

Clinical Grief Activities
for
Working with Bereaved Children



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Introduction:

Each of us will face the death of a loved one at some time in our lives. As adults, we seek help from family, friends, and outside supports during the grief process. But who helps a child cope with the death of a loved one? Children naturally turn to other significant persons in their life for support. Although children may understand and respond to illness and death differently than adults, helping a grieving child is not that different from helping a grieving adult. As a clinician, your interaction can have an important impact in helping a child deal with a loved one's illness and death in a healthy way.

The content of this publication is intended to provide clinicians with guidance in providing support to adult caregivers when they are faced with the task of communicating with their children about death and dying. In addition, the concrete suggestions provided in the clinical grief activities will prove beneficial to those clinicians working directly with grieving children.

Talking with Children about Death and Dying

Important questions to consider when working with bereaved children and their families:

- What has the child been told about the illness and/or events of the death?
- What is the family's comfort level with the child knowing details about the illness and/or death?
- What is the culture in the family regarding illness, death and sharing difficult things with children?
- What is the child's history with death? Has the child experienced other family member, friends and pet deaths?
- What are the family and child's past coping responses related to illness and death?
- If the person who died did not live in the same home as the child, when was the last time the child saw this person?
- What was the significance of the relationship to the child of the deceased loved one?

If the family has not yet talked with the child about circumstances of the death...

- Always consider the culture of the family, including ethnic and religious beliefs and practices.
- Educate that the child may overhear conversations and imagine things that are far worse than the truth.
- Children may also be picking up on the emotional atmosphere in the home and the changes in lifestyle that have occurred as the family has adjusted to the illness and death.

Guidelines to Share with Adult Caregivers about How to Talk with Children When a Death Has Occurred:

A primary concern of adult caregivers is often centered on what information to share with children, and how to initiate difficult conversations. The following simple guidelines can assist the caregiver in honoring their children with truth, to the best of their ability. It is helpful to acknowledge that there is not a 'right' or 'wrong.' The guidelines provided are adaptable to the specific context of the family, its values, and the unique personality of the child.

Inform the child using simple details. Give general details of how the death occurred. You can begin the conversation by saying, "Something really hard happened today..."

- **Sudden death:** "Dad's heart stopped beating today, and he died."
- **Accident:** "Mary was in a car accident. Her body was very badly hurt, couldn't be fixed, and she died."
- **Old age:** "Grandma had gotten very, very old, her body stopped working and she died."
- **Terminal illness:** "Because the disease couldn't be stopped, your dad got very, very sick and his body stopped working. Dad died."
- **Stillbirth:** "Sometimes something causes a baby's body to stop working before it is born. We don't know why, but it is nothing anyone did or didn't do."
- **Homicide:** "Your mother was killed today. Sometimes people do very bad things that hurt or kill..."
- **Suicide – Absolute** (when there is no doubt the person killed him/herself): "Your brother killed himself. Sometimes a person's mind gets very sick and doesn't work right, and they don't understand things clearly. They may think the only way to solve their problems is to stop living, so they kill themselves. However, this is never a solution to problems. The only reason they thought of it is because their mind was too sick to think clearly. It's not anyone's fault that this has happened".
- **Suicide – Questionable:** "Sometimes people take pills to relax or to sleep. Sometimes they forget how many they have taken and think that they need more. These pills make their body slow down, and too many of them make their body stop working. We don't think Auntie wanted to die, but that's what happened to her body."

Allow questions and answer them truthfully. Children process information concerning a traumatic death in small increments. Depending on the developmental maturity of the child, he/she may ask for graphic details. Answer the question asked as simply as possible. In the case of questions about a murder, it is helpful to refer to the person who committed the act as the "killer" instead of "a very bad person." "Mary was shot by a killer." Children are often repetitive, asking the same questions over and over. Again, keep answers simple as well as consistent. This helps to build trust and reassurance that you will continue to tell them the truth.

Reassure the child that they are loved. Acknowledge the significance of the relationship and the impact the death will have on the child. "Your father loved us very much. I will be here

to take care of you.” Often children become afraid that another caregiver may die too. It is helpful to reassure a child. “Most people do live for a long time. I plan to continue taking good care of myself.”

Causation. It’s important that children are reassured that they are not at fault, especially if the death involves an accident that they may have seen or been a part of. “Sometimes horrible accidents happen. There’s nothing that anyone could have done to change what happened.”

Talking to children about...

Sadness:

- Children need to know why others in the family are sad.
- Children must be told that it is the death that has made their family members sad. Without an explanation, children may think the sadness is caused by something that they did or said.
- Start by saying... “A very, very sad thing has happened...” or “Mommy and Daddy are sad because...”
- Modeling of sad feelings and behaviors lets children know that it’s okay to be sad. Children also need to be taught that people express sadness in different ways (ie some may cry, some may want alone time, some may share more than others).

What the word “dead” means:

- Provide children with basic information about the human body to assist in understanding of alive vs. dead (i.e., heart stopped beating, lungs no longer breathe in air, brain does not think anymore).
- Use language and ideas appropriate to the age of the child to communicate that a dead person’s body can’t do the things it used to do. The body is no longer able to talk, walk, move, see or hear. The dead person no longer feels pain, sadness, anger or discomfort.
- Use the words “dead” and “died.” Avoid the use of euphemisms such as “passed away,” “left us,” and “gone on.” To a child, this may sound as if the person is taking a trip, doesn’t want to return and can cause him/her to fear that others may leave and not return.
- Refer back to these biological explanations when answering a child’s questions that arise, such as:
 - When will she come back? (She can’t. She didn’t leave; her body stopped working.)
 - Why doesn’t she move? (She can’t move because her body has stopped working.)
 - Why can’t they fix him? (Once the body has stopped working, it can’t start again.)
 - Is he sleeping? (No. When we sleep our body is still working, our heart is still beating, our lungs are still breathing and we are just resting.)
 - Can they hear me? (No. They could only hear you if their body was working.)

