

Grief and Loss in the School Classroom:

**Helpful Things to Know
What to Say
Some Do's and Don'ts
Practical Activities to Assist Kids**

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BCEC
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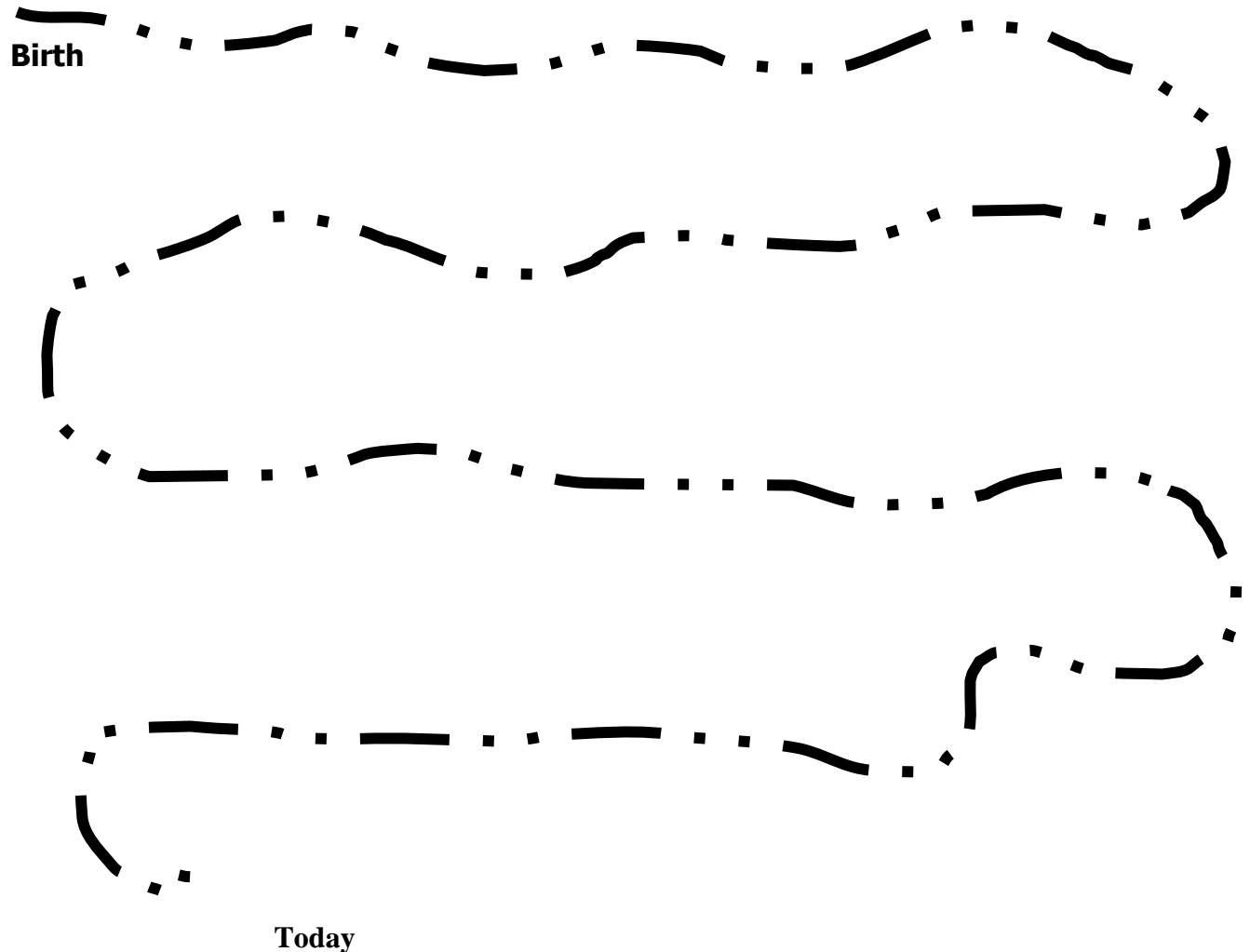
Starting at the Beginning: My Issues of Grief and Loss

Far too often, especially in Western society where we daily experience a culture of “denial of death”, we tend to impose on others our own issues about loss and death, rather than allowing people to mourn and grieve in their own way, at their own pace.

It is helpful, therefore, to name and acknowledge our own loss and bereavement before looking at ways we can be of help to others. Then at least, we can be alert to when our own issues begin to intrude on what we say and do when helping others to grieve, adjust to and memorialise the loss into their lives.

Exercise 1: Whirlpools and Waterfalls on My Life Journey

Journey down the river of your life so far, starting at its source, marking in the waterfalls of loss and whirlpools of grief you have endured (and from which you may not have yet recovered).



Some examples of “losses” in life that people can grieve: leaving the womb; starting school; new brother or sister; moving home; change of school; grandparent dies; pet dies; parents separate; friendship ends; changing

teacher; changing friends; parent loses job; failed exams; lost assignment; leaving school; lower than expected OP score; missing out on a first choice university place; choosing a career path; broken limb; infectious disease; debilitating illness; loss of bodily function- hearing, sight, separation, divorce, family feuding, disabled child.

