

Safe Crossings Children's Grief Program  
Providence Hospice of Seattle

# **Grief Support Groups in the School Setting: A Guide for School Counselors**



*safe*CROSSINGS

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## **Grief Support Groups in the School Setting: A Guide for School Counselors**

### **Introduction:**

The school-based support group curriculum is designed to educate students about normal and complicated grief responses, as well as to reinforce and support the uniqueness of each individual's physical, emotional, and spiritual grief process. School groups can help decrease a student's isolation, as well as instill hope that it is possible to live, find strength, and grow through one's personal grief experience.

The following eight week curriculum provides a framework for supporting grieving children in a group setting. Each week's outline includes: the session's purpose; a list of materials needed; introduction/icebreaker activity options; clinical activity options; and a closing activity.

The clinical activities included are intentionally designed to support the purpose of each session, but please pick and choose which activities can be accomplished within the time frame of your group's sessions. It is not necessary – or even possible! – to utilize every activity listed in each session's curriculum. As a facilitator, you may also wish to create and/or add your own intentional activities. Also, the icebreaker ideas are interchangeable week-to-week. At times, groups become attached to an icebreaker and want to repeat it again and again!

Finally, an evaluation for group members to complete and a resource bibliography for your reference are included at the end of the curriculum.

### **Getting Started:**

1. Identify Students:
  - Counselor has personal knowledge that a death has occurred
  - Parent calls asking for support
  - Student survey which includes various groups being offered
  - Teacher survey to obtain feedback concerning students who have experienced a death
2. Contact students
  - Individual meetings with students to assess interest in a group
  - Obtain necessary consents from parent/guardian
3. Consider Logistics
  - Choose a site which has an element of privacy.
  - Choose a time of day which is most conducive. For middle and high schools, it usually works best to stagger periods. Each group session is geared to last approximately 50 minutes.
  - Note: Because of erratic schedules and variables inherent to the school setting, the curriculum may have to be adapted to finish a group in 8 weeks.



# School Grief Group Outline

## **WEEK 1: Telling the Story**

- Introduction to the grief process
- Group rules and process
- Reduce isolation
- Begin to share the story

## **WEEK 2: Signs and Symptoms of Grief**

- Exploring the physical, emotional and behavioral symptoms of grief

## **WEEK 3: Physical Symptoms of Grief & the Grief Cycle**

- Exploring feelings
- Identifying how feelings are experienced in one's body
- Understanding the cycles of grief

## **WEEK 4: The Value of Memories**

- Sharing items and memories of loved ones
- Facilitating questions about personal grief

## **WEEK 5: Exploring Changes & Regrets**

- Identifying changes in each group member's life because of the loss of their loved one(s)
- Expressing regrets

## **WEEK 6: Finding Comfort in Grief**

- Identifying ways to find personal comfort in one's grief
- Identifying support system.

## **WEEK 7: Personal Growth**

- Acknowledging the personal growth of each group member in his or her grief process

## **Week 8: Continuing Bonds**

- Establishing continuing bonds in ongoing life.

# Week 1: Telling the Story

**Purpose:** Introduction to the grief process; group rules and process; reduce isolation; begin to share their story.

## Materials Needed:

- small, smooth-sided votive candle holders
- votive candles (Middle school students do better with battery operated candles. Teens enjoy colorful scented candles and will often choose one that is significant to their personal grief process.)
- colorful stamp pads
- white stick-on labels
- colored markers
- colored cardstock paper
- stickers
- baby wipes
- M&M's or foam shapes
- piece of poster board
- long-handled butane lighter (if using real candles)
- pipe cleaners for children to fiddle with while sharing; can be laid out on table

## Introduction Activity:

**Fingerprint Candles** (can also be done after the group rules, prior to the closing activity)

**Materials:** votive candle holders and candles, stamp pads, labels, markers, baby wipes

**Directions:** Have various candles in candleholders. Ask each group member to choose a candle and write their name on a white label. Beside their name, ask them to use the ink pads to make a fingerprint on the white label. During the activity, facilitator can use the symbol of the uniqueness of fingerprints to discuss the uniqueness of each person's grief process. Discuss the factors that contribute to uniqueness, such as personality, age, relationship, culture, type of death, etc.

## Ice Breaker Activity Ideas:

### M&M's or Foam Shapes

**Materials:** M&M's or foam shapes

**Directions:** Pass around the bowl of M&M's or scatter colorful shapes on the table. Have each member choose as many as they want, without direction as to the next step. When each group member has a pile, ask them to: 1) sort them into color, shape, or just count their items, 2) tell their name and grade, and 3) share with the group that many things about themselves (or as many as they feel comfortable sharing), i.e., personal characteristics or favorites.

### Name Placards

**Materials:** colored cardstock paper, stickers, markers

**Directions:** Each group member should choose a color of paper and fold it in half lengthwise. Ask each group member to write their name and either write or draw activities or things that they enjoy (instrument they play, like to dance, play basketball, etc). They can decorate with stickers. Allow each child to share their name and the things that they enjoy.

### Establishing Group Rules

**Materials:** poster board, markers

**Directions:** Provide explanation of the group—grief group, 6-8 weeks in length, etc. Ask if any have ever participated in cooperative group experiences. Let them give examples. Then, “establish ownership” of this particular group as “Their Group”, and give them a chance to establish rules that will be important to them as they undertake this process and enter into a situation where personal and private information may be shared. Help the

students identify respectful behavior and address confidentiality if this is not brought up. Also – facilitator will probably have to add a very important rule: “*It’s ok to pass.*” Explain that there will never be an expectation that they will have to talk about a subject they aren’t comfortable with. A strategy that is helpful is to let them know that anyone who chooses to “pass” will have another chance to share if they change their minds, i.e., “Is there anyone who passes who would like an opportunity to share?”