Funeral/memorial service:

If the service has been planned and after a thorough discussion, it is recommended that the child is given the choice to attend. Answering questions that children have will help them to feel welcome, but some children will still opt not to attend. Either choice is ok.

It is important to prepare children in advance by telling them as *specifically* as possible what will happen. (Change the sample explanations below to fit your plans and special traditions.)

“ _____ will be taken from _____, where he died, to the funeral home. At the funeral home, _____ will be dressed in clothes that he/she liked and put into a casket. A casket is a box we use so that when _____ is buried in the ground, no dirt will get on him. Because _____’s body isn’t working any more, his/her body won’t move or do any of the things it used to do. The body will look like _____. People will come and visit us at our house and say how sorry they are that _____ died. After _____ days, we will have a special ceremony to remember _____. At that time, the casket will be closed and buried in the ground.

- Provide information about who will attend and what people might say or do at the service.
- Describe the room in the funeral home or chapel: room, music, flowers, paintings or religious symbols.
- Give details of what to expect if viewing the body in an open casket. This is especially helpful for young children to grasp that the person is, in fact, dead. Explain that the person will be lying down, not moving, and what they will be wearing. Explain any change in appearance due to illness, weight loss, or trauma. “It’s still Grandpa’s body, but you know he was sick and lost a lot of weight so he will look thinner...”

Burial (If applicable, add to the above information about the service.):

- “Then we will go to the cemetery, where _____ will be buried in a hole in the ground in a spot that _____ picked out. If you like, you can come to the funeral home and visit for a while and even go to the cemetery. You could bring something to leave in the casket with _____ if you want.”

Cremation:

- “After we leave the funeral home, _____ will be taken to the crematorium. At the crematorium, the body will be placed in a very, very hot small room which removes all the water from the body and turns it to ash. The body is not burned in flames. Then we will take those ashes and _____ (scatter them, keep them in an urn, etc.). Since _____’s body doesn’t work and doesn’t feel anything, being cremated doesn’t hurt.”

Grief Activities Based on the Safe Crossing Program Model for Supporting Bereaved Children and Families

1. Processing the circumstances or event within the context of the child's developmental ability.

- Creating a safe environment
- All About Me
- All About My Loved One (Anticipatory or Bereavement)
- Anagram
- Timeline

2. Understanding the concepts of grief and loss.

- "Way – No Way" Game
- "Grief" Activity
- Books helpful in talking about grief

3. Identifying and understanding feelings and behaviors associated with normal grief response.

- Feelings Worksheet
- Emotional Behavioral Cards
- Feelings Body
- Inside/Outside Feelings
- Feeling Concentration Game

4. Identifying and practicing healthy ways to cope.

- When You Get Angry
- When You Get Sad
- Letting Go of Regrets
- What Helps?

5. Honoring the relationship and establishing continuing bonds.

- I Remember Poem
- Collage
- Memory Book or Box
- Memory Candle
- Memory Mobile

6. Identifying and accessing his or her support system.

- Who Helps Me!

Additional Resource: Safe Crossings Bibliography for Children, Teens and Parent/Guardians.

1. Processing the circumstances or event within the context of the child's developmental ability.

Creating a Safe Environment

Who: Kids, Teens, Families, Groups

Materials: Beanie Babies; pipe cleaners; play dough

Why: Provides a safe, non-threatening environment that is welcoming and inviting; opens and invites discussion; materials occupy fidgety, nervous hands.

How to use: Place items on the table or floor at the beginning of the visit. Invite participant(s) to use materials. For example, use pipe cleaners to create art as you are talking. Set and review rules at each visit. Kids, teens, families or groups may have their own rules to add to the following:

- 1) Confidentiality: Explain that, "What is said in room stays in room." For younger children, the clinician can use the example of "top secret." Make sure children are aware that the only time this rule may need to be broken is if children have stated they may hurt themselves or others.
- 2) It's okay to pass: Explain that conversations may be hard at times, and it is okay not to share if the child does not wish to.
- 3) It's okay to have fun and play.

All About Me

Who: Kids

Materials: "All About Me" worksheet; markers, crayons or colored pencils

Why: Assists in building rapport; helps engage participant(s) in conversation about who they are and what they like; assists counselor to know what activities may be appropriate to use in the future.

How to use: Provide a worksheet to each participant and ask participant(s) to complete. Once completed, ask participant(s) to share.

All About My Loved One: Anticipatory OR Bereavement

Who: Kids, Teens

Materials: "All About My Loved One" worksheet; markers, crayons or colored pencils

Why: Provides a forum to begin to share about loved ones with a serious illness or who have died; assists counselor to understand what information participant(s) know about the serious illness or death of their loved one.

How to use: Provide a worksheet to each participant and ask participant(s) to complete. Once completed, ask participant(s) to share.

Anagram

Who: Kids, Teens, Families

Materials: white or colored paper; markers, crayons, colored pencils

Why: Encourages participant(s) to introduce their loved ones and share memories; helps participant(s) begin to understand and share feelings.

How to Use: Invite participant(s) to either choose the name of the person who died or a word that describes their relationship to that person. Examples: Sarah, Mom, pappy. Have participant(s) write the word down the left side of a piece of paper. Next to each letter, have participant(s) write descriptive words using the letter as the first letter of the word.

Example: **M**arvelously
 Outstanding
 Maker of Cookies

Timeline

Who: Kids, Teens, Families, Groups

Materials: colored or plain paper; markers, crayons or colored pencils; stickers

Why: Allows participant(s) to identify positive and/or negative significant events in their lives. Alternatively, it can provide participant(s) an opportunity to review detailed information around an event (i.e., accident, illness or death).

How to use: Have participant(s) choose a piece of colored paper and draw a line on the paper. Lines can be curvy, straight, jagged, etc.; the uniqueness of the line reflects the uniqueness of the individual and his/her story. The beginning of the line is their date of birth and the end of the line is today's date. Along the line, have participant(s) make marks that represent significant changes in their family, personality, friendships, homes, schools, as well as any new responsibilities they now have because of these changes. Using stickers or markers, participants can write or draw pictures or symbols to represent the loss event and other changes marked on the timeline. Participants can also describe how they felt before, during and after the times marked. Provide participants with an opportunity to share their timelines. This can be followed by a discussion about their observations, changes, and the loss that is associated with change.