Exercise 2: Issues Around My Loss and Grief Responses

| Loss | Age | Experiences During, After | Unanswered Questions | What Changed |
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| Loss | Age | Experiences | Unanswered Questions | What Changed |
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Why Interventions with Children are Important (Even when relatives object)

(From Ward,1996)

- Children need details, simple, but truthful, about death- e.g. about funerals, coffins, burial, cremation, the difference between death and sleep.
The evidence suggests strongly that the mourning of children- no less than adults- is commonly characterised by persisting memories and images of the dead person and by repeated recurrences of yearning and sadness, especially at family reunions and anniversaries, or when a current relationship seems to be going wrong.
- Children can make ready scapegoats for distraught parents or relatives or siblings to lay blame for a death or loss. Such cases are the majority cause of a morbid sense of guilt in a child.
- There are situations where a child can easily reach the conclusion that they are to blame for a death – e.g. cross infection- and only discussion with an appropriate adult will enable them to see this in its proper perspective.
- A child is in no position, as adults are, to institute inquiries to clarify facts or obtain more detailed information. They are often at the mercy of what relatives decide to tell them.
- A child is at a great disadvantage if adults or relatives are unsympathetic to his/her yearning, sorrow or anxiety. A child is rarely in a position, unlike an adult, to seek further for understanding and comfort if initial attempts are not successful.
- Children have less knowledge and understandings of life and death issues. Children can make false inferences from information they receive, especially if it is cloaked in euphemism and figures of speech.
- In the great majority of cases where children are described as having failed totally to respond to news of a death, both the information given and the opportunity to discuss its significance were so inadequate the child failed to grasp the nature of what had happened.
- Just when a child needs most the patience and understanding of the adults around him, these adults are likely to be least fit to give it.

- Because of some family messages about how to grieve:
 - Just carry on as usual (back to school etc)
 - Don't make a fuss (Granny wouldn't want it)
 - Grief is a private matter
 - Children don't need to grieve
 - Children don't need their innocence spoiled by grisly facts
 - Adults don't share their grief with children
 - Lets forget all about it
 - Its morbid to talk about the dead or death

(Gordon in Smith & Pennell p123)

- In Koocher's test, 40% of children in the pre-operational level thought that dead creatures could be brought back to life.
- Pre schoolers view death as temporary and reversible.

- Preschoolers' thinking is still centered very much on self and loss can be viewed in terms of their own needs: "Who is going to take care of me?"
- Broader support systems such as the school and community are important to the child's recovery from the trauma of parental death. (Saravay, 1991)

Young People and Grief

Part (i): Children Do Grieve!

- Most professionals agree that the ability to grieve is acquired in childhood as the ego functions mature and the child is able to comprehend the finality of death.
- But there has been a lengthy and often contradictory debate among professionals as to when children acquire this capacity.
- On one side, people such as Wolfenstein (1966) believe that the capacity to mourn is not acquired until adolescence when a person is fully differentiated.
- On the other side of this debate, Bowlby (1963, 1980) posits that children as young as six months experience grief reactions resembling those seen in adults.
- A middle position, represented by Furman (1964) places the capacity to mourn at around 3.5 to 4 yrs of age.
- For the purists of psychoanalysis, children cannot mourn because they have "limited ego capacities such as reality testing and lack of control of id tendencies".
- Other therapists do not see mourning in terms of outcome, but rather as a broad spectrum of responses set into motion with the death or loss of a loved one. Some go as far to say that it is not necessary for a child to have a realistic concept of death or loss in order to grieve.
- They argue that the focus should be placed on separation and the emotional response to separation.
- Despite differences, however, most would agree that the child must have achieved a coherent mental representation of important attachment figures as well as object constancy for mourning to occur.
- Most children develop these capacities around 3-4 yrs of age.

Part (ii): The Grief Process of Children (Carr, 2000)

| Grief Process | Underlying Theme | Behavioural expressions of grief processes |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Shock | I am stunned by the loss | Complete lack of affect Difficulty with engaging emotionally with others Poor concentration and poor school work. Can last minutes, days, even months. |
| Denial | The person/thing is not dead/gone | Reporting seeing/hearing absent person. Carrying on conversations with the departed. Making future plans involving the departed. |
| Yearning and Searching | I must find the departed/lost one | Wandering or running away Frantic searching Contacting relatives. Disorganisation/panic |
| Loss, Emptiness, Sadness | I am sad, hopeless and lonely because I have lost someone/something on whom I depended. | Persistent low mood, tearfulness, low energy and lack of activity. Appetite and sleep disruption. Regression- loss of connectedness Poor concentration and poor school work. Takes place over time. |
| Anger | I am angry because the person/thing I needed has abandoned me. | Aggression, tantrums, defiance, delinquency, acting out behaviour. Explosive emotions. Conflict with parents, siblings, teachers and peers. Drug or alcohol abuse Poor concentration and poor school work. |
| Anxiety | I am frightened that the departed will punish me for causing their departure or my being angry with them. I am afraid that I too may die or be lost or sent away. | Separation anxiety, school refusal, regressed behaviour, bedwetting. Somatic complaints, hypochondriasis and agoraphobia associated with the fear of accidents. Poor concentration and poor schoolwork. May fear loving again due to risk of loss. |
| Guilt, self-blame and Bargaining | It is my fault that the person/thing is gone, so I should die. Or if I die, they may come back. | Suicidal behaviour: "Take me instead". Self harm. "I wish" or "If only" statements Bargaining with God about being good. |
| Relief | I'm glad it's all over. | Normal body response to periods of tension built up after prolonged suffering. May feel guilty for feeling this relief. Confusion that it is possible to feel relieved, yet still love the departed. |
| Acceptance Reconciliation | I loved and lost the person/thing that is gone and now I must find a new sense of meaning in life and carry on without them | Return to normal behavioural routines. (Up to two years for children and adults) Sense of release from departed Capacity to enjoy life Recognition of the reality and finality of death. |

