General Resources for Grieving Children

There are vast numbers of books and resources available to help children cope with loss. Individual leaflets, books (related to age) and bereavement resources can be found in detail on these sites, with particular reference to grief and how it differs at various ages and stages of development. You will also find further guides on the grieving process as it relates to different family members (i.e. parent, grandparent, sibling, etc).

Dougy Center
www.dougy.org
The Dougy Center provides support in a safe place where children, teens, young adults, and their families grieving a death can share their experiences. They provide support and training locally, nationally and internationally to individuals and organizations seeking to assist children in grief. They are supported solely through private support from individuals, foundations and companies. The Dougy Center does not charge a fee for its services.

National Association of School Psychologists
www.nasponline.org/educators/index.asp
The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) is the premier source of knowledge, professional development, and resources, empowering school psychologists to ensure that all children and youth attain optimal learning and mental health. Search for “crisis and safety” then locate “Helping Children Cope with Loss, Death and Grief: tips for teachers and parents”

Cancer Specific Resources

Kids Konnected
www.kidskonnected.org
800.899.2866
Kids Konnected provides complimentary counseling, summer camps, bereavement workshops and cancer educational tools for children and teens that have a parent with cancer, or have lost a parent to cancer. Kids Konnected was founded on the premise that when a parent gets cancer, the entire family is affected, especially the children.

Support Groups

Gary’s Place for Kids
www.garysplace.com
949.348.0548
Provides ongoing grief support for children, ages 3 to 18 and their families, who have experienced the loss of a loved one due to a death, enabling them to express and process their feelings, reach grief adjustment and lead productive lives. South Orange County location.

KIDS4AD
www.kids4ad.com
An email support group that provides a safe place for kids to help each other deal with grief and loss. It provides opportunity to share and view artwork and stories and for parents and kids to ask questions and find answers. Additional information is provided on the parent site www.GriefNet.org.

Bereavement Camps for Kids

Camp Erin
www.moyerfoundation.org/programs/camperin.aspx
Camp Erin, created and funded by The Moyer Foundation, is the largest nationwide network of bereavement camps for children and teens ages 6-17 who have experienced the death of someone close to them. It is a weekend-long experience filled with traditional, fun, camp activities combined with grief education and emotional support -- facilitated by grief professionals and trained volunteers. At Camp Erin, children are comforted knowing that there are other children who understand exactly what they are feeling and experiencing. At Camp Erin, grieving children have an opportunity to address their feelings and memorialize their loved ones. They are provided with tools and resources for use during and after camp, including memories and friendships that last long after camp is complete.

Comfort Zone Camp
www.comfortzonecamp.org/locations/california
Comfort Zone Camp is a nonprofit bereavement camp that transforms the lives of children who have experienced the death of a parent, sibling, or primary caregiver. The free camps include confidence building programs and age-based support groups that break the emotional isolation grief often brings. Comfort Zone Camps are offered to children 7-17, and are held year-round in California, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Virginia.
Talking with children about death must be geared to their developmental level and sensitive to their capacity to understand the situation. Children will be aware of the reactions of the adults around them. These reactions can actually shape how the child will respond to the tragedy. The range of emotions may include:

- Emotional shock and often apparent lack of feelings. This can serve to help the child detach from the pain of the situation.
- Regressive, or immature, behaviors such as difficulty separating from adult caregivers, needing to be rocked or held, wanting to sleep in a parent’s bed or difficulty completing age-appropriate tasks (i.e. bed wetting, language regression).

Acting out behavior that reflects the child’s feelings of fear, anger or frustration. This behavior may allow the child to feel that they are exerting control over the situation.

Repeating the same questions over and over, often because the information is so hard to believe and accept.

### Expressions of Grief

#### Help Children Cope with Death

Explain what “dead” means. Keep it as simple as possible. You can say “the body stopped working.” Avoid saying the person “went to sleep” or “went away” as this may create fear about sleeping and/or hope that the person might return.

