



HOSPICE OF THE *Piedmont*
KIDS' GRIEF AND HEALING

Recommendations for Running Kids' Grief Support Groups in Schools

Hospice of the Piedmont's Kid's Grief and Healing program creates grief support groups for schools. For those counselors who would like to facilitate their own grief support group with children, we offer these guidelines and details on how we facilitate our groups. We've also created a training video to accompany this guide: <https://youtu.be/kYb0pgRADzQ>.

How We Organize Groups:

- Groups are closed. No new members after the 1st session
- Groups usually run for 6 weeks, and sessions are 45 to 60 minutes
- We find 5-10 students per group works best
- Interview parents for extra information on the death and how the child is grieving before starting the group
- Topics for the grief group: Introduction of Group and Each Other; Grief, Changes, Feelings; Telling Your Story; Regrets; Coping and Support; and Memories
- An art activity is usually paired with each topic
- Use a talking stick or other object for students to hold when talking

Rules for Groups:

- Respect each other – Listen
- Talk when holding the talking stick
- Pass when you need to
- What is said in the group stays in the group
- Turn off all devices
- Confidentiality/Safety: We will not share what you say with anyone outside this group unless you talk about hurting yourself or hurting someone else, or someone is hurting you, and then we would need to help keep you safe.

Grief Group Curriculum - 6 Weeks

Give each student a pocket folder to keep their work in. Give each student a desk name card. (Cut card stock in half to make 2 name cards and fold each card in half so it will stand up.) Have each student decorate their name tags with stickers and drawings or lists of their favorite things.

Week 1: Introductions, Grief, and "Your Story"

- :00 Intro** - This group will last 6 weeks, and we will share our stories and support each other. We all have one thing in common: we all have had a special person die. This group will help you remember that you are not alone. You can share your thoughts and feelings about your loss. This is a safe place.
- :10 Rules** - Keep this group a safe place for everyone so they can feel comfortable sharing (Share rules on page 1)
- :15 Ritual** - Introduce ritual to use each time, light candle (use battery operated candle), "We light this candle in memory of those who have died."
- :13 Circle Check-in** - Say your name, who died, when they died, and tell us something about the nametag you made for yourself.
- :23 Topic & Activity Introducing yourself through art**
Make a portrait of yourself, showing what you like to do like games and activities, and favorites like a school subject, sport, animal, color, or food. Include Anything you might want to include that describes yourself.
- :35 Share** – Share drawings.
- :45 End group** - Take care of yourself.
Next week - Grief, changes, and feelings.
Extinguish the candle.

(Materials needed: candle, talking stick, pencils, markers, regular copy paper or paper with 'frame' border, stickers)

Week 2: Grief, Changes, and Feelings

:00 **Greetings** – Greetings and review the rules.

:05 **Ritual** - “We will light the candle in memory of those who have died.”

:06 **Circle check-in** - Say your name, who died, when they died, and something else you would like us to know about him or her.

:16 **Topic - Defining Grief**

So, a little about grief - it is a journey, and it has ups and downs. There is no timeline. Over time it will get softer – during the journey, you will have grief bursts where you’ll feel really strong emotions, but these all have to be experienced. You can’t go over sadness, can’t go around anger, can’t go under guilt, and have to go through all the hard feelings to move through it. We don’t get over death; we come to learn to live with it and adjust to it. In time we find that the grief becomes softer.

Topic - Changes

Change is hard for everyone. We get used to things being a certain way then something happens to make parts of our lives different and unfamiliar. After someone close to us dies, there are almost always changes, the change of someone dying causes other changes, which cause other changes. Some changes may be seen as positive, for example, the end of suffering. But many are very hard on us, for example, moving, loss of income, and one less plate at the table.

Can anyone think of other changes that could happen after someone dies?

(No more hugs, visits, gifts, new school, or meal changes...)

Topic - Feelings (Child)

When someone dies, we experience “grief.” Grief is all the thoughts and feelings someone has after the death of their person.

What are some of the feelings someone might have? (While we think of them, we’ll demonstrate what happens when you hold them all in) Sad, mad, lonely, guilty, worried, surprised, confused...

What happens if you hold them in for a long time and then you can’t hold them in any longer? (Use a balloon to show) Blow up! Pop! Explode! Act out.

(Week 2: Grief, Changes, and Feelings – Continued)

We need to find safe ways to express these feelings, so they don't get bottled up and then explode! *What can you do when you are sad, mad, scared, worried, or anxious? What are some safe ways of expressing feelings?*

- Talking, exercising, drawing, music, singing, punching a pillow, deep breaths, screaming into a pillow...
- Even with grief, we can still have happiness, pride, strength, love, and interest.