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| | while cherishing the memory. | |
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Part (iii): What Children Need to Learn About Grief and Loss

O'Rourke & Worzby, (1996)

Children need to learn that:

- There are many types of loss
- When they experience a significant loss, they will grieve
- Grief is a normal process that takes time
- There is no timetable for resolving loss
- There is no one way to grieve and grieving is personal
- Working through grief can be difficult, but they can do it
- They can express their grief many ways- through pictures, talk, writing etc
- Anger, sadness, loneliness, guilt, frustration and numbness are normal feelings
- They may experience highs and lows
- They are not going crazy even though they may feel disorganised and confused
- They can and should take time from their grieving
- They must continue to eat properly and do healthy things
- With time and work, things will get better.

Part (iv): Worden's Tasks of Mourning for Children

Worden, W.J., (1996)

Task 1: To Accept the Reality of the Loss

Like adults, children must believe that the deceased is indeed dead and will not return to life before they can deal with the emotional impact of a loss, or the lost situation one is gone and will not return.

To negotiate the first task of mourning, children need to be told about the death in ways that are accurate and in language that is age appropriate, or how the situation has changed in very concrete terms.

They also need to be told repeatedly over time. The repetitive questions that children ask about death and loss are a way for them to grapple with the reality of death and loss as well as a test to be sure that the story has not changed.

Children who are not given accurate information make up a story to fill in the gaps. Sometimes this can be more extreme and more frightening to the child than what actually happened.

Task II: To experience the pain or emotional aspects of the loss.

It is necessary to acknowledge and work through the variety of emotions associated with the loss or these affects will manifest in other ways, perhaps somatically or in aberrant behaviour patterns.

Children between the ages of 5 and 7 years are a particularly vulnerable group. Their cognitive development enables them to understand something of the permanency of death, but they still lack the ego and social skills to deal with the intensity of the feelings of loss.

Affects experienced by children are similar to those of adults. A child's ability to process the pain of loss will be influenced by observing the adult's experience of this process. **It is counter-productive, no matter how well-intentioned, to "shield" people from experiencing the emotions associated with grief and loss.**

Task III: To adjust to an environment in which the lost one is missing

The nature of this adjustment is determined by the roles and relationships that the lost one played in the child's life, as well as in the life of the family.

For most children, the loss of a mother results in more daily changes than the loss of a father. These changes significantly affect the child's emotional outlook and create major disruptions to which the child must adjust.

For children, this adjustment goes on over time. As they mature into adolescence, they realise in new ways what has been lost to parental departure. (Silverman 1989)

Mourning for a childhood loss can be revived at many points in life, especially when important life events reactivate the loss.

Task IV: To relocate the lost one within their life and to find ways to memorialise them.

The widely accepted notion that the bereaved need to "let go" of the lost one confuses our understanding of the mourning process. The task facing the bereaved is not to give up on the relationship with the one lost, **but to find a new and appropriate place for the lost in their emotional lives- one that enables them to go on living effectively in the world.** (Worden 1991)

The child must be helped to transform the connection to the lost one and to place the relationship in a new perspective, rather than to separate from the lost one.

Each child will negotiate these tasks in his or her own individual way.

There is a wide range of "normal" responses to the death of a parent or loss in general.

Part (v): Age-Related Grief Responses

- Much of the work on the development of the concept of death has been guided by Piagetian theory, which argues that the child's concept of death is constrained by the availability of certain cognitive skills. (Pre-Operational, Concrete reasoning, Abstract thinking)
- Empirical studies show that the evolution of the concept of death follows the broad pattern suggested by Piaget, but there are many exceptions because children's experience of death also has an impact.
- In a study of children ranging in age from 6-15, Koocher (1973) found that concepts of death corresponded to Piaget's preoperational, concrete operational and formal thought stages. (Orton 1997)

Children Aged 4 to 8 (Magical Thinking stage)

- Once realisation has begun, enter a period of shock for a few hours up to a week. (Though this may come and go as they are distracted by other things)
- Children at this age are more socially aware.
- They have greater intellectual capacity.
- This is the age of magical thinking, when wishes can come true, and fairy stories. Death is avoidable and reversible.
- May need to be asked to explain back what they have been told, to allow for misconceptions based on "magical thinking"- eg "bang bang you're dead" – and then getting up again.
- They may feel responsible for the death- egocentric stage.
- May be frightened and remorseful that their thoughts made death/loss occur.
- There is now a social impact- reaction of peers, school, society.
- Need simple, direct explanations which draw from the child's own experience.
- Are particularly interested in biological facts and physical details about death.
- May experience a compelling urge to recover lost one- as in fairy tales- and live happily ever after.
- May re-enact cause of event or part of the funeral.
- May become fearful that they will die themselves, or disappear or get lost.
- May experience periods of panic and apprehension.
- May become withdrawn and gaze into space for long periods.
- May not wish to let parents out of their sight.
- Affected by their cultural/ethnic/religious background.