### **Clinical Activity and Closing:**

#### **Candle lighting**

**Materials:** long-handled butane lighter

**Directions:** Invite each group member to say the name(s) and relationship(s) of loved ones who have died. If group members are ready to share more such as a memory, some of the story of the loss, etc and there is time permitting, allow children to share this too.

## Week 2: Signs and Symptoms of Grief

**Purpose:** Exploring the physical, emotional and behavioral symptoms of grief.

### Materials Needed:

- candles with candleholders
- crayons
- set of "Behavioral & Emotional Grief Response Cards"
- long-handled butane lighter
- pipe cleaners
- large piece of paper
- thick marker
- Way – No Way Questions
- Euphemisms for "Dead" facilitator list

### Introduction:

Review group rules and distribute candles, give a brief re-education about why the group is together and review the uniqueness of the grief process using fingerprints.

### Icebreaker:

#### Personal Favorites

**Materials:** n/a

**Directions:** Choose from personal favorites, but at this 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting, select one that builds cohesiveness in the group and continues to help the group members get to know one another better. For example, pair up the group members, and have them interview each other about: 1) name and grade, 2) favorites -food, animals, colors, etc., 3) where they'd love to go on vacation..., etc. Then have members introduce the person they interviewed to the group.

### Clinical Activity Ideas:

**Emotional/Behavioral Signs of Grief** (for middle school & high school groups)

**Materials:** "Behavioral & Emotional Grief Response Cards," crayons

**Directions:** Pass the cards around, and ask each group member to put a check mark on any card that states a feeling or behavior they have experienced. After the cards have been seen by all of the group members, pass them out equally, and ask if each member would read the card and count the number of "marks". Discuss commonalities and differences.

**Euphemisms for the Word "Dead"** (for elementary school groups)

**Materials:** large piece of paper, thick marker, Euphemisms for Dead facilitator list

**Directions:** Write the word "Dead" or "Died" in the middle of a large piece of paper and place on wall. Explain that adults have lots of words or phrases called euphemisms that they use to talk about death. Ask the group, "Why do adults use these words?" (Answers might include: Easier, trying to be nice, not make someone feel bad). Explain that these words can sometimes be misunderstand or make it hard for kids to understand what has happened. Ask group members what words or phrases they have heard adults, other kids or even themselves use? Discuss ones that might be misunderstand (i.e., Dad went to sleep – kids might be afraid to go to sleep; Mom has gone to a better place – kids might ask when their loved is coming back).

**Way – No Way Game** (for elementary school groups)

**Materials:** "Way – No Way Game" statement sheet

**Directions:** Read statements to group members. Have group members to put a thumb up if they agree with the statement and thumb down if they disagree. Discuss statements and follow up with any questions listed on the "Way – No Way" facilitator sheet.

If the group is a more active one, 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 and the other side of the room is the "No Way" side. From the way, no way statement sheet, read sentences aloud and ask group members to stand on the side of the line that they feel is true of the question. Have discussion while kids are standing on the sides of the line.

**Closing:**

Have members light their candles and share the name of the person(s) they are holding in their heart today. This person may not be the person that died but may be someone else in the family who is struggling or they are worried about.

## Behavioral & Emotional Grief Response Cards

**Who:** Groups or Families  
Kids or Teens  
Bereavement  
Anticipatory (pull cards specifically related to post death)

**Why:** To facilitate discussion about responses to grief; to normalize grief behaviors and emotions experienced.

**How to Use:** Pass cards around group. Have individuals mark cards for behaviors or emotions that they have experienced. When all of the cards have been passed, invite individuals to comment on different cards that may have stood out for them. It is helpful to highlight cards that many members have marked or those that few members have marked. Ask for clarification or for individuals to share their experience.

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



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

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	

## Euphemisms for "Dead"

at room temperature  
dirt nap  
pushing up the daisies  
passed over, on, away, etc  
deceased  
ex-  
stone dead  
demised  
ceased to be  
no more  
expired  
gone to meet their maker  
stiff  
bereft of life  
resting in peace  
off the twig  
kicked the bucket  
shuffled off the mortal coil  
run down the curtain  
joined the choir invisible  
that good night  
in a better place  
six feet under  
crossed over  
crossed the bar  
crossed the River Styx  
sleeping with the fishes  
bought the farm  
asleep  
belly up  
bloodless  
buried  
cadaverous  
checked out  
cold  
cut off  
defunct  
departed  
done for  
erased  
extinct  
gone  
inanimate  
late  
lifeless  
liquidated  
mortified

offed  
perished  
in repose  
rubbed out  
snuffed out  
wasted  
lost  
bump off  
buy it  
cash in (or out)  
check out  
conk  
croak  
dance the last dance  
eat it  
finished  
gone into the west  
kicked off  
got a one-way ticket  
popped off  
snuffed  
sprouted wings  
succumbed  
no longer with us  
dirt  
ashes to ashes, dust to dust  
return to the ground  
in Hell (or Heaven)  
with the ancestors  
gathered to his people  
give up the ghost  
in the grave  
executed  
wacked  
terminated  
put down  
"going to the big \_\_\_\_ (whatever) in  
the sky"  
destroyed  
worm food  
fragged  
buy a pine condo  
go into the fertilizer  
carked  
get your wings

## **“Way – No Way” Game**

1. People die in many different ways. (What are some ways?)
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 cremated first)
8. People die because they were “bad”.
9. Sleeping is the same as being dead. (Discuss whether people breathe, heart beats or people get hungry when they die)
10. Do people feel pain/hurt after they die? (Discuss heart stops, don't breathe, etc)
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. (What are some feelings someone may have if a loved one has died?)
16. It is ok to cry.
17. Can crying help sad feelings get better? (What are other ways that help you get your 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.