Topic - Feelings (Teen):

When someone dies, we experience "grief," Grief is all the thoughts and feelings someone has after the death of their person.

What are some of the feelings someone might have after the death of their special person? Sad, mad, lonely, guilty, worried, surprised, confused, etc.

It's important that we express our feelings and not keep them bottled up and then feel like we might explode. We need to find safe ways to express these. *What are some activities you can do when feeling difficult feelings?*

- Talking to someone, exercising, drawing, music, singing, punching a pillow, deep breaths, playing a game, screaming into a pillow...
- Even with grief, we can still have feelings that are more positive like happiness, pride, strength, love, interest, and excitement.

:35 Child Activity - Watercolor Feelings as the Weather – How could your feelings be described by drawing a picture of the weather? What might the weather be like if it were sad, mad, or happy? Paint your own picture of your feelings as the weather.

Teen Activity - Tissue Paper Collage – Provide tissue paper and glue mixture along with brushes and heavy paper like card stock or watercolor paper. Tear or cut tissue and glue it down using colors that represent the feelings they've been experiencing.

:50 Share Artwork - Let dry if needed and put in a folder

:55 End Group - Take care of yourself. Next week: Telling Your Story. Extinguish candle.

Materials needed: Child - candle, talking stick, balloon, pencil, watercolors, brushes, water, container, watercolor paper; Teen- candle talking stick, watercolor paper, brushes, cups, glue and water, colored tissue paper, scissors)

Week 3: Telling Your Story

- :00 Greetings** – Greet one another and decorate the front cover of the folder
- :05 Ritual** - “We will light the candle in memory of those who have died.”
- :06 Circle** - Say your name, who died, when they died and something about yourselves that we don’t know.
- :16 Topic: Telling your story** –
“Telling your story” means sharing who died, when they died, how they died, and telling us about your special person.
- Doing this helps you accept the reality of the death and helps you to face your feelings. It is hard to do but it gets easier the more you do it.
- Hand the list of questions to each child and go around and have them pick one to answer.
- :28 Activity** - Special Person Portrait
Show what they liked to do, favorites like sports teams, color, and food. Anything you might want to put that describes your person.
- :38 Share** – Share drawings
- :45 End Group** - Take care of yourself. Next week: Regrets. Extinguish candle.

Materials needed: Child - candle, talking stick, pencils, markers, regular copy paper or paper with ‘frame’ border, stickers, Appendix B – Questions for Children; Teen - candle, talking stick, pencils, markers, regular copy paper or paper with ‘frame’ border, stickers, Appendix C – Questions for Teens

Week 4: Regrets (Unfinished Business)

:00 **Greetings** - Continue to decorate folders with stickers that remind you of your person

:05 **Ritual** - "We light this candle in memory of those who have died."

:06 **Circle check-in** - Say your name, who died, when they died, and something else you would like us to know about your person or a silly memory

:20 **Topic: Unfinished Business** - Woulda, shoulda, coulda... I regret... I'm sorry...I wish...
What did you do or not do, say or not say that you wish you had?

I wish I would have... spent more time with her, told him I loved him, wrote to him, been more thankful for what she did for me...

I should ... have said, not have said, not been mean to her, have listened and not talked back...

I could have... been willing to help more, listened better, been more honest / respectful / loving / interested, asked more about his / her life...

I regret... not apologizing, not visiting more, not forgiving...

I'm sorry... for asking so much, giving so little, or hurting his/her feelings...

I wish... that I could have said goodbye, or I love you

:30 **Child Activity** - On stickies write "I'm sorry I..., I coulda..., I wish I...."

Share and give the option to throw away or keep.

Then make a "Goodbye Hand" – Trace the hand and on each finger write what you would say to them if you weren't able to say goodbye and/or write what you would like to say to them now. Decorate how you wish.

Teen Activity - On stickies write "I'm sorry I..., I coulda..., I wish I...."

Share and give option to throw away or keep.

Then, write a letter to (or from) your special person or make a drawing for them.

:50 **Share** - Share art project

:55 **End Group** - Take care of yourself. Next week: Coping and support. Extinguish candle.

Materials needed: Child - candle, talking stick, copy paper, markers, pencils, stickers; Teen - candle, talking stick, sticky notes, pen, markers, pencils, stickers, Appendix D - Writing Prompts for Goodbye Letter.