Children Aged 9 to 12 (Concrete Thinking stage)

- Once realisation has begun, enter a period of shock for a few hours up to a week
- Increased cognitive capacity- some ability to deal with subtleties or euphemisms.
- Awareness of the finality of death- it is common to all things. Death is final, universal, inevitable.
- The frightening possibility of their own death arises.
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- May be limited in their actual experiences of death and coping with their emotions in response to such a loss.
- Possibility of display of psychosomatic symptoms in order to draw attention to their distress.
- May bite nails, pick themselves, cut themselves, twiddle with hair.
- May have sleep problems, possibly nightmares
- May develop a phobia about hospitals, doctors, nurses.
- Loss of concentration
- May not know appropriate ways to express sadness and anger
- May be frightened to ask questions and only talk to "outsiders", or conversely, only want to talk about the tragedy to immediate family.
- Often deny their loss and 'get on with life'.
- Affected by their cultural background.

Adolescents (Abstract Thinking)

- Once realisation has begun, enter a period of shock for a few hours up to a week
- Reactions approximate those of adulthood
- Reactions compounded by rapid physical and emotional development.
- May seek to idolise or "beatify" the lost one.
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- Naturally seek independence and rebel against adults, yet can be confusion and conflicting emotions arising from need for increased dependence on surviving relatives.
- Some report feeling suicidal and even make life attempts
- Question the meaning of life, faith, and purpose in life
- Wish to discuss death and have no unspoken barriers
- May explore issues of life after death, the occult and ritualistic behaviour
- Affected by cultural background.

Some Do's

Adapted from Barbara Ward et al., (1993). *Good grief. Exploring feelings, loss and death with under elevens*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

- **Do recognise** that there will be children in every group who will have experienced the loss or death of someone or something close to them- a parent, grandparent, pet, a family or a home.
- **Do reassure** that tears are natural and normal. Remind that trusted people are available for further consultation at any time.
- **Do treat** bereavement (grieving for a loss of something or someone significant) as a natural and normal part of life. Grieving is natural and important for recovery.
- **Do take** cues from the group on the depth to which they want to go.
- **Do be aware** of children who may need extra support- gigglers and cynics are often the most scared.
- **Do be aware** of your own reactions and level of comfort with tears, feelings about death, silences and try not to let them interfere with the group's work.
- **Do convey** to other staff (teaching and non-teaching) what you are doing, so they may be sensitive to the needs of the group.
- **Do create** an atmosphere of safety and trust where children feel free to share their feelings. A circle, in pairs, small groups or the whole class are appropriate. Every person should be able to make eye contact.
- **Do allow** each person in the group the freedom to participate to the level to which they are most comfortable.
- **Do use** a variety of symbols and strategies in rituals to allow for "multiple intelligences" and the different capacities of children for communicating feelings.
- **Do let** your genuine concern and caring show. Children are reassured that grieving is "normal".
- **Do say** you are sorry about what happened and their pain.
- **Do admit** your own lack of understanding about death- be honest.
- **Do allow** different children different amounts of time to recover.
- **Do take** opportunities to educate about death as part of life across the curriculum.

- **Do continue** to subtly “check in” on people, even if they rebuff your approaches.
- **Do assure** them that you are just checking and are available if needed.
- **Do be** still and listen. Create safe environments for people to talk, or just sit in your company.
- **Do allow** them to express as much unhappiness as they are feeling at the moment and are willing to share.
- **Do encourage** them to be patient with themselves and not to impose any “shoulds” on themselves.
- **Do allow** them to talk about their loss as much and as often as they want to.
- **Do talk** about the special, endearing qualities of what they have lost.
- **Do reassure** them that they did everything that they could.

Some Don'ts

- **Don't** let your own sense of helplessness keep you from reaching out.
- **Don't** say you know how they feel. (Unless you have experienced exactly what they have, you probably don't).
- **Don't** use euphemisms such as “passed away”, “fallen asleep”, or “sleeping with the angels”: it can cause confusion and fear in children.
- **Don't** tell people that they have to leave the lost one behind and “move on”. Rather help them to adjust to the loss and re-contextualise the lost one in their lives.
- **Don't** presume that there is a set time to “get over it” or anything else which implies a judgement about their feelings. People never get over it- they adjust to the loss at their own pace.
- **Don't** impose your own framework of bereavement on others- provide scope for alternative ways of grieving.
- **Don't** tell them what they should do or feel.
- **Don't** change the subject when they mention their loss.

- **Don't** avoid mentioning their loss out of fear of reminding them. (They haven't forgotten it).
- **Don't** try to find something positive about the loss.
- **Don't** point out that at least they still have...
- **Don't** say they can always get/have another...
- **Don't** suggest they should be grateful for their...
- **Don't** tell people it was "God's will" or "God wanted the person more than they did".

What Do I Say?

How do we explain death?

- "Neither dogmas of immortality nor statements that death is the end of everything are likely to be of help to children and adolescents. Neither is 'I don't know'." (Mitchell)
- "No one yet knows for certain" is in keeping with the natural urge of the exploring child. Say *"People are still trying to find out, just as they are trying to find out what is in space. Probably when you are older, you'll go on trying to find out too, but the brain is limited and can't find out everything."*

FAQ'S:

"What does Dead mean?"

- Primary school children tend to concentrate on what happens to the body.
Say: *does not feel or think as you do because he/she is dead and that means he/she does not have feelings anymore. They do not breathe anymore. Their heart has stopped, all parts of their body have stopped working and their body is cold and will not move again. They cannot feel hot or cold, or that they are hurting or sick or well. They cannot think anymore either- about nice things or scary things, or good or bad things. They do not need to be held or hugged or fed or played with anymore because being dead means that their body has stopped working and is of no use to them anymore. This happens to everything that is alive.*

"Is a dead person sleeping?"