Alternate: You can also focus on a smaller amount of time, such as the day before, of, and/or after the death of the loved one. For example, start the timeline on the day they learned their loved one was ill and end a few days after the funeral/memorial service. This can assist children to understand feelings related to specific memories.

My name is:

I like to be called:

My favorite
subject in school is:

The people in my
family are:

My favorite food is:

My favorite sport is:

My favorite game is:

My favorite thing
to do is:

My favorite
animal is:

My favorite book is:

My favorite movie is:

What I do
best is:

My favorite
color is:

All About My Loved One

The name of the person who has a serious illness is...

This person is my...

The serious illness that my loved has is...

Some things I enjoy doing with my loved one are...

Some things I know about my loved one's illness are...

Other changes in my family are...

Before my loved one was seriously ill, we used to...

Questions I have about my loved one's serious illness are...

All About My Loved One

The name of the person who died is...

This person was my...

My loved one died from...

My favorite thing to do with them was...

My favorite memory of my loved one is...

My loved one really liked...

The thing I miss most about my loved one is...

My loved one didn't like...

When I want to share stories about my loved one, someone I talk to is...

2. Understanding the concepts of grief and loss.

“Way – No Way” Game

Who: Kids, Families, Groups

Materials: “Way – No Way” statement sheet

Why: Provides grief education and dispels myths of death; promotes discussion about grief and loss issues.

How to use: Read each statement to participant(s). Have participant(s) put a thumb up if they agree with the statement or a thumb down if they disagree. Discuss statements and follow-up with the additional discussion prompts that are in parenthesis next to each statement.

Variation: If participants are active, this can be played as a game. Mark a line down the center of the room with tape. One side of the room is the “Way” side (agree with statement) and the other side of the room is the “No Way” side (disagree with statement). All participants stand on the center of the line at the beginning of the game. As facilitator reads statements aloud, participant(s) stand on or jump to the side of the line that feels true for them. Again, Discuss statements and follow-up with additional discussion prompts.

“Grief” Activity

Who: Kids, Teens, Families, Groups

Materials: “Grief” worksheet; markers

Why: Provides an opportunity for participant(s) to share about their individual grief experience; promotes discussion about the similarities and differences in the grief experience for different group or family members.

How to use: Provide participant(s) with a copy of the “Grief” worksheet. Have participant(s) write, draw pictures and/or describe what grief is like for them. Allow participant(s) the opportunity to share their work.

Helpful Books for Talking about Death and Grief

Who: Kids, Families

Materials: See Safe Crossings Bibliography below for age appropriate books on grief and loss.

Why: Provides education about death and dying; promote conversation between children and their families about difficult topics in a non-threatening way.

How to use: Read the book aloud, using the pictures and content to promote discussion, facilitate questions and provide support.

“Way – No Way” Game

1. People die in many different ways. (Discuss some of the ways people die)
2. Everything that is alive dies someday.
3. My thoughts or feelings can make someone die.
4. Most people live a long time before they die.
5. I have seen a real dead body.
6. A funeral service or memorial service is a good way to say goodbye to our loved ones who died.
7. Some people choose to be buried when they die while others chose to be cremated. (May need to explain cremation first)
8. People die because they were “bad”.
9. Sleeping is the same as being dead. (Discuss whether people breathe, heart beats or get hungry after they die)
10. Do people feel pain/hurt after they die? (Discuss that people can’t feel pain)
11. It’s my fault that my loved one died.
12. Other people sometimes say dumb things to me about my loved one who died.
13. I sometimes worry about other people in my family dying.
14. I sometimes worry that I might die too.
15. All feelings are OK. (Discuss some feelings that children and adults may have if a loved one has died)
16. It is ok to cry.
17. Can crying help sad feelings get better? (Discuss other ways that may help children get their feelings out)
18. Sometimes I feel mad that my loved one died.
19. Sometimes I feel alone since my loved one died.
20. Even though my loved one died, I can still have fun and happy times.

*** Statements in parenthesis are to assist clinician to expand the conversation and generate further discussion with participants.

GRIEF

3. Identifying and understanding feelings and behaviors associated with normal grief responses.

“Feelings” Worksheet

Who: Kids, Teens, Families, Groups

Materials: “Feelings” worksheet; markers, colored pencils or crayons

Why: Provides an opportunity to express feelings related to their grief experience; normalize feelings associated with grief.

How to use: Provide participant(s) with a feelings worksheet. Ask participant(s) to look over the worksheet. Invite them to circle any feelings they are currently feeling. Use worksheet as a discussion starter for talking about feelings. Ask participant(s) to share which feelings they are currently feeling and when they have been feeling that way. Worksheet can also be helpful for families to check-in with their children.

Emotional Behavioral Cards

Who: Kids, Teens, Families, Groups

Materials: Emotional Behavioral Cards; crayons or markers

Why: Facilitates discussion of grief experiences; normalizes feelings associated with grief; broadens self-awareness regarding one’s personal grief process.

How to use: Explain to participants that the feelings and behaviors on each card are feelings and behaviors other kids and teens have said they experience.

Individuals:

- Have participant sort the cards into two piles: one pile with those that they have experienced and a second pile with those that they have not.
- Counselor and participant can discuss behaviors and feelings.

Family or Group:

- Pass the cards around and ask participant(s) to put a check mark on any card that describes a feeling or behavior they have experienced. If the cards are laminated, crayons work well for this (easy to clean and less messy than markers).
- After the cards have been seen by all participants, pass several out to each participant.
- Ask participants to read each of the cards in front of them and count the number of marks. Discuss behaviors and feelings as well as commonalities and differences.

Feelings Body

Who: Kids, Teens, Families, Groups

Materials: Piece of paper for each participant; large piece of butcher paper (for variation); markers

Why: Provides an outlet to articulate the grief experience through artistic expression; provides an opportunity to understand the manifestations of feelings in the body.

