
- Tell me about your mom/dad/brother/sister.
- What was their favorite food?
- What do you miss the most?
- What is the hardest part for you?
- What is the hardest time of day for you?
- I cannot know how you feel, but I remember how I felt when my _____ died.
- I care about you and how you are feeling.
- Would you like to talk about it?
- Whenever you want to talk about it, I am here for you.
- I'm thinking about you, especially today because today is your mother's birthday (anniversary of the death, your birthday, etc.).
- I'm here to listen if you want to talk or just spend time together if you don't want to talk.

Words that can hurt:

The following are a few of the potentially harmful comments that are often offered to children grieving the loss of a loved one:

- I know just how you feel.
- I know just how you feel...my dog died last year.
- They are in a better place.
- You'll get over it.
- It will be okay.
- Don't think about it.
- You are better off without them.
- Don't cry.
- It's your fault.
- If you only had _____.
- Tears won't bring your mom back.
- Be strong.
- Forget about it.
- You are the man/woman of the house now.
- You should feel...(proud, relieved, happy, sad, etc.)

Grief Book List

General Death and Dying

Preschool and School Age Children:

- I Know I Made It Happen (Blackburn, L.B.- 1991)
- What is Death? (Boritzer, E.- 2000)
- The Fall of Freddie the Leaf (Buscaglia, L.- 1982)
- The Goodbye Boat (Joslin, M.- 1998)
- There's No Such Thing as a Dragon (Kent, J.- 1975)
- What Makes Me Feel This Way (LeShan, E.- 1972)
- Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children (Mellonie, B. & Ingpen, R.- 1983)
- Gentle Willow: A Story for Children About Dying (Mills, Joyce- 1993)
- Sad Isn't Bad (Mundy, M.- 1998)
- The Kid's Book About Death and Dying (Rofes, Eric- 1985)
- The Saddest Time (Simon, N.- 1986)
- I Am Not a Crybaby (Simon, N.- 1989)
- About Dying: An Open Family Book for Parents and Children Together (Sein, Sara Bonnet- 1974)
- Badger's Parting Gifts (Varley, Susan- 1984)
- Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day (Viorst, J.- 1972)

Death of a Parent

Preschool Children

- Everett Anderson's Good-bye (Clifton, L- 1983)
- Saying Good-bye to Daddy (Vigna, J.- 1991)

School Age Children

- The Education of Little Tree (Carter, F.- 1976)
- Geranium Morning (Powell, E.S.- 1990)
- A Quilt for Elizabeth (Tiffault, E.- 1992)

Death of a Sibling

Preschool Children

- Another Look at the Rainbow (Johnson J. & Jampolsky, G.- 1982)
- Children Facing Grief: Letters From Bereaved Brothers and Sisters (Romond, J.- 1989)

School Age Children

- Nadia The Willful (Alexander, S.- 1983)
- Another Look at the Rainbow (Murray G. & Jampolsky G.- 1982)
- Children Facing Grief: Letters From Bereaved Brothers and Sisters (Romond, J.- 1989)

Death of a Friend

School Age Children

- Dusty Was My Friend (Clardy, A.F.- 1984)
- I Had a Friend Named Peter (Cohn, J.- 1987)
- Losing Uncle Tim (Jordan, M.- 1989)
- Good-bye Rune (Kaldhol, M. & Oyen, W.- 1987)
- A Taste of Blackberries (Smith, D.- 1973)

Death of a Grandparent

Preschool and School Age Children

- Something to Remember Me By (Bosak, V.- 1997)
- Nana Upstairs and Nana Downstairs (DePaola, T.- 1973)