Say: *When we sleep, we are resting our bodies. Our heart and other parts of our bodies do not work as hard. But they keep working. Sleep gives us strength for another day at school or play. When a person dies, the body parts stop working all together. There will be no waking up. The body's work is finished. So sleep and death are different.*

"What happens to the dead body?"

Explain that there are two aspects of death: (i) the body and (ii) the spiritual.

Say: *In our country, there are two things we can choose to do with the dead body. We can have it put in a special box called a coffin and, often after a special prayer service, bury it in the ground in a place called a cemetery, which is a special place set aside for burying people.*

and

Another way is to turn the body into ashes, which is called cremation and that happens at a special place called a crematorium. The body is put into its special box and after a special service, it is put into a very small room which contains a very hot fire and this changes the body into ashes. Then, the ashes can be scattered in a special place, or buried in the ground, or kept in a special container called an urn.

and

People called funeral directors arrange for these things to happen.

"But what happens to them once their body dies?"

There are three viewpoints for the Spiritual aspect:

Say: *Nobody really fully understands what happens to people after death, but many people believe that life continues in a different way. (To concretise this different way, images such as chrysalis-to-butterfly and the story book **Waterbugs and Dragonflies** are used). The story of Jesus being different post-resurrection reaffirms this difference.*

Say: *Many people believe and all religions teach that humans have a spirit or soul and that the spirit or soul of the person lives on after death and either goes to another place or returns as the spirit of another being on earth.*

Say: *Some people believe that the death of the body is also the end of life for that person- that their spirit dies too.*

"What is heaven like?"

Say: *We do not know what heaven looks like. We cannot tell you where heaven is. We know our bodies on earth wear out and die. Because we believe it is our spirits that live on, we believe that we shall not be sad again, or experience troubles or difficulties we have on earth. We believe heaven is the place where God is. Because God is love, heaven will be a place full of love.*

"Why do babies and some people die young and others live to be very old?"

Say: *We often don't know for certain why this happens. It does seem unfair. We do know that the bodies of some people, even babies, wear out very quickly or sometimes things go wrong with parts of their bodies that causes the whole body to stop working. Most people live to old age. We can only try to take care of our own bodies and never act to cause hurt to another person to help our body to work as long as possible. Sometimes things happen to people and they have no way of stopping it. Everything that is born will die sometime.*

"Why do some people kill themselves?"

Say: *There are some people who feel that there are too many bad or wrong things happening in their lives and they start to think that best way to stop those things hurting them is to end their life. When we are well, we try to stay safe and alive. They become so sad or sick or unhappy that they cannot think clearly anymore. Sometimes they harm themselves as a way of calling out for help. They are so worried or confused that they forget that suicide is never the best way to solve those problems, or call for help. They forget that once we are dead, no one can help us and we cannot change our minds later.*

Bass and Gasper Funeral Home Indiana Supplied these Q&A:

(<http://www.bassgasper.com>)

Questions

1. **Why do people die?**
2. **Does death hurt?**
3. **When someone dies are they being punished?**
4. **Why can't doctors and hospitals stop someone from dying?**
5. **Where do dead people go?**
6. **Why did someone I love have to die and not someone else?**
7. **Is death like sleeping?**
8. **Why do some people die when they are very young?**
9. **Why do grown-ups die before they get old?**
10. **How long will I live?**
11. **Do people die because they are unhappy?**
12. **Will I ever see the person again who died?**
13. **How can I stop feeling sad?**
14. **Why are people buried when they die?**
15. **What are funerals for?**

Why do people die?

Dying is a natural part of life. All living things-plants, animals, even people are special parts of God's natural world. Nature almost always gives us long, healthy lives. Like all other living things, though, people grow old and reach the end of life. This is called death or dying.

Does death hurt?

Doctors tell us that death is not usually painful. Especially with old people, dying is almost always quiet. When someone dies in an accident, they often feel no pain at all since death comes so quickly. Even when someone is sick or hurt for a long time before death, special medicines and treatments take away much of the pain.

When someone dies, are they being punished?

Death is never a punishment. It is almost always natural. Time wears out important parts of our bodies. After many, many years these parts cannot work anymore. People die when these parts, the heart, for example, stop working. God gave us wonderfully strong bodies that usually last a long time. Sometimes sickness makes them stop working before a person becomes old. This is not a punishment though. No one dies because God is angry with them. A person dies when an important part of their body wears out and stops working.

Why can't doctors or hospitals stop someone from dying?

Many times they do. Yet sometimes, even though they have tried their best, someone dies. Doctors help people live long, healthy lives. Because of what doctors have learned, people live much longer now than they did when your grandparents were children. Hospitals help people too. Doctors and nurses work in hospitals to make sick and injured people better. People go to hospitals to become healthy, not to die.

Where do dead people go?

Most people believe that when someone dies, part of that person lives on and goes to Heaven. This part of us is not like a heart or brain or any other part of us that a doctor takes care of. It is the part of us that lets us feel love and happiness. It never gets sick. It never wears out. This part is called the spirit, or the soul. We cannot see someone's soul. We cannot see Heaven either. But we have faith in them. Faith is believing in something we cannot see or measure.

Why did someone I love have to die and not someone else?

Sometimes death doesn't seem fair. Of all the people in the whole world, why did this one special person have to die? Almost everyone, no matter who they are or where they live, is loved by others. Almost everyone will be missed by others when they die. Right now someone just like you somewhere else in the world is asking the same question. Maybe if you were with that other person you could help them understand that we all will someday lose someone we love.

Is death like sleeping?