## Week 3: Physical Symptoms of Grief & the Grief Cycle

**Purpose:** Exploring feelings; identifying how feelings are experienced in one's body; understanding the cycles of grief.

### Materials Needed:

- candles with candleholders
- butane lighter
- markers
- pipe cleaners
- "Cycles of Grief" handout
- 11x14 paper
- poster board
- "Feelings Body" handout
- Teen Hotline Cards or Teen Link Booklets (request via [www.866teenlink.org](http://www.866teenlink.org) or 866-833-6546)

**Introduction:** Review group rules and distribute candles. Review the significance of the fingerprints and the uniqueness of each individual's grief process.

### Ice Breaker Activity Ideas:

#### Pipe Cleaner check in

**Materials:** Pipe cleaners

**Directions:** Have pipe cleaners spread on the table before group members arrive. Have members choose some pipe cleaners and shape them into something that symbolizes how their week or day is going, how they're feeling today, etc.

#### Hi Lite, Low Lite

**Materials:** n/a

**Directions:** Ask group members to think about one positive event that has happened since last group and one hard event that has happened. Give each group member an opportunity to share these events.

### Clinical Activity Ideas:

#### Understand Physical Symptoms of Grief

**Materials:** poster board or 11x14 paper with outline of body, "Feelings Body" handout, markers

**Directions:** Have one of the group members draw an outline of a body on the poster board, and discuss with group members the physical manifestations of grief. Give a few examples, i.e., tired, sick to stomach, spaced out, going crazy, etc. Then ask the group members for examples from their own unique experiences. Either the facilitator or the group members can write or draw the feelings on the body. Often group members will want certain feelings to be drawn in different colors. If you have a space that will allow for it, it is nice to have the group members surround the drawing and all work on it at the same time. They'll often draw eyes with tears, a broken heart, etc. Discussion regarding feelings will occur throughout the activity. Alternative: Give each group member a single piece of paper with outline of a body and have each group member do their own body. Give each group member the opportunity to share their body with the group when all are finished.

#### Cycles of Grief

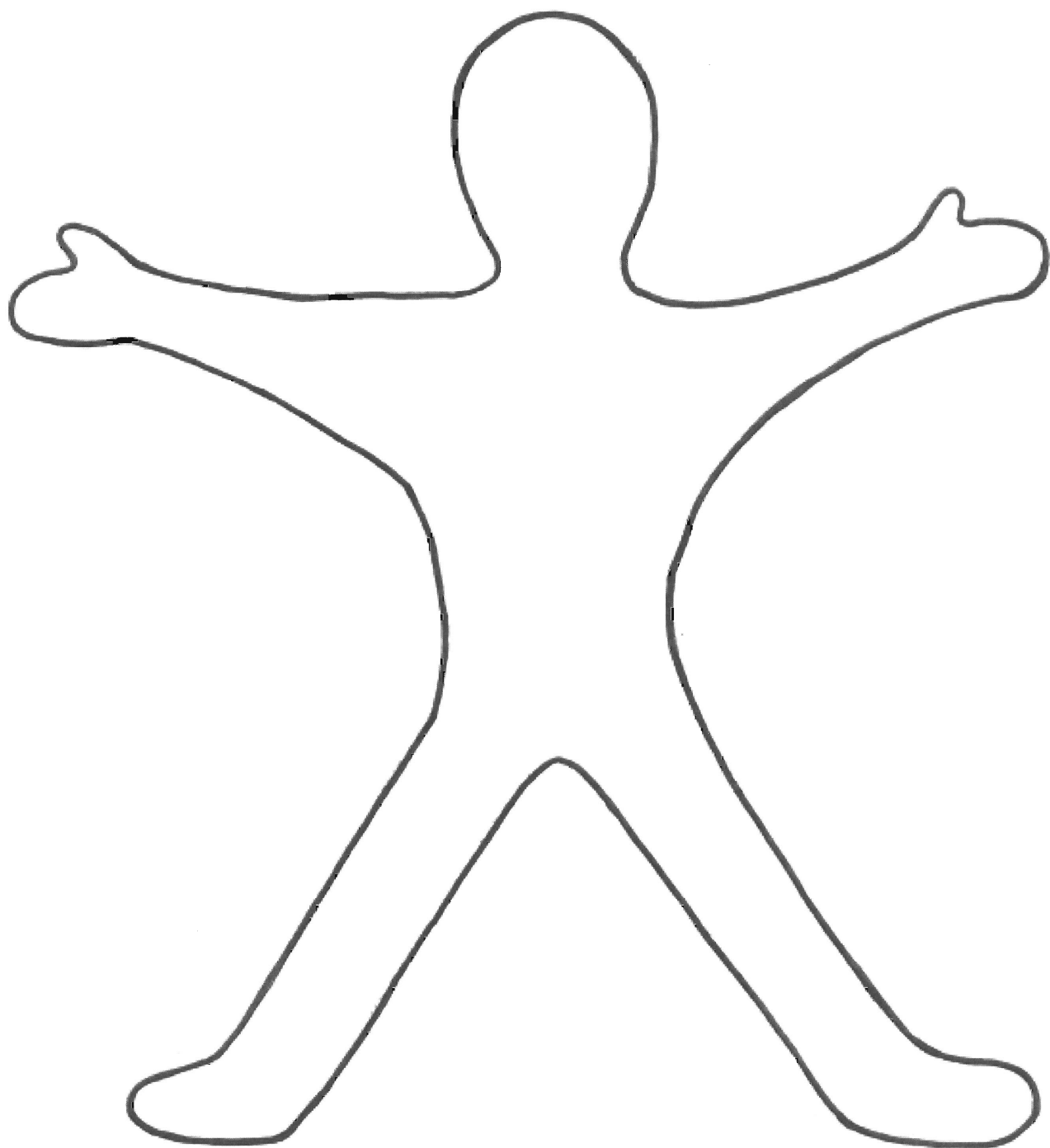
**Materials:** Cycles of Grief handout, poster board