Week 5: Coping and Support

:00 **Greetings** - Little spots of feeling for children and teens just name a feeling

:05 **Ritual** - "We light the candle in memory of those who have died"

:10 **Circle check-in** - Say your name, who died, when they died, and what has helped you the most with your grief

:20 **Topic - Self-Care and Support**

It is important to take care of yourself when you are grieving. You might be experiencing many different feelings. When we have difficult feelings, we don't want to hold them in, we want to express them. We don't want to act out and explode. We need some tools to help us with this difficult grief work, we call these coping skills. It's also important to recognize those people who support you, whom you can go to and talk to or ask for help. (You may also find support in God or a higher power, your special person who died, and pets too.)

What do you do to take care of yourself?

Would anyone like to share whom they go to for support?

Give students the self-care handout

:30 **Child Activity** - Tree of support

Draw a tree with roots and branches. On the branches write those people who support you and, on the roots, write activities that you enjoy doing.

Teen Activity

Using the teen handout, first, check the ones they regularly do. Circle the ones you would be willing to try. Discuss other things students do that help. Go back to the list and draw yourself doing one of those you circled.

:45 **Sharing** - Next week: Memories, and saying goodbye to the group. Extinguish candle.

Materials needed: Child - candle, talking stick, markers, 12x18 paper, Appendix E - Coping Activities for Kids; Teen - candle, talking stick, markers, copy paper, Appendix F - 50 Ways to Take a Break for Teens

Week 6: Memories

:00 Greetings

:05 Ritual - "We will light the candle as a ritual in memory of our special person."

:06 Circle check-in - Say your name, who died, when they died, and a favorite memory

:20 Topic - Memories

One important part of taking care of yourself after the death of your person is to stay connected to them. How? Talking to them, praying to them, writing letters to them, planting a tree or plant to honor them – and, remember what you'll always have – your memories.

Here is a little more about memories:

Memories can be just about as varied as feelings.

Happy, sad, scary, lonely, silly...

When someone close to us dies, it is important for us to remember the happy, the sad, the good, and the bad memories because the person we loved who died was a human being...with great things about them and certainly some not-so-great things. No one is perfect.

What can we do to help us remember our person? Look at pictures, scrapbooks, photo albums, and pictures by our bed; draw or write about special times in a journal; talk with family about them; make a memory box to keep special items that remind us of them; or, make a painting about them

:30 Child Activity - Heart Collage

Fill large heart shape with magazine clippings/drawings/words that remind you of your loved one and what you want to "keep in your heart."

Teen Activity - Watercolor Scribble

Use a sharpie to draw controlled scribble and inside the spaces write and draw characteristics and memories about the loved one. Then watercolor in the shapes.

:45 Share - Share artwork

:50 Closing - Group: Take care of yourself. Say goodbye to the group. Extinguish candle.

Materials: Child - candle, talking stick, large heart cut from 12x18 paper, glue stick, scissors, magazines; Teen - candle, talking stick, black sharpie, watercolors, brushes, watercolor paper, water, and container.

Appendix A – Resources for Grief Education

This link is for an excellent documentary about grief in general. If you haven't seen it, please watch it.

<https://www.speakinggrief.org/>

This link is for more specific information on children's grief. It includes some material about COVID-19.

<https://www.winstonswish.org/childhood-bereavement-training-video/>

This link is to a grief presentation created by Hospice of the Piedmont Kids' Grief and Healing staff for parents and school counselors.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zdgRwGbm9Tc>

Appendix B – Questions for Children (Week 3)

1. After the death, I have a new chore – it is _____.
2. Before the death, my biggest fear was _____,
now it is _____.
3. If I could change how I was told about the death, I would change _____.
4. How do other people in your family express their grief?
5. How have you been doing in school since the death?
6. If you could change a part of the funeral or service, what would you do differently?
7. When you are feeling really big feelings, who does it help to talk to or to be with?
8. Anger is a very common grief feeling, describe a recent example of anger in your life.
9. Describe what it is like to visit the cemetery if your person is buried there.
10. Complete this statement: When I feel like crying, I _____.
11. How could a friend be helpful to you?

Appendix C – Questions for Teens (Week 3)

1. Before the death, my biggest responsibility was_____.
Today it's _____.
2. Before the death, my most loved possession was possession _____.
Today my most loved possession is_____.
3. Before the death, my biggest fear was _____.
Today it's _____.
4. What about you has changed lately without your permission?
5. If you could change how you were told of the death, what would you do differently?
6. How do other members of your family express their grief?
7. How do you feel when someone says, "I know just what you're going through?"
8. How has your success in school been influenced by this death?
9. If you could change parts of the funeral, what would you do differently?
10. Describe one of the most special sympathy cards or letters you received?
11. When you feel like expressing your grief, whom do you choose to be with and why?
12. What advice have you received that was helpful for you in coping with your grief?
13. Anger is a common response to loss and grief. Give a recent example of such anger in your life.
14. In what ways have your hopes and plans for the future changed as a result of the death?
15. Describe what it is like for you to visit the cemetery.
16. Complete this statement: "When I feel like crying, I _____."
17. What advice would you give a funeral director or minister in terms of helping grieving people, especially young people?