How to use: This activity should follow the previous discussion/activities related to the identification of feelings and how/where they are experienced in one's body. Discuss the physical manifestations of grief. Give a few examples, i.e., tired behind the eyes; nervous - butterflies in the stomach or sweaty palms, spaced out, heart has been torn in two, etc. Have participants an outline of a body on their piece of paper. For some kids or groups, it may be better for the clinician to draw the body ahead of time. Ask participant(s) to choose a different color marker to represent each feeling. The feelings can be written or drawn on their body drawing. Provide an opportunity for participant(s) to share their body (the feelings they are feeling, where in the body they feel these feelings, symbols/pictures they drew to represent these feelings). (continued on next page)

Variation: If there is a large space, cut a big piece of butcher paper the height of each participant. Ask participant(s) to lie on the butcher paper and trace an outline of each participant's body. Participant(s) can then fill in their own body with feelings as above.

Inside/Outside Feelings: Paper Bag or Faces

Who: Kids, Teens, Families, Groups

Materials: Paper Bag: Brown paper lunch bags; strips of colored paper; markers, crayons or colored pencils; tape

Faces: Paper Plates, tongue depressors, markers, stapler

Why: Identify feelings they are experiencing during their grief process; affirms feelings as normal part of grief; provides education and understanding of how feelings may or may not be expressed even if they are felt.

How to use:

Paper Bag (older kids and teens): Ask participant(s) to write down or draw a picture of all the feelings they have felt since their loved one died. Ask them to think about which feelings they express to others and explain these are called the outside feelings. Ask participant(s) to think about which feeling they do not express to others but keep on the inside and explain these are called inside feelings. Ask participant(s) to tape outside feelings to the outside of the paper bag and put inside feelings in the inside of the bag. Invited each participant to share their inside and outside feelings. Children can keep bags at home and change the location of feelings as the feelings that they share with others change.

Faces (younger kids): Put a tongue depressor between two paper plates. Staple the two paper plates together. Explain to participant(s) that we feel many feelings when someone in our life dies. Some of these feelings we chose to share with others and some we chose to keep to ourselves. Ask participant(s) to draw a picture of their face with the feelings that they show to others on one paper plate. Ask participant(s) to draw a picture of their face with the feelings that keep inside and do not let others see on the other plate. Invite participant(s) to share.

Feelings Concentration

Who: Kids, Teens, Families

Materials: Feelings concentration cards (2 cards of each feeling). Two sets of Feelings Flashcards would also work well with non-readers, who could use the face pictures to help

identify matches (available at vendors such as www.amazon.com or www.childtherapytoys.com).

Why: Educate about feelings; Provides opportunity to share feelings and memories.

How to use: Place cards face down on the table or floor. One participant at a time flips two cards over to try to find a match. When a match is identified, the participant who finds the feelings pair is given the opportunity to share a time when he or she experienced that feeling with their loved one or in their grief process. If the participant cannot identify a time when he/she experienced the feeling with their loved one, he/she can share anytime when he/she experienced that feeling. With younger children, you may want to use fewer pairs (ie 5 pairs).

feelings



Happy Sad Frightened Afraid
Upset Ashamed Relieved
Disgusted Cautious Confused
Embarrassed Hopeful Anxious Hysterical
Shy Scared Ecstatic Suspicious
feelings Guilty
Shocked Angry Jealous Confident
Tired Bored Surprised Disappointed
Smug Nervous Lonely Cool
Enraged Overwhelmed Depressed Joyful
Worried Silly Exhausted Mischievous Excited

Emotional Behavior Cards

thankful that the significant person was in my life	relieved	Missing the significant person
angry	no interest in food	not able to concentrate
lonely	scared	fearful
sick a lot	questioning "why" this happened	constantly thinking about the significant person
wanting to be more alone	guilty	feeling like I made the person get sick

Emotional Behavior Cards

energized	overwhelmed	happy
out of control	just want to die too	confused
irritable	hopeful	encouraged
calm	shocked	going crazy
trying to escape the pain with risky behavior	stomach aches	

Emotional Behavior Cards

anxious	wanting to eat more	worried about the future
feeling my friends don't understand	feeling tired, no energy	tearful, crying
unable to sleep	I wish I could wake up and find out it was all a dream	wishing things were different
Having dreams of the significant person	sad	Things just aren't the same anymore

Feelings Concentration

embarrassed	embarrassed
confident	confident
guilty	guilty
happy	happy
lonely	lonely
sad	sad

Feelings Concentration

shocked

shocked

surprised

surprised

jealous

jealous

angry

angry

afraid

afraid

worried

worried

Feelings Concentration

confused

confused

hopeful

Hopeful

tired

tired

overwhelmed

overwhelmed

relieved

relieved

frustrated

frustrated

4. Identifying and practicing healthy ways to cope.

“When You Get Angry” worksheet

Who: Kids, Teens, Families

Materials: “When You Get Angry” worksheet; pen or pencil

Why: Provides education and identification of healthy expressions of anger; promotes discussion for creative strategies for self care.

How to use: Explain that many kids and teens you have talked to feel angry in their grief experience. It is helpful to find safe ways to express anger that won't hurt one's self or another person. Hand out the “When You Get Angry” worksheet, explaining that it has some ideas for things to do when you feel angry. Have the participant(s) read it over and circle the ideas that might work for them. Ask participant(s) if they have any other ideas, and have them write down their ideas on the page. For young children who cannot read, read each idea to them and let them share if it might be helpful. At the end of the discussion, the child might want to try one of the activities if feeling angry.

“When You Get Sad” worksheet

Who: Kids, Teens, Families

Materials: “When You Get Sad” worksheet; pen or pencil

Why: Provides education and identification of healthy expressions of sadness; to promote discussion for creative strategies for self care.

How to use: Discuss different ways people express their sadness. Hand out the “When You Get Sad” worksheet, explaining that it has some ideas for things to do when you feel sad. Have the participant(s) read it over and circle the ideas that might work for them. Ask participant(s) if they have any other ideas, and have them write down their ideas on the page. For young children who cannot read, read each idea to them and let them share if it might be helpful. At the end of the discussion, the child might want to try one of the activities if feeling sad.