**Directions:** Hand out the grief cycle and/or take a piece of poster board and draw the cycle on it. Have the group members take turns reading the cycle out loud, and discuss responses. Use plain paper or the back of the cycle, and ask group members to 1) draw a symbol of how they experience each emotion and 2) write out words associated with those feelings on the back of the drawings. Discuss ways to help when feeling depressed. Include cultural differences in grieving and traditions in certain cultures/religions that can be helpful.

**Closing:**

Members light their candles and share the name of the person(s) they are holding in their heart today. This person may not be the person that died but may be someone else in the family who is struggling or they are worried about.

**REMINDER:** Ask group members to bring photos of their loved one who died or special objects that remind them of their loved one to the group next week.



Adapted from Heegaard, M. (1998). *When someone very special dies*. Woodland Press: Minneapolis, MN.

# Sample Feelings Body

- ANGER
- ANXIOUS
- TIRED
- LONELY
- SAD





# CYCLES OF GRIEF

Not everyone will experience all these feelings, and they don't always occur in the same order.

## ADJUSTMENT & ACCEPTANCE

"I now understand more about my grief and realize that I have strengths that will help me to move on to a new and different life."

**CHANGE**

**LOSS**

**GRIEF**

**GROWTH**

## DESPAIR & DEPRESSION

"There is nothing left to live for."

## TEARS & FEARS!

"I can't stand it!"  
"I can't cope!"

## BARGAINING

"Please let everything be back to normal and I promise to..."

## SHOCK & DENIAL

"This can't be true."

## ANGER & GUILT

"Why me?"  
"Why my loved one?"  
"If only..."

The cycle never closes. You are forever changed by your loss. Though you may experience hardships, you have the opportunity to continue to grow in healthy ways.

## Week 4: The Value of Memories

**Purpose:** Sharing items and memories of loved ones; facilitating questions about personal grief.

### Materials Needed:

- candle with candleholder
- lighter
- Memory Basket, filled with items that might remind kids of their loved ones who have died. Examples include: small sports figures; small football and baseball; baseball cards; small plastic and stuffed animals; a TV remote control; satin flowers and feathers; squirt gun; men's and women's wallets, a coin purse and checkbook case; small cars, trucks, planes and emergency vehicles; hair accessories and brush/comb; small flashlight; belt buckle; floss and toothbrush; pretend coins and paper money; tools, i.e., a screw driver; a books, CD, and cassette tape; scout patches; holiday mementos; wedding memento; pieces from children's games, such a die or playing card ; religious and cultural reminders; military and/or national memorabilia; pair of glasses; earrings and other jewelry; candle; kitchen utensils, like a spatula; small costume item, like a mask or funny glasses; etc.
- Grief Discussion Question Cards & Facilitator list

### Introduction:

Review rules and distribute candles. Review discussion of last week's grief cycle, and remind the group of the uniqueness of each person's grief.

### Ice Breaker Activity Ideas:

#### Two Truths and a Lie

**Materials:** n/a

**Directions:** Each member tells three things about themselves, two of which are true, one of which is untrue. The group members then guess which is untrue – usually by holding up 1, 2 or 3 fingers to coincide with the untrue statement.

### Clinical Activity Ideas:

#### Sharing Memories

**Materials:** Memory basket (see supply list), photos/special objects brought from home

**Directions:** Bring attention to the "Memory Basket." Either pass the basket around or put the items on the table, so the group members can look at them and choose items that remind them of their loved ones. This gives each member an opportunity to have something to share, if they forgot to bring an item or picture. Offer each group member time to share the picture or item they brought that reminds them of their loved one(s) or any item(s) from the memory basket.

### Grief Discussion Questions

**Materials:** Grief Discussion Question Cards & Facilitator List

**Directions:** The Grief Discussion Cards can be passed around or sat on the table for each group member to pick up several. Ask members to read them and decide if there is one or several that they would be able or willing to answer. They can pass cards on that they don't want to keep. When each member has chosen a card or several cards, provide them a chance to read their card, answer it, and allow discussion with the group, if desired.

### Closing:

Members light their candles and share the name of the person(s) they are holding in their heart today. This person may not be the person that died but may be someone else in the family who is struggling or they are worried about.

## Greif Discussion Questions

At the time of the death, who in your family was most helpful?

What is the most positive thing you remember about the funeral?

What was the most difficult thing for you to handle at the funeral?

How do other members of your family express their grief?

In what ways has this death strengthened or weakened your religious beliefs?

How do you feel when someone says, "I know just what you're going through."?

If you could change parts of the funeral, what would you do differently?

Describe one of the most special sympathy cards you received.

When you feel like expressing your grief, whom do you choose to be with and why?

What advice have you received that was helpful for you in coping with your grief?

Which feelings surrounding the death are the most difficult for you to deal with now?