Submitted by: BRIDGES: A Center for Grieving Children

Appendix D – Writing Prompts for Goodbye Letter (Week 4)

Dear...

I remember when...

The hardest part about your death for me is...

It would have been nice if...

I'm really sorry for...

My best time with you was...

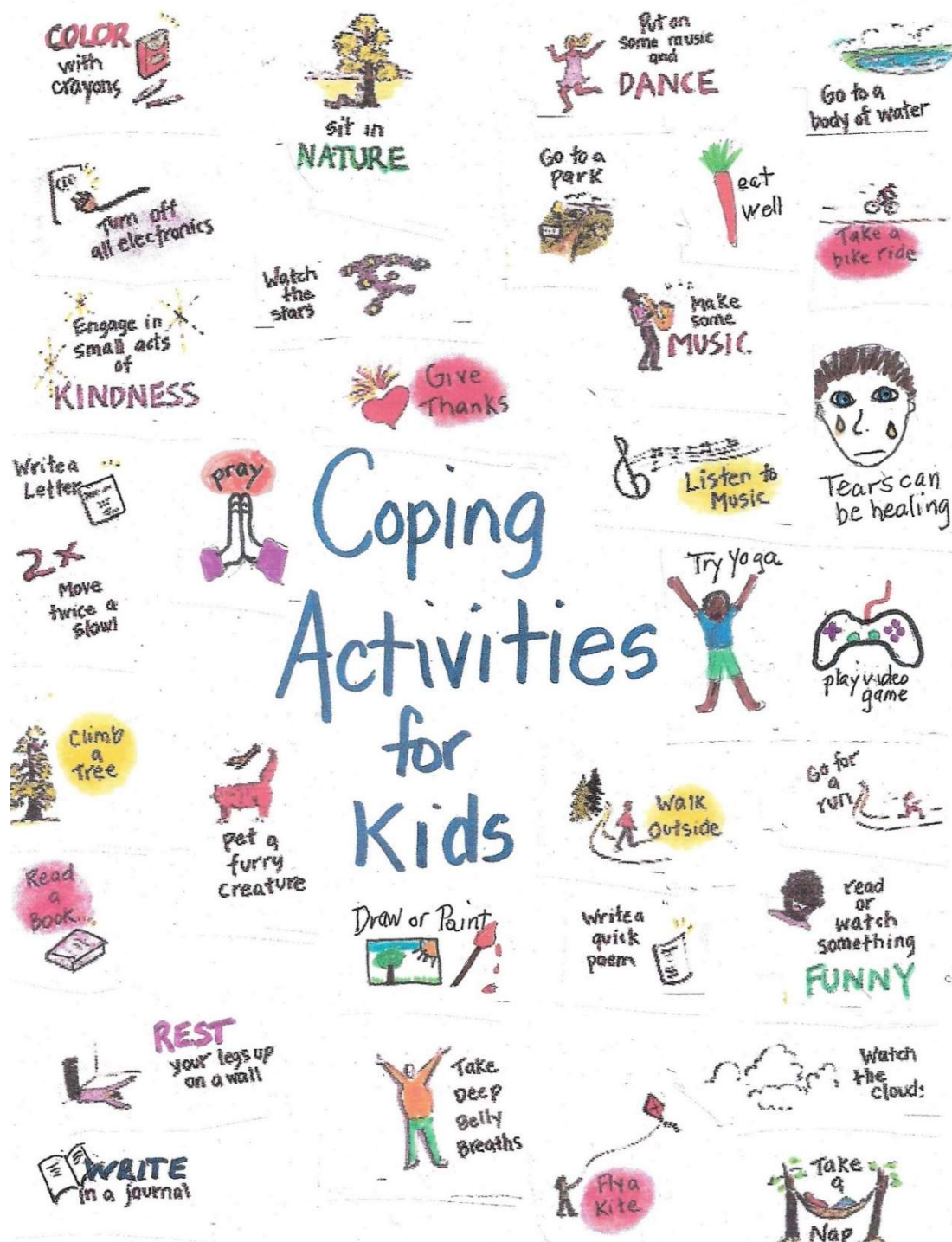
If you were right here now, I would...

Thank you for...

One thing I'd like you to know...

One of the things I miss most is...

Appendix E – Coping Activities for Kids (Week 5)



Appendix F – 50 Ways to Take a Break (Week 5)