“Regrets: Letting Go” activity

Who: Kids, Teens, Families, Groups

Materials: white or colored paper, regret prompts, pens or markers, trash can or paper shredder

Why: Provides an opportunity to identify and let go of regrets; offers an opportunity for self-reflection and the promotion of healing.

How to use: Explain that the activity will be around the idea of regrets. Ask participant(s) if they know what the word “regret” means. After discussion, have group members close their eyes, and read aloud the following:

When someone we love dies, it is normal to have thoughts that can be called regrets. A regret is something we wish we had done differently. Some people regret, or feel sad, that they were not able to say goodbye or be with their special

person before he or she died. Others may regret they had an argument, or cross words or thoughts, before their loved one died. Sometimes people even think they caused the death to happen by something they did, said or thought. Most people have a regret or two.

It is important to know that there is nothing you did, said or thought that caused the death of your loved one. Talking about our regrets with people we trust can help us understand that these thoughts are very normal and most people have them. If we do this, we can then let the regrets go! I would like you to think about your regrets.

Let me give you a few sentence starters to help you begin:

- I wish I had...
- If only...
- It was my fault...
- I'm sorry that...
- I blame myself for...

When you are ready, open your eyes. Draw or write your regrets on your piece of paper. I will give you 10-15 minutes to work on your regrets.

When group is finished, invite participants to share one or several of their regrets. After each participant has shared, ask them to think about whether they are ready to let go of their regrets. For those that are ready to let go of their regrets, tell them the time has come for their regrets to be released.

Option 1:

- Invite each participant to tear their paper into many small pieces.
- When they have all finished, get in a circle with each participant holding his/her pieces of paper. Count to three, and have the participants toss the pieces of paper into the air in the center of the circle like confetti. Explain that all of the brightly colored paper with thoughts of guilt, blame and regret are now released, and when regrets are outside of a person, the colors (regrets) are beautiful, but when kept inside, the regrets are not helpful.

Option 2:

- Use a paper shredder or trash can. After each participant has shared his or her regrets, invite each participant to release the regrets by shredding them in the paper shredder or tearing and throwing them in the trash.

“What Helps?” Worksheet

Who: Kids, Teens, Families, Groups

Materials: “What Helps” worksheet; pen or markers

Why: Identifies ways to feel supported when experiencing big feelings. In a family or group setting, worksheet allows for participant(s) to learn ways to cope from each other.

How to use: Ask participant(s) to think about what they can do for themselves when they are having a hard time. Hand out the “What Helps?” worksheet and have participant(s) mark the ideas from the list that might be helpful for them. They can add additional ideas at the bottom of the page. Invite participant(s) to share their ways of coping and discuss.

WHEN YOU GET ANGRY...

TELL someone

Clean your room

Pound on pots

Take slow, deep breaths

Shout outside

Walk the dog

HOWL AT THE MOON

Throw bean bags at a wall

shake body to loud music

FORGIVE WHEN IT IS TIME

Talk it out

Walk in the grass with bare feet

STOMP ON THE GROUND

Walk on the beach

Watch a funny movie

BEAT A DRUM

Write a letter

Spend some time alone

Punch a pillow

Write a mad list

PLAY A SPORT

PLAY AT THE PARK

Throw rocks in the water

Have a good cry

Run around the yard

Listen to music

Hammer nails

STRETCH

WHEN YOU GET SAD

TELL someone

Take slow, deep breaths

Have a good cry

Walk the dog

Scream outside

Walk in the grass with bare feet

shake body to music

Walk on the beach

Talk it out

PLAY AN INSTRUMENT

Watch a funny movie

Spend time with family

Write a letter

Call a friend

PLAY A SPORT

PLAY AT THE PARK

Throw rocks in the water

Listen to music

Run around the yard

WRITE A POEM

Draw a picture

Read a good book

TELL A JOKE

GET A HUG

BAKE COOKIES

Give a hug

Laugh out loud

Journal

Regrets

I wish I had...

If only...

It was my fault...

I am sorry that...

I blame myself for...

What Helps?

Talk to friends

Talk to family

Share memories about my loved one

Shout or scream outside

Dance to loud music

Listen to music

Watch a funny movie

Spend time with friends

Write a letter

Write in journal

Play a sport

Exercise (ride bike, run, go for a walk)

Spend some time alone

Have a good cry

Read a good book

Laugh out loud

Give a hug

Get a hug

Play an instrument

Walk the dog

Add your own:

5. Honoring the relationship and establishing continuing bonds.

I Remember Poem

Who: Kids, Teens, Families, Groups

Materials: “I Remember” sample poem; plain colored paper; “I remember...” sentence starters on strips of paper; colored pencils or markers, glue

Why: Provides opportunity for written expression to honor and remember loved ones; creates a forum for sharing stories of self, family and loved one who died.

How to use: Either read the sample poem or ask one participant to read the sample poem aloud. If there is a group, it can work well to have each participant read a line. Participants each take 5-7 “I remember...” sentence starters, and complete the sentence with memories of their loved one. Encourage participant(s) to be as descriptive as possible. To help participant(s) think of detailed memories, suggest prompts such as, “I remember the sight...the sound...the taste...the smell...the touch.” Participant(s) can arrange and glue “I remember...” statements on another piece of paper in the order they would like. Using markers, participant(s) can title their poem and decorate the page Invite participant(s) to share their poems.

Alternative: The “I Remember” Poem can also be incorporated in the Collage activity below.

Collage

Who: Kids, Teens, Families, Groups

Materials: Large piece of poster board (or another backing, such as picture frame, wood, etc.); markers; scissors; glue; modge podge; paintbrushes; photos; mementos of participants’ loved ones; magazine words and pictures; collage words handout; tissue paper; cloth, glitter and other various craft items.

Why: Provides an opportunity for artistic expression to honor and remember loved ones; create a forum for sharing stories of self, family and loved who died.