Anger is a common response to loss and grief. Give an example of such anger in your life.

How have you coped with the holidays since your loved one's death?

The anniversary of the death may be difficult for the survivors. What was that like for you?

In what ways have your hopes and plans for the future changed as a result of the death?

In what ways have you grown as a person since the death of your loved one?

Describe what it is like for you to visit the cemetery.

Complete this statement: "One thing I wish teachers understood is..."

Have your attitudes toward what is most important in life changed as a result of the death?  
If so, in what ways?

Complete this statement: "When I feel like crying, I..."

Give some examples of how you denied the death, either initially or more recently.

Complete this statement: "It isn't easy for me to admit..."

Complete this statement: "One of my greatest fears is..."

What advice would you give a funeral director or minister in terms of helping grieving people, especially young people?

## Grief Discussion Cards

**Who:** Groups or Families  
Kids or Teens  
Bereavement

**Why:** To facilitate discussion about grief experiences.

**How to Use:** The Grief Discussion cards can be passed around or sat on the table for each group member to pick up several. Ask members to read them and decide if there is one or several that they would be able to/willing to answer. They can pass cards on that they don't want to keep. When each member has chosen a card or several cards, provide them a chance to read their card, answer it, and allow discussion with the group, if desired.

At the time of the death, who in your family was most helpful?	What is the most positive thing you remember about the funeral?	What was the most difficult thing for you to handle at the funeral?
How do other members of your family express their grief?	In what ways has this death strengthened or weakened your religious beliefs?	How do you feel when someone says, "I know just what you're going through."?
If you could change parts of the funeral, what would you do differently?	Describe one of the most special sympathy cards you received.	When you feel like expressing your grief, whom do you choose to be with and why?
What advice have you received that was helpful for you in coping with your grief?	Which feelings surrounding the death are the most difficult for you to deal with now?	Anger is a common response to loss and grief. Give an example of such anger in your life.

<p>How have you coped with the holidays since your loved one's death?</p>	<p>The anniversary of the death may be difficult for the survivors. What was that like for you?</p>	<p>In what ways have your hopes and plans for the future changed as a result of the death?</p>
<p>In what ways have you grown as a person since the death of your loved one?</p>	<p>Describe what it is like for you to visit the cemetery.</p>	<p>Complete this statement: "One thing I wish teachers understood is..."</p>
<p>Have your attitudes toward what is most important in life changed as a result of the death? If so, in what ways?</p>	<p>Complete this statement: "When I feel like crying, I..."</p>	<p>Give some examples of how you denied the death, either initially or more recently.</p>
<p>Complete this statement: "It isn't easy for me to admit..."</p>	<p>Complete this statement: "One of my greatest fears is..."</p>	<p>What advice would you give a funeral director or minister in terms of helping grieving people, especially young people?</p>

## Week 5: Exploring Changes & Regrets

**Purpose:** Identifying changes in each group member's life because of the loss of their loved one(s); expressing regrets.

### Materials Needed:

- candles with candleholders
- lighter
- Change Basket (same as the memory basket from week before)
- stickers
- markers/colored pencils
- 8 ½ x 11 white or colored paper
- label stickers in white or bright colors
- paper shredder

### Introduction:

Review group rules and distribute candles; reinforce individuality of grief process.

### Ice breaker:

#### Change Basket

**Materials:** Change Basket (see Memory Basket for examples of contents)

**Directions:** Either pass around the basket or put items on the table/floor for the children to choose from. Ask each group member to choose an item or items that may symbolize friendships, personality, family, responsibilities, roles, etc., that have changed since the death of their loved one.

### Clinical Activity Ideas:

#### Timeline

**Materials:** paper, markers, stickers

**Directions:** Using the paper, ask each group member to create a line on which they can mark the events of their life. Draw a few different lines (curvy, straight, etc.) to model for the group members, and again stress individuality and that they can draw their lines any way they want. Have the group members put marks on the line from birth to present, labeling them or drawing a picture or symbol to represent times that significant changes have occurred in their family, personality, friendships, homes, schools, as well as any new responsibilities they now have since their loved one died. Have stickers and markers so that they can decorate their timeline. Discuss the concept of loss that is associated with all change.

#### Letting Go of Regrets

**Materials:** poster board, colored pencils & markers, white or colored paper, paper shredder

**Directions:** Ask each group member to choose a piece of paper. Explain that activity will be around "regrets." Ask if any group members have heard of the word "regret" and what it means to them. After discussion, have group members close their eyes and read the following to the group:

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 good-bye 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, there is nothing you did, said, or thought that caused the death of your loved one. Talking about our regretful thoughts within a trusting group can help us understand that these thoughts are very

normal and most people have them. Then we can let the regrets go! When I ask you to open your eyes, I would like you to think about your regrets. Then, draw or write your regrets on your piece of paper. 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 blaming myself for...

(Have these sentence starters written in large print on poster board size paper)

Give the group members 10-15 minutes to work on their regrets. Bring the group back together and give group members the opportunity to share one or several of their regrets. After each group member has shared, ask them to think about if 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. Invite each group member to tear their paper into many small pieces. When they have all finished, get in a circle with each member holding their pieces of paper, count to three and have the group members 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.

Another option (less clean up time): Use a paper shredder and after each group member has shared the regrets, invite each group member to release the regrets by shredding them in the paper shredder.