Dying is nothing at all like sleep. People, animals too, sleep to rest and stay healthy. Sleep gives hard working parts of our bodies time to store up strength. Think of how good you feel after sleeping. You feel good because your body is rested and ready for another day. When someone dies, their body stops working. It is not resting. It's job is over.

Why do some people die when they are very young?

Sometimes, but not very often, death comes to a child. Illness can make this happen. So can a very bad accident. A young person's death makes us especially unhappy. We feel that it isn't fair. We feel that everyone should live a long, happy life. We know that we will miss a young friend, or sister, or brother more than we might miss anyone else. We may even feel sad because we sometimes argued or fought with that child. All of these feelings are normal. Every young person has them, just as you do. But you must

leave room for other feelings also. Remember that you often made that child happy. Even though that child's life was not as long as yours will be, it was a mostly happy life, because of loving friends like you.

Why do grown-ups die before they get old?

Most grown-ups are strong and healthy. They will live until they are very old. Sometimes, though, a grown-up's heart or other important part of their body stops working. Being big and strong doesn't always help. It is not the person's fault. It is not God's fault. It is not your fault.

How long will I live?

No one knows how long he or she will live. We do know that we will not live forever. We know that when we grow old, death grows closer. This does not mean that people worry all their lives about growing old and dying. As we grow older we learn more about living and dying. The more we learn, the less we have to worry. We know many old people who are very happy. They have learned not to worry about dying. How long will you live? Probably a long, long time. Almost everyone does.

Do people die because they are unhappy?

Unhappiness can sometimes make us feel sick for awhile. But almost no one dies because they are unhappy. Remember the times when you have been unhappy. Sooner or later you feel better again. You are able to smile and laugh again. Everyone goes through times like this.. It has nothing to do with dying.

Will I ever see that person again who died?

When someone dies they do not come back to life again. This is why people become so sad when someone they love dies. They miss the person who is gone. Right now you may miss someone who has died. Maybe you will always miss them. But you will not always feel sad about it. You will understand after a while that the person may have gone to Heaven. Some day, a long, long time from now, you may be with that person in Heaven.

How can I stop feeling sad?

It is natural to feel sad when someone you love dies. You miss them. You may feel lonely. You may feel confused too. Most people-not just children-feel the same way when someone they love dies. Sadness is something like the pain you feel when you hurt yourself. At first it hurts very much. But it will hurt less each day. Sooner than you

think, it will be gone. Then you will be able to think about the person who has died without feeling sad. Right now you are trying to understand more about death. This will take some of your sadness away. It helps to ask questions. It also helps very much to tell your family and friends how you feel. It helps most not to pretend. If you are sad, don't pretend you are not.

Why are people buried when they die?

After people die, we place their bodies in cemeteries. This is a gentle way to say good-bye to someone we love. A cemetery gives us a quiet, pretty place to come and think about that person. A visit to a cemetery can bring back pleasant memories.

What are funerals for?

One of the nicest things about being a person is that we are able to feel love for another person. This does not end when that person dies. Funerals are for sharing loving feelings about someone who has died. They give us the chance to remember with others the goodness and joy that person brought to our lives. This takes away some of the sadness that we all feel. It also helps us understand how much others care too.

Support Structures

- Identify and publish support structures **in your school**: people and their roles (adults and children), places, rituals, activities, resources
- **BCEC support structures** – Guidance & Counselling (Student Services) ; Counselling, Access to Centacare, Critical Incidents policy
- What structures exist:
 - in the parish
 - in the town- e.g. funeral directors, counselling services, community organisations, other church organisations
 - on the web? e.g. www.willowgreen.com
 - via phone? (Lifeline, Kid's Help Line)
- Who will support you? Who cares for the carers? Are there structures in your school to accommodate this?

Classroom, Individual and Group Strategies and Activities

1. Group Support /Healing Rituals

All children need to:

- **Receive accurate information**
- **Share their feelings**
- **Share their beliefs**
- **Grieve**
- **Take action**

Group activities and rituals, especially those which provide symbols to assist sharing beliefs and experiences, can assist in this process.

Group Rituals:

- Provide a safe supportive environment without worrying about the reactions of other family members.
- Provide support from peers and leaders
- Provide contact with bereaved peers re-assures they are not alone in the experience of loss.
- Help young people learn about death and correct faulty beliefs about loss.
- Are especially helpful for bereaved adolescents- bereavement support groups.

- Provide social support, which assists in diminishing emotional distress and levels of depression.

**Sharing beliefs in a group will also help deal with unhelpful myths and ideas.
(See sample ritual activities)**

2. Incorporating Death Studies in the Curriculum

Look for opportunities to present death, grief and loss as part of the process of living in every KLA: eg

- Teaching children to appreciate differing cultural and religious beliefs about life and death and the various ceremonies and rituals that support both will help children understand that death is very much part of life.
- In stories, films, poetry, art novels and current affairs make reference to and allow discussion of people suffering grief, loss and bereavement.
- In Science and Web of Life studies point out death as a natural part of the cycle of living.
- Health and Physical Education studies provide opportunities to examine sickness and death.
- Research Projects on Stonemasons, historical aspects of cemeteries; cultural aspects of bereavement; missing pets posters

Why Death Education?