How to use: Arrange ahead of time for participant(s) to bring personal mementos that are okay to be incorporated into the collage, especially if it is a group or session away from home. Invite participant(s) to identify photos and other objects that remind them of their loved one. Magazines are a great place to identify words, pictures and sayings to be used on the collage. Have participant(s) place all items on a large piece of poster board arranging and designing patterns of interest. Once the poster board is complete, ask participant(s) glue items to board and decorate. Invite participant(s) to share their collage.

Memory Book or Box

Who: Kids, Teens, Families

Materials: Photos; drawings; mementos of participants’ loved ones; a binder, photo album or box; various craft supplies, such as paper, glue, markers, scissors.

Why: Creates a memory object; provides an opportunity for artistic expression to honor and remember loved ones; provides a forum for sharing stories of self, family and loved one who died.

How to use: Have participant(s) collect drawings, photos, and other items that remind them of memories of their loved one. Arrange this ahead of time. Place these items in a photo album (i.e., mount photos on construction paper and tied with yarn or ribbon) or inside a box of any size. Decorate the album or box. Invite participants to share their memory book or box.

Memory Candle

Who: Kids, Teens, Groups

Materials: Candle (can use battery operated candles for younger children), Candle holder, modge podge, tissue paper, collage words handout (may need to shrink words on copier if candle holder small).

Why: Creates a memory object; provides an opportunity for artistic expression to honor and remember loved ones; introduces ritual and allows for expression through ritual.

How to use: Explain the meaning of ritual. One simple definition is: Rituals are activities that honor our loved ones who have died. Explain that participant(s) will be decorating candle holders in honor of their loved one who has died. The candle can then be lit at special times throughout the day or at night in remembrance of their loved one who died. Using modge podge, have participant(s) decorate candle holder with tissue paper and words that describe loved one who died. When dry, place candle in center and light. Invite each participant(s) to share something special about their loved.

***For young children who have difficulty falling asleep, lighting a battery operated candle and saying something special to the loved one who died or saying a favorite poem/phrase before bed is helpful.

Memory Mobile

Who: Kids, Teens, Families

Materials: Paper plate; sheet of stars; sheet of big star; 2 ribbons; 5 pieces of cording; markers, colored pencils or crayons; stickers; beads; scissors; hole punch; paper clip; stapler.

Why: Creates a memory object; provides an opportunity for artistic expression to honor and remember loved ones; provides a forum for sharing stories of self, family and memories.

How to use:

- Write memories about their loved one who died on the stars.
- Decorate the stars and paper plate with markers colored pencils or crayons and stickers.
- Cut out the stars
- Punch holes in the stars.
- Punch 4 holes on the out most portion of the paper plate in each of the 4 quadrants. Tie each of the 2 ribbons to a punched hole on the backside of the plate and then tie to the hole directly across. This is how the mobile will hang. **Make sure the ribbons are the same length when they are tied.

- String pieces of cording with beads (this weights down the stars). Tie or staple stars to the end of the cording.
- Staple the other ends of the cording in a randomly to the paper plate; opposite of the ribbon.
- Attach paper clip to ribbon to hang.

I Remember

by Joe Brainard

I remember the only time I ever saw my mother cry. I was eating apricot pie.

I remember how much I used to stutter.

I remember the first time I saw television. Lucille Ball was taking ballet lessons.

I remember Aunt Cleora who lived in Hollywood. Every year for Christmas she sent my brother and ma a joint present of one book.

I remember a very poor boy who had to wear his sister's blouses to school.

I remember shower curtains with angel fish on them.

I remember very old people when I was very young. Their houses smelled funny.

I remember daydreams of being a singer all alone on a big stage with not scenery, just one spotlight on me, singing my heart out, and moving my audience to total tears of love and affection.

I remember waking up somewhere once and there was a horse staring me in the face.

I remember saying "thank you" in reply to "thank you" and then the other person doesn't know what to say.

I remember how embarrassed I was when other children cried.

I remember one very hot summer day I put ice cubes in my aquarium and all the fish died.

I remember not understanding why people on the other side of the world didn't fall off.

Brainard, J. (2007). I remember. In Collum, J., & Noethe, S., *Poetry Everywhere: Teaching poetry writing in school and in the community* (pp. 105-110). NY: Teachers & Writers Collaborative.