### **Role labels**

**Materials:** colored and/or white label stickers, markers

**Directions:** Have the group members think about the roles they have in their lives, and give examples, i.e. best friend, daughter, sister, basketball player, etc. Ask them to write down the various roles they had before their loved one(s) died on individual stickers. Have them put all of the stickers on one of their arms/sleeves. Then have them think about the new roles they have since the death(s). Have them write their new roles on separate stickers and put them on their other arm. Have discussion, using this visual to identify how changes affect roles, drawing attention to the secondary loss associated with the loss of a role.

### **Closing:**

Members light their candles and share the name of the person(s) they are holding in their heart today. This person may not be the person that died but may be someone else in the family who is struggling or they are worried about.

**REMINDER:** Ask group members to bring items that give comfort during their grief next week. This could include a song, video clip, and/or poem – possibly that they have written, etc.

😊 HAPPY Normal) Went to school  
said good-bye to sister

SCARED early dismissal - came home  
mother on phone crying  
didn't talk to me

Confused Went to my room

More confused one hour later -  
hungry, Scared went down stairs  
Grandma was there  
no smell of dinner  
cooking

Shocked Grandma told me  
Confused, Sad my mother and father  
went to the hospital  
my sister got sick at  
School

Didn't want to I didn't ask any  
talk Hungry and questions. Ate  
a stomach-ache just a snack

Very confused Went to my room  
Couldn't concentrate did homework +  
NUMB Couldn't sleep went to bed

Very scared Woke up the  
Felt all alone next morning.  
Very Confused Grandma was still  
there. She had been crying

The  
day  
my  
sister  
got  
sick

TIMELINE



## Week 6: Finding Comfort in Grief

**Purpose:** Identifying ways to find personal comfort in one's grief; identifying support system.

### Materials Needed:

- candles with candleholders
- lighter
- "My Help Circle" and "What helps?" handouts
- Writing utensil
- ball of yarn
- CD/tape player, possibly VHS/DVD player – for sharing a video of a loved one, funeral CD, etc.
- Group evaluation forms (if last week of group)

**Introduction:** Review group rules and distribute candles.

**Icebreaker:** Group Member's Choice

### Clinical Activity Ideas:

#### What Brings You Comfort...

**Materials:** Items children brought to share

**Directions:** Ask the group members to share the items they have brought that bring them comfort. This could include a song, video clip, and/or poem – possibly that they have written, etc.

#### My Help Circle & What Helps?

**Materials:** "My Help Circle" and "What Helps?" handouts

**Directions:** Starting with the help circle side of the worksheet, discuss how there are many ways that we receive help when we are grieving. Discuss how some people help a lot and are very close to us within our circle while others help out but may be more on the periphery. Ask group members to think about those that have been helpful during their time of grief and write them in their circle. Allow each group member the opportunity to share.

After group members have identified those who support them, hand out the "What Helps?" worksheet. Ask group members to think about what they can do for themselves when they are having a hard time. Have group members mark ideas from the list that are helpful to them. If there are any that are not on the list, group members can write them at the bottom of the page. Allow each group member the opportunity to share.

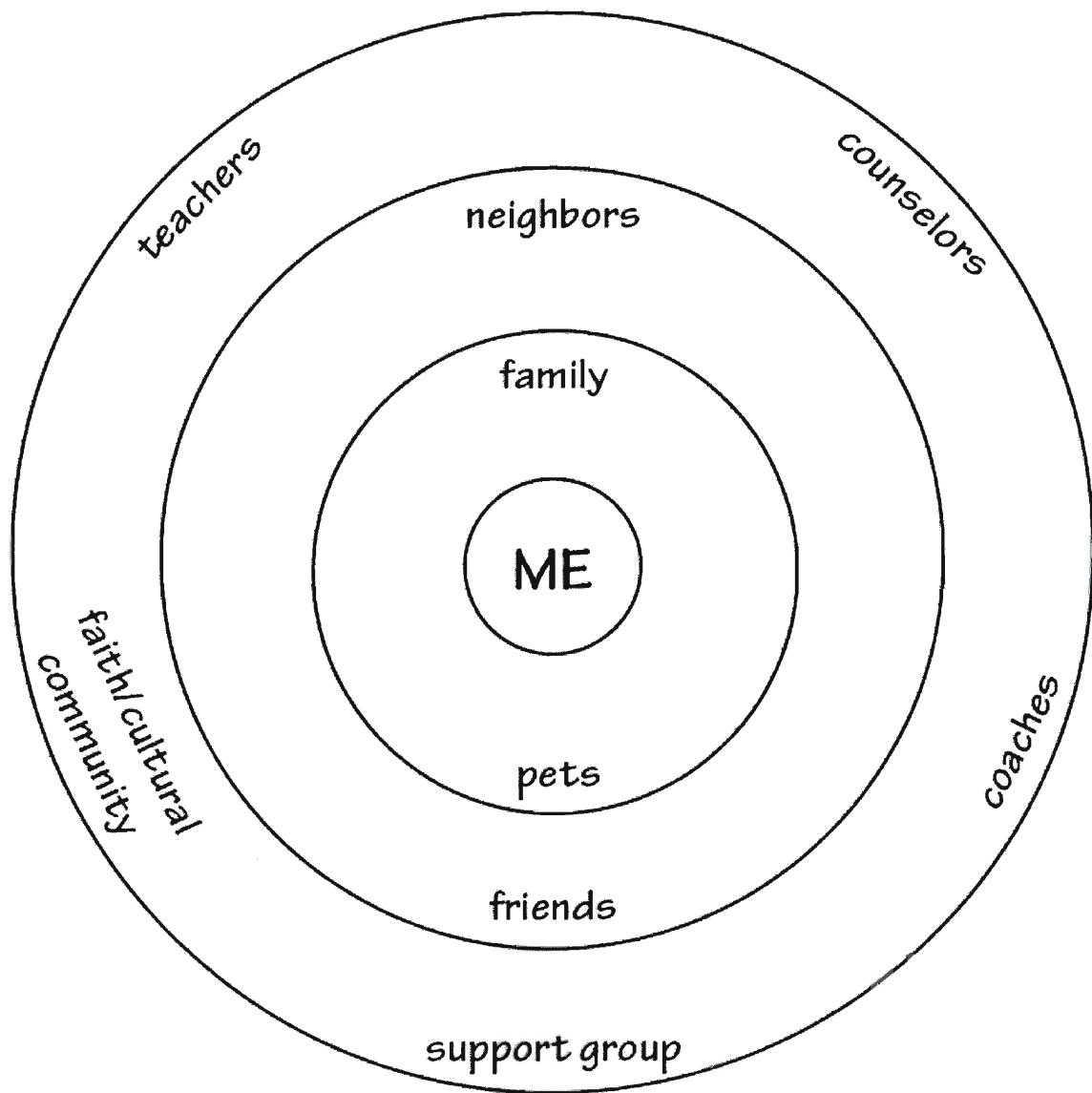
#### Closing:

Members light their candles and share the name of the person(s) there are holding in their heart today. This person may not be the person that died but may be someone else in the family who is struggling or they are worried about.

**\*\* Have students fill out a group evaluation at some point during the group (if group is six weeks in length).**

# My Help Circle

When something hard happens in my life,  
Here are some of the people who can help me.



# 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:**

# Week 7: Personal Growth

**Purpose:** Acknowledging the personal growth of each group member in his or her grief process.

## Materials Needed:

- candles with candleholders
- pieces of white or color cardboard, cut to the size of a large bookmark
- roll of "hemp"
- hole punch
- beads
- stickers
- markers
- smooth and rough rocks, one each per group member (either gathered from nature; polished rocks available at Michaels Craft Supply)

## Introduction:

Review group rules and distribute candles.

**Icebreaker:** Use a group favorite, or do a "hi lite, low lite" check-in.

## Clinical Activities:

### Bookmark

**Materials:** bookmarks, hemp, hole punch, beads, markers, stickers

**Directions:** Each student receives a cardboard bookmark with hole punched at top in the middle of the card. Using a length of "hemp" (approximately 6 inches), tie one end through the hole. Choose from an array of beads to string onto the "hemp". Each bead either represents a way in which you have grown or something that has helped you in your grief (i.e. "I'm... more positive, stronger, more patient, more mature, my family has helped me, friends, grief group is O.K.). On the book mark itself, write a self-affirmation. Use this book mark to witness how far you have come in your grief process, as well as the things that have helped you.

### Rock Ceremony

**Materials:** Smooth and rough rocks (one each per group member)

**Directions:** When someone dies, children sometimes don't have the opportunity to say goodbye. It is important for all children to acknowledge their feelings when they have to say goodbye. The activity provides children with this opportunity.

Give each group member two rocks: one that is polished, shiny and smooth and one that is rough and unpolished. Explain to group members that "the process a rock goes through to become polished and gemlike represents the path we take through life. The rough rocks with sharp edges and cracks are put in a tumbler with water and coarse grit. The rocks tumble against each other and are sanded down by the grit – polished and rounded. Some rocks will disintegrate, some will crack, but most will polish and become gemlike. As humans, we also tumble through life with knocks, pains, tears, disappointments, losses, deaths and hardships. It is hard and it hurts, but in the process we, too, can become more gemlike. The polish rock represents the healing that takes place as we move through grief. The rough rock represents the part of us that still hurts and may always hurt, but that is okay."

Allow group members to share their thoughts and ask questions. Group members can take rocks home to remind them of their grief journey.

**Closing:**

Members light their candles and share the name of the person(s) there are holding in their heart today. This person may not be the person that died but may be someone else in the family who is struggling or they are worried about.

**REMINDER:** Bring items, photos, or anything you would like to put into a weaving or collage you will be creating next week, such as a print of a photograph.

## Week 8: Continuing Bonds

**Purpose:** Establishing continuing bonds in ongoing life.

### Materials Needed:

- candles with candleholders
- supplies for ice breaker
- cross-stitch hoops, with carpet tacks nailed all around (approximately ½ inch apart)
- “hemp,” ribbon and fabric pieces to use for looming around the hoop to create a weaving
- other embellishments to add to weaving (dried flowers, feather, shells, sand dollars, driftwood, raffia, pieces of paper with words already printed on them, etc.)
- fabric markers
- If cross-stitch hoops are not available, use any medium that can be weaved into (i.e., canvas with slits cut into it, a small tree branch or bamboo that has enough of a “Y” to wind string/ribbon/hemp around).
- Purple, yellow, green cord for closing ritual
- colored tissue
- glue
- scissors
- mod podge
- paint brushes
- magazine words and pictures
- cardboard backing, cardstock or paper for collage and poetry activities

**Introduction:** Review group rules and distribute candles.

**Ice Breaker:** Repeat a favorite, i.e. pipe cleaners or “two truths and a lie.”

### Clinical Activities:

#### Weaving

**Materials:** weaving hoop, hemp, ribbon and fabric pieces, embellishments, fabric markers

**Directions:** Each student receives one “ready-made” weaving hoop. The students have been asked the week before to bring items, photos, or anything they would like to put into the weaving. Additional items are brought by facilitator, i.e., strips of paper with words or thoughts common to the grief process or words of encouragement, dried flower stems, feathers, shells, sand dollars, driftwood, ribbon, raffia, etc. If you have fabric markers, members can write names or words on pieces of ribbon, as well. Make sure to provide many colors and widths. Often, it’s the color itself which represents memories. If you use canvas, bring fabric markers for group member to write names or draw memories/pictures on the canvas in addition to the materials they weave in.