- Children are better able to cope with death and its inevitability for all living creatures including themselves if they have been helped beforehand.
- They also benefit from knowing about the natural after effects of death and the practical reasons for having to dispose of the dead body. Attending a funeral of an acquaintance or distant relative can give parents and significant others the chance to answer questions without having to cope with their own feelings at the same time.
- It is also helpful for children to have some explanation of what happens at the funeral service.
- We need to use any opportunity to help children to develop a concept of death.- eg death of a pet can allow the child to see the stillness of the dead body and how the pet is changed in death. Burial rituals for pets can help a child understand burial rites for people when the time comes.
- We know that pre-school children can understand the concept of death if they are helped in this way. (Dyregrov, A. 1994)

Healing Rituals Used in the Containment of Grief and Loss

Gordon (1995), states that we cope better with stressful experiences if we have previously had the chance to take part in a similar occasion, but one in which we are less intensely involved. She argues that children are better able to cope with death and its inevitability for all living creatures including themselves if they have been helped beforehand. Rituals which allow this to happen in a safe and supported context are therefore of considerable benefit in building resilience and psychological strength. These purposes were served in the schools surveyed by the following rituals

- The community and/or family farewell ritual
- Class rituals and prayer experiences
- Year level rituals and symbolic actions
- Whole-school rituals: formal and informal
- Family rituals and symbolic actions
- Small group rituals that may occur spontaneously in the allocated prayer/safe spaces or elsewhere
- Individual rituals and symbolic actions in the safe space/sacred space.

Imber-Black (1998) argues that rituals allow strong emotions to be safely experienced at the same time that interpersonal connections are made. He states that a link has consistently been found between social isolation and mental health problems. The linking of past, present and future through ritual also has broad implications for therapy. Ritual provides fluidity between different time frames for people and groups embroiled or stuck in one time frame: in this case, communities were often stuck in the trauma of grief and loss. Ritual provided the opportunities for connection, dealing with the past and present, and looking to the future.

Even secular therapists stress the need to maintain the "sacredness" or special nature of where the rituals take place (Roberts, 1998). In the schools surveyed, provision was made for a variety of rituals in a variety of places, as it was acknowledged that different people will feel more comfortable or "safe" in different settings. Such places included

- An allocated prayer or withdrawal space with a staff member present
- Chapel/church
- Students' homerooms
- Classroom/s
- The Assembly area
- Place/s associated with the deceased/departed
- The site of death
- Outdoor natural settings
- River/creek/beach/bridge/hilltop/oval/parkland
- Art and drama rooms.

Memorial services formed a significant part of the ritualisation that occurred in the schools surveyed. They varied according to how closely groups were associated with the person they were grieving. Usually all class levels would compose a memorial ritual for a person associated with the school, but teachers would establish boundaries

considered appropriate for the age group and connection with the person. This ritualisation was often associated with the localised symbolic memorialisation of the person, which remained in place for varying periods of time. Examples from schools surveyed included placement of photographs, posters, flowers arrangements, plants, drawings, items associated with the person and displays of candles.

Frequently the dedication of a permanent memorial, or the anniversary of the event involved another ritual and symbolic action. Some examples of how communities have memorialised departed individuals include

- Rituals and symbolic actions to mark the anniversary of the loss
- Reference to deceased at significant rites of passage: e.g. graduation ceremonies, awards night, Easter celebrations.
- An obituary in school annual/magazine
- Tree planting/s
- Memorial gardens
- Rocks with plaques
- Memorial tiles on walls and paving tiles (walkway)
- Memorial seating
- Plaque on or near a place associated with the lost one
- Memory books- for family and school
- Books compiled from messages written before/after the death
- Shrine of remembrance/pictorial memoir in prominent place
- Drying and framing floral tributes for family & school
- Inclusion in memorial art wall/mosaic/stained glass
- Bursaries in memoriam
- Donations/fundraising in memoriam for significant charity
- Festivals/fun event on a once-off or annual basis
- Naming of building/room in memoriam.

Symbols and Symbolic Actions for Assisting Adjustment to Loss

Whiting (1998), states that the selection of appropriate symbols is typically achieved in one of three ways, namely: explicit client language; therapist choice based on themes or issues; or client choice. In the schools surveyed, all three of these methods were used to determine symbols appropriate to the group, time and place. These symbols included

- Memorabilia for/ from the family
- Memorabilia and symbols for and from friends (e.g. music, drink cup, lunch box, item of clothing)
- Memorabilia and selected symbols for and from class/es (e.g. desk/ folder/ artwork)
- Items for and from the deceased's association with the school (e.g. musical instrument, sporting item, uniform, jersey, hat)
- Banners/pall prepared for use at rituals
- PowerPoint presentation of special mementoes of departed.

Other symbols and symbolic acts used in schools and recorded in the literature include

Use of Sand Trays

Sand trays can help the young person to tell their story, explore their feelings, thoughts and situations and examine issues relating to their story. Working with symbols in the sand helps them gain a cognitive understanding of the elements or events occurring in their life.

Use of Miniature Animals

This is a projective technique (often associated with sand tray work), which focuses on exploring the inter-personal relationships of the adolescent where they select animals to represent key figures in those aspects of their lives which they are attempting to change.

Flowers/ Other symbolic mementoes

The placement of flowers and plants marks the new “sacred sites” of contemporary culture (Eyre, 2001). Often these are the only rituals left available to members of a post-religion community.

Candles

The burning of candles is a universal religious form of expression addressing the unanswerable question of “why?” An example is Grandparents Day where candles are lit for each grandparent, living and dead, or the lighting of candles for the departed in sacred spaces and classrooms. Others are the Candle Service memorialising lost children described by Heslop (2001) and Winston’s Candelight ceremony described by Stokes and Crossley (1995).

Public Contributions

Public contributions are one of the most instinctive responses by members of the broader community. It allows people to *do something*.