I remember

I remember

I remember

I remember

I remember

I remember

I remember

I remember

I remember

I remember

I remember

Sample Collage Activity



Words for Memory Art Projects

Wish Positive Confident

Believe Belief Honor

Strong Pure Fun-Loving Humorous

Legacy Dream Cool Talented Athletic

Playful Faith Dedicated **Serious**

Musical Focused Values Crazy Happy

Spiritual Life Caring Musical

Thoughtful Inspiring Intelligent

Soulful Funny **Leader Gentle**

Bold *Dance* Breath Always

Love Sharing **Bold** Affectionate

Remember Brave Clever Curious

Words for Memory Art Projects

Innocent Inquisitive Spirited

Tough Joyful Smiling Smiley

Happy Funny Silly Patient

Giving Reliable Kind Values

Thoughtful Active Run Play

Playful Bike Courageous

Sharing Legacy Remember Cool

Dance Mountain Climbing

I LOVE YOU I MISS YOU

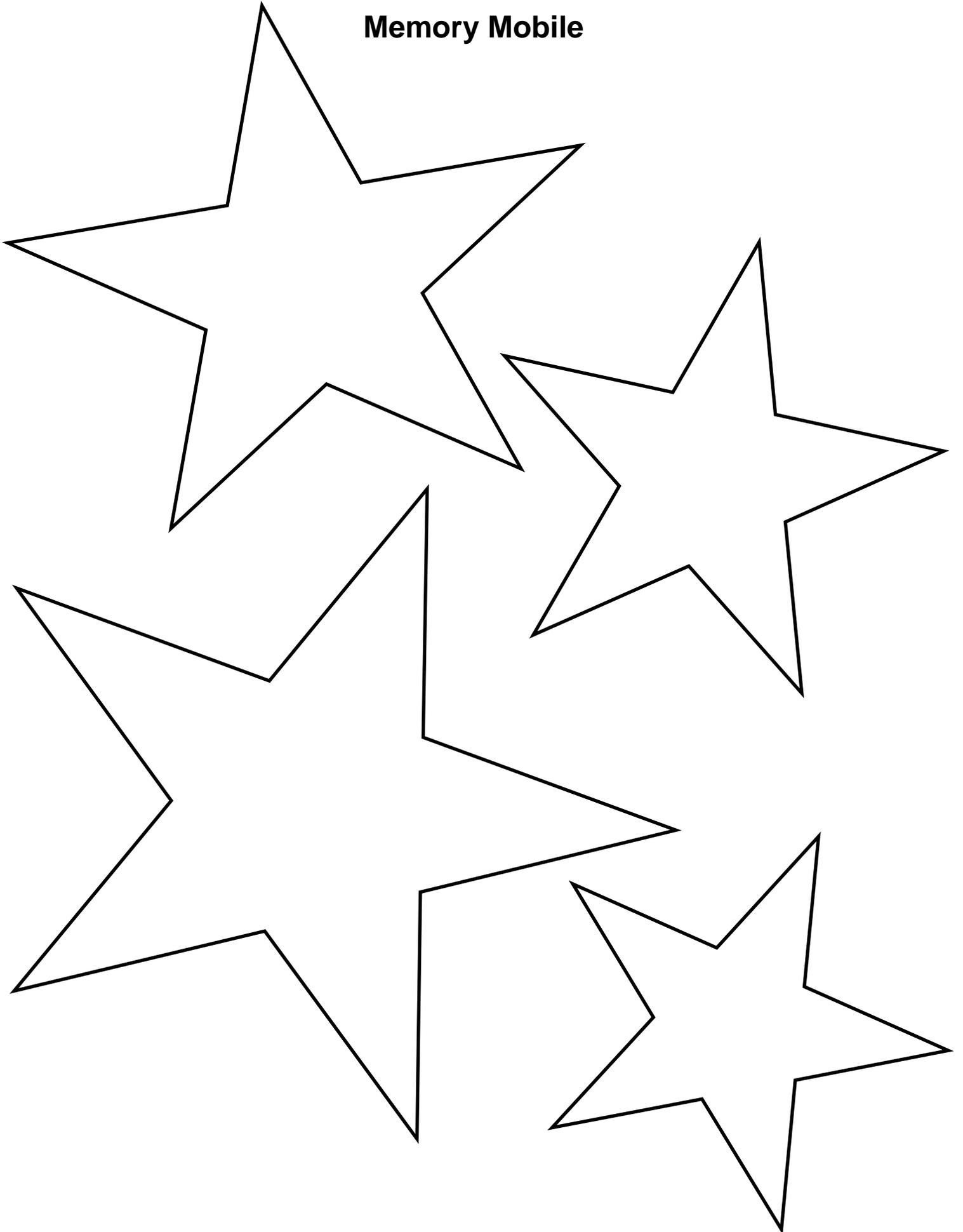
Mom, You Are Special MOMMY

MAMA DAD Daddy MOM

***In Honor of* _____**

***In Memory of* _____**

Memory Mobile



6. Identifying and accessing one's support system.

“Who Helps Me!”