#### Memory Collage

**Materials:** cardboard backing or cardstock, scissors, glue, magazine words and pictures, mod podge, paint brushes

**Directions:** Invite group members to choose words and/or pictures which remind them of their loved one to create a memory collage. At end of activity, offer opportunity for group members to share.

#### “I Remember” Poem

**Materials:** paper, markers

**Directions:** Invite group members to write a poem with as many lines as they would like, each line beginning with, “I remember...” followed by a special memory about their loved one or an experience with their loved one. Sample prompts can include, “I remember the sight...the sound...the taste...the smell...the touch.”

## Closing:

Form standing circle and read the following excerpt, "In China when a child is born, friends and family members are asked to bring threads, cords, ribbons, or string to the home of the new infant. These items are collected together and a tassel is formed. This tassel is known as a **life tassel**, and it is carried throughout the life of the individual to remind them of the ongoing love and support that is theirs from their family and friends." (Yates, E. (1966). *Up the golden stair*. NY: Dutton.)

- Pass the **PURPLE** cord to the right, asking each group member to pass it to the next person and yet still hold on to it so that everyone in the circle is holding the cord. As the cord passes around the circle relate that this purple cord represents **their grief...the grief that brought them to this group**.
- Next pass the **GREEN** cord and relate that this cord represents the **growth that each member of the group has attained over the past 8 weeks**. This time as they pass the cord have each member of the group turn to the person they are passing the cord to and relate how that individual has helped them to grow over the past 8 weeks.
- Finally, pass the **YELLOW** cord around the group relating that this cord represents their **courage...to come to group, to continue to come to group, and to look at, acknowledge and experience their grief**.
- Scissors are then passed around the group and each group member cuts the cords they are holding. After each group member has cut the cord, have them fold the cords in half and tie a knot in the folded end, creating a tassel. Explain to group member, "The tassel that you hold now represents your grief, growth, and courage and the ongoing support from the people you have met in this group. May it also be a reminder to you that you are not alone in this journey."

Have group members light their candle and share, "Something that I'm thankful for because of being involved in this group is..."

**\*\* Have students fill out a group evaluation at some point during the group.**

# Sample Collage Activity





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

Fearless **Daring Heroic** Shy

**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* \_\_\_\_\_**

## Group Evaluation

These are some of the ways we hope that this group has helped you. Please let us know what you think because your ideas and comments help us to make our program better. Thank you for your help!

1. I have learned about what grief is, and how everyone's grief may be different.  yes  no

2. I see improvements at school in any of these areas:

- In my attendance  yes  no
- In my work / grades  yes  no
- Being more comfortable at school  yes  no

3. My family is better able to support each other with our grief.  yes  no

**Even though I have learned that grief can be very painful...**

4. I can express my own grief without hurting myself or others.  yes  no

5. I know people I can talk to or feel supported by.  yes  no

6. Have you noticed any other changes because of this group?

7. What did you like best about our meetings?

**More on back...!**

8. What didn't you like about our meetings?

9. What have you learned in the group?

10. What would make this group better?

**Thank you for filling out this evaluation!**

## A Bibliography for Families Experiencing Grief and Loss

### 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 and 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 Mechaelene Mundy

Promotes honest and 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 the child's 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.

### 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

A story that 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

Through the story of a rough and greedy pirate, *Tough Boris* explains 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 and gives them tools for coping with their 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](http://www.griefwatch.com) and [www.compassionbooks.com](http://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 Samoff 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:**

Safe Crossings, Providence Hospice of Seattle

425 Pontius Ave N, Seattle, WA 98109

206-320-4000

## **Grief Support Groups in the School Setting: A Guide for School Counselors**

### **Introduction:**

The school-based support group curriculum is designed to educate students about normal and complicated grief responses, as well as to reinforce and support the uniqueness of each individual's physical, emotional, and spiritual grief process. School groups can help decrease a student's isolation, as well as instill hope that it is possible to live, find strength, and grow through one's personal grief experience.

The following eight week curriculum provides a framework for supporting grieving children in a group setting. Each week's outline includes: the session's purpose; a list of materials needed; introduction/icebreaker activity options; clinical activity options; and a closing activity.

The clinical activities included are intentionally designed to support the purpose of each session, but please pick and choose which activities can be accomplished within the time frame of your group's sessions. It is not necessary – or even possible! – to utilize every activity listed in each session's curriculum. As a facilitator, you may also wish to create and/or add your own intentional activities. Also, the icebreaker ideas are interchangeable week-to-week. At times, groups become attached to an icebreaker and want to repeat it again and again!

Finally, an evaluation for group members to complete and a resource bibliography for your reference are included at the end of the curriculum.

### **Getting Started:**

1. Identify Students:
  - Counselor has personal knowledge that a death has occurred
  - Parent calls asking for support
  - Student survey which includes various groups being offered
  - Teacher survey to obtain feedback concerning students who have experienced a death
2. Contact students
  - Individual meetings with students to assess interest in a group
  - Obtain necessary consents from parent/guardian
3. Consider Logistics
  - Choose a site which has an element of privacy.
  - Choose a time of day which is most conducive. For middle and high schools, it usually works best to stagger periods. Each group session is geared to last approximately 50 minutes.
  - Note: Because of erratic schedules and variables inherent to the school setting, the curriculum may have to be adapted to finish a group in 8 weeks.