Tell the truth. Be honest and try to be specific; do not distort the truth. Honesty about an illness process can help calm the child’s fears by reassuring them that a cold is different from cancer.

Allow children to tell their story and be a good listener. Tell the child that it is ok to cry or feel angry or sad.

Allow children to see you or other adults express emotions. This can serve to help the child feel safe. Let them know how they can help.

### Understanding of Illness

#### Age Group

- **Infants and Toddlers**
- **Preschoolers**
- **Early Elementary School (5-9)**
- **Middle School (10-13)**
- **High School (14 - adulthood)**

#### Cognitive Understanding of the Illness

- **Infants and Toddlers**
  - May see death as reversible. May see death as a “monster” that takes someone away. Still some magical thinking but understands death is final. May see death as a “monstrous writhing thing” or “a sick body.”
  - May see death as a “monster” that takes someone away. Still some magical thinking but understands death is final. May develop an interest in the causes of death.

- **Preschoolers**
  - Have some understanding of death as final and that certain situations can result in death. Death is perceived as something that happens to others.
  - May see death as a “monster” that takes someone away. Still some magical thinking but understands death is final. May develop an interest in the causes of death.

- **Early Elementary School (5-9)**
  - May see death as a “monster” that takes someone away. Still some magical thinking but understands death is final. May develop an interest in the causes of death.

- **Middle School (10-13)**
  - May experience variety of emotions including acting out & self-injurious behaviors to express anger. May become irritable, sad, fearful, complain of headaches, stomachaches. May have separation anxiety. May have poor grades, poor concentration, withdrawal.

- **High School (14 - adulthood)**
  - May experience variety of emotions including acting out & self-injurious behaviors to express anger. May become irritable, sad, fearful, complain of headaches, stomachaches. May have separation anxiety. May have poor grades, poor concentration, withdrawal.

### Helpful Parental Responses

#### Age Group

- **Infants and Toddlers**
  - May not need more details about how the person died. Encourage child to ask questions and reassure them that you will be there for them.

- **Preschoolers**
  - May need more details about how the person died. Encourage child to ask questions and reassure them that you will be there for them.

- **Early Elementary School (5-9)**
  - May need more details about how the person died. Encourage child to ask questions and reassure them that you will be there for them.

- **Middle School (10-13)**
  - Use books to explain illness, treatment and potential outcomes. Reassure them that they did nothing to cause the illness. Take time to listen and let them know that their feelings are important. Let them know that it is ok to show emotions by showing yours. Let them know how they can help.

- **High School (14 - adulthood)**
  - Use books to explain illness, treatment and potential outcomes. Reassure them that they did nothing to cause the illness. Take time to listen and let them know that their feelings are important. Let them know that it is ok to show emotions by showing yours. Let them know how they can help.

### Should a Child Attend a Funeral?

- Yes – if the child wants to and is old enough to understand the event.

#### Middle School (10-13)

- Use books to explain illness, treatment and potential outcomes. Reassure them that they did nothing to cause the illness. Take time to listen and let them know that their feelings are important. Let them know that it is ok to show emotions by showing yours. Let them know how they can help.

- Address issues of possible death even if child does not bring it up.

### Memorial Ideas

- **Infants and Toddlers**
  - May seek out friends or adults outside of the family. Guide through grief process and help identify coping skills. Provide privacy as needed but set appropriate limits. Provide plenty of verbal and physical expressions of love. Talk about role changes in the family if appropriate.

- **Middle School (10-13)**
  - Encourage them to talk about their feelings. Teens may feel that it is easier to talk to friends or adults outside of the family. Guide through grief process and help identify coping skills. Provide privacy as needed but set appropriate limits. Provide plenty of verbal and physical expressions of love. Talk about role changes in the family if appropriate.

- **High School (14 - adulthood)**
  - Encourage them to talk about their feelings. Teens may feel that it is easier to talk to friends or adults outside of the family. Guide through grief process and help identify coping skills. Provide privacy as needed but set appropriate limits. Provide plenty of verbal and physical expressions of love. Talk about role changes in the family if appropriate.