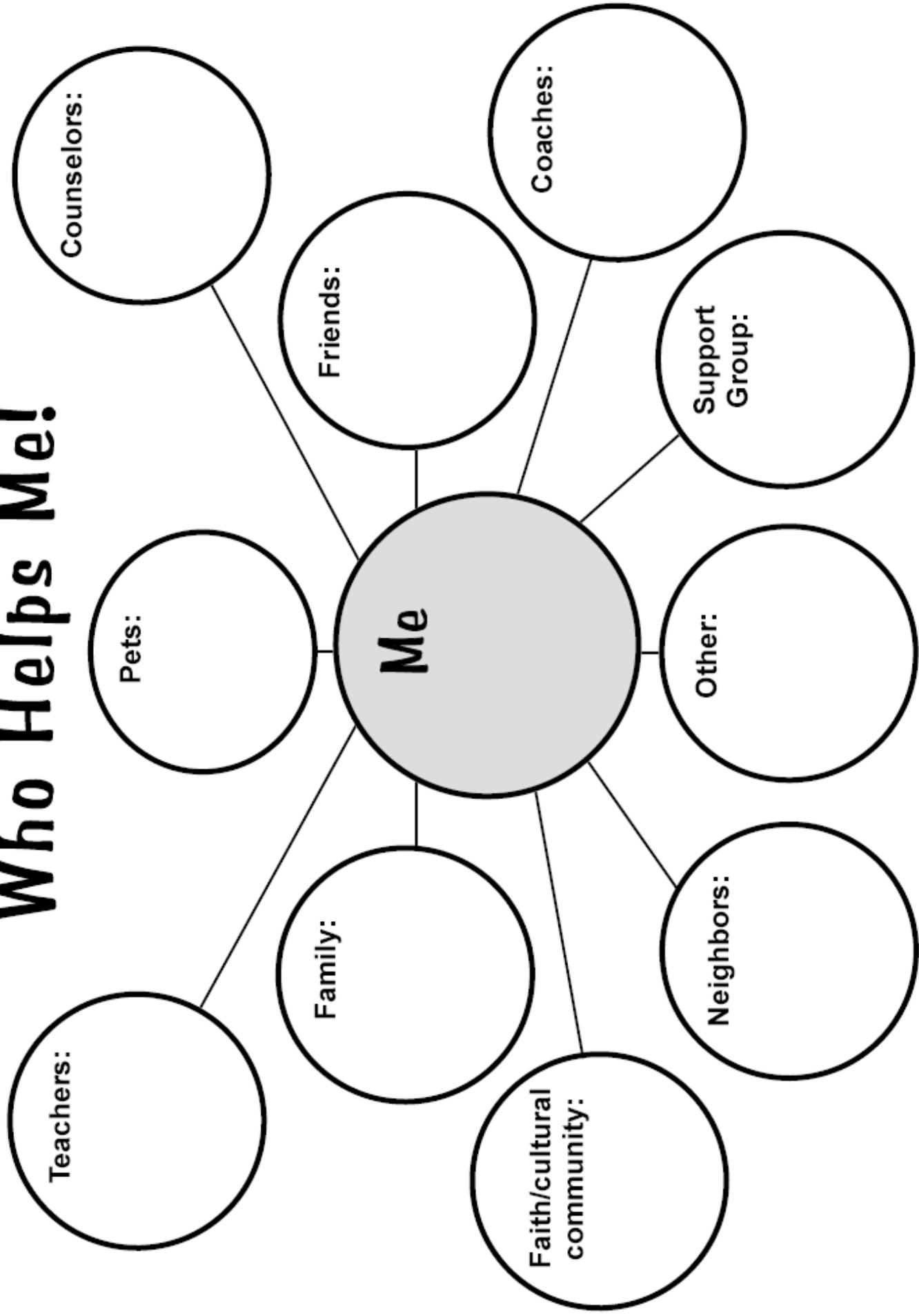
Who: Kids, Teens, Families, Groups

Materials: “Who Helps Me!” worksheet, pens or markers

Why: Promotes the identification of support systems and how support is provided.

How to use: Begin activity with the discussion about the many ways that support is received in one's grief. Discuss how some people help a lot and are very close to us, while others help out, but may be more on the periphery. Ask participant(s) to think about those who have been helpful during their time of grief. Have participant(s) write these in the different circles on the “Who Helps Me!” worksheet. Participant(s) can also identify how they are helped by these people, places and animals. Invite each participant to share his or her worksheet.

Who Helps Me!



In the circles, write the name of those who support you and how they help.

Bibliography

For Children Ages 3-6

I Miss You: A First Look at Death

by Pat Thomas

Addresses children's feelings and questions about death in a simple, realistic way. Introduces funerals and cultural difference.

Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children

by Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen

Explains life and death in a sensitive and natural way.

Sad Isn't Bad: A Good-Grief Guidebook for Kids Dealing with Loss

by Mechaeline Mundy

Promotes honest, healthy grief and growth by providing a comforting, realistic look at loss and life-affirming ideas for coping.

The Dead Bird

by Margaret Wise Brown

Upon finding a dead bird, a group of children perform a burial service to say goodbye.

When Bad Things Happen: A Guide to Help Kids Cope

by Ted O'Neal

Helps adults talk to children about feelings, fears and skills for coping and healing in times of change and challenges.

When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death

by Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown

Answers children's questions and fears about death with clarity and directness.

When Someone You Love Has Cancer: A Guide to Help Kids Cope

by Alaric Lewis

Helps adults talk to children about the illness cancer and the feelings, fears and skills for coping with a loved one's cancer.

For Children Ages 6-12

Badger's Parting Gifts

by Susan Varley

Badger's friends are overwhelmed with their loss when he dies. By sharing their memories of his gifts, they find strength to face the future with hope.

The Invisible String

by Patrice Karst

Shares that there is a bond between children and their loved ones even when the loved one is not physically present.

The Memory String

by Eve Bunting

Invites readers to consider ways to remember family history and welcome new memories.

Ocho Loved Flowers

by Anne Fontaine

The story of a young girl who learns how to say goodbye to her beloved cat while treasuring memories. A helpful, sensitive way to support a child when the death of a loved one is anticipated.

Rachel and the Upside Down Heart: A True Story

by Eileen Douglas

A story about the grief of a young girl and her mom as they adjust to the changes of life after the death of Rachel's father.

Tough Boris

by Kathryn Brown

Explains through the story of a rough and greedy pirate that having feelings is normal and that it is okay to be sad sometimes.

For Teens

Common Threads of Teenage Grief

by Janet Tyson and Teens Who Know

Promotes an understanding of grief and healing for teens, their families and friends. Written by a middle school counselor and nine teens.

Facing Change: Falling Apart and Coming Together Again in the Teen Years

by Donna O'Toole

Information to help teens cope, understand and grow through their losses.

Fire in My Heart, Ice in My Veins: A Journal for Teenagers Experiencing Loss

by Enid Samuel-Traisman

A journal for teens who have experienced the death of a loved one.

Healing Your Grieving Heart for Teens: 100 Practical Ideas

by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

Written to help teens understand and deal with their unique grief.

Help for the Hard Times: Getting through Loss

by Earl Hipp

A guide that helps teens understand how they experience grief and loss; provides tools for coping with grief in healthy ways.

For Parents

A Parent's Guide to Raising Grieving Children

by Phyllis R. Silverman and Madelyn Kelly

Provides a breadth of guidance regarding childhood loss, including topics such as: living with someone who's dying, talking about death and dying with children, preparing for the funeral and developing an ongoing support system.

A Tiny Boat at Sea: How to Help Children Who Have a Parent Diagnosed with Cancer

by Izetta Smith

Information for parents, caregivers and professionals who are helping children adjust to the cancer diagnosis or terminal illness of an adult family member. Includes excellent ideas for parents about talking to their children when a family member is ill or dying. Available at www.griefwatch.com and www.compassionbooks.com.

Healing the Grieving Child's Heart: 100 Practical Ideas for Families, Friends & Caregivers

by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

Provides kid-friendly ideas for helping children mourn.

Living with Grief: Children and Adolescents

Edited by Kenneth J. Doka & Amy S. Tucci, Hospice Foundation of America

A comprehensive guide for parents and professionals on how to deal with children's grief. Each helpful chapter is written by a different expert.

The Bereaved Parent

by Harriet Sarnoff Schiff

Offers guidance to parents who face the imminent death of a child, are shocked by accidental death, or suffer post-funeral turmoil, grief, and depression. Shows a way through day-to-day hardships and decisions and offers concrete, helpful suggestions for meeting the needs of the whole family.

The Journey Through Grief and Loss: Helping Yourself and Your Child When Grief is Shared

by Robert Zucker, M.A., L.C.S.W.

Offers parents and other concerned adults important insights into managing their own grief while supporting grieving children.

For additional resources, please contact:
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Notes

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