Permanent Memorials

Children can plan these for the school, e.g. a garden, plaque, sculpture, mural, or trees.

Anniversary Events

It is important the loss is marked at special anniversaries- e.g. end of year, graduation, or date of loss. Discretion is needed as to what level of commemoration occurs.

Use of Seasonal Colours and Symbols

Texts on bereavement often suggest use of seasonal colours as symbols for death being part of the cycle of life. For example:

- Autumn: colours such as orange, yellow, Autumn leaves
- Winter: black; white; cobalt/purple, a scarf, pinecones, driftwood, blackened firewood-heaters; bare branches
- Spring: green; seeds, flowers, butterflies, sunflowers

- Summer: red, blue, yellow (sand) beach ball, sunglasses, beach towel.

Balloons

Filled with either air or helium, they are useful metaphors for letting go, for affirmation, sending messages and celebration.

Paper Chains/ Paper Dolls

These can represent broken promises, hopes and dreams lost hands. Hearts can be used to make a chain or circle.

Mobiles

These can include symbols and be used for feeling safe and for group support.

Doors

Drawings of doors can be used as metaphors for one part of life closing and another opening.

Boxes

Boxes represent life's mysteries, surprises, hidden thoughts, feelings, buried pain and grief.

Symbolic actions were also used to assist a return to normal and to assist students to adjust to an environment in which the departed was missing and to relocate the person in their lives. These included:

- The symbolic cleansing/rededication of death site/associated places
- The symbolic removal/replacement of desk/table in classroom
- Placing floral tributes, message bears at dedication points
- Placing of symbols in classrooms and homerooms.

Informants to the survey suggested other interventions using symbolic objects in group and one-on-one activities such as:

Show and Tell

Group members bring to the group a picture or symbol they associate with the departed one. They share these objects and pictures.

Puppet Activities

Manipulating a puppet removes children from speaking for themselves and gives them an opportunity to project onto the puppet thoughts and feelings that may be difficult for them to own. It offers a safe distance, but is still an energised activity. Puppets can be made by the helper or children and can be as simple as using small paper bags. Puppets can be of each family member, including the deceased. Letting all group members interact can give the helper and child important insights into thoughts, feelings and

misperceptions current for the child. This is an activity for younger children and is more for use with individuals, though it can be adapted for classroom use.

The Symbolic Telephone

The telephone can also be used to fantasise a connection with an individual now dead, or far away. Children often use the telephone to connect with deceased loved ones, separated parents or even with significant acquaintances of earlier years. A certain safety exists in speaking to parents, siblings, a therapist or even oneself behind the one-way screen of the receiver. Because hearing voices on the telephone is expected, a telephone conversation becomes a socially acceptable way for a child to acknowledge inner fears by articulating them in the guise of another party on the line. This activity is limited to individual or small group work and is not really suited to classroom application.

The Emotional Barometer

The basic notion of this intervention is that children register on a scaled barometer each time they visit the counsellor or helper. The emotional barometer refers to a visual scale with happy faces. It is a valuable graphic aid to help children understand the concept of a rating scale from 1-10. The barometers can become a record of progress in working through the stages of grief if records are kept from previous registrations, or individual barometers are used. This activity could be adapted for use in a classroom or with a small group who are working through grief and loss together.

The Personal See Saw

A further intervention is the *see-saw* where negative and positive things are placed at each end of the see-saw to allow the student to see personal strengths and weaknesses; the degree of their ego-strength; the number of positive or negative aspects existing in their lives and which is predominant; awareness of the perceptions of others regarding the existing problems and areas of immediate concern.

Writing Activities to Contain Grief and Loss

Writing in "Safe Spaces"

A practice common to all of the schools represented in the survey was the provision of special "safe spaces" for students to visit whenever they felt the need over periods of time ranging from a few days to more than a week. Students could check themselves out of class to go to the safe space as often and for as long as they felt the need to be there. In these special spaces, students were free to journal, write letters to the deceased and/or to relatives of the deceased, or to write messages and prayers and attach them to "prayer/message trees" or to message boards or to place them in special message books. Graffiti walls or whiteboards were also used for a similar purpose. The "special space" was always supervised by an adult and an atmosphere of quiet was maintained. Purposes varied and, according to informants, were sometimes unclear. In some schools, provision of the space was therapeutic: it was for personal coming to

terms with the loss. In others, students were informed that the purpose of the space was to write messages, poems and reflections about the one being grieved for later presentation to relatives. In these cases, there seemed to be little provision for personal therapeutic writing. It seemed to be an intervention more suited to older students: that is, from the middle school level upwards. In one school, two spaces were created, the second being for a particular group of close friends who became the focus of special therapeutic interventions by the school counsellor before, during and after the death of one of their group. They used a white board in her room to express personal feelings and messages as part of their grieving process.

Journaling

Journaling is an activity that appeals to and can be used by children from about grade 6 and up. Students are provided with a notebook or paper or specially designed notepaper and encouraged to write down feelings, thoughts and questions about the lost loved one. Some children enjoy writing poems. If used therapeutically, students can be encouraged to write down dreams, especially dreams that involve the deceased. Another approach for classroom use is for teachers to distribute poems on loss and/or death and allow written reflection around them.

Letters

Writing letters to the deceased can be used, but discretion is needed, especially in terms of how young people view death. This is not an appropriate activity for young children, as letters to the deceased can introduce confusion about finality and irreversibility. The activity may be appropriate for younger students if the person has departed, rather than died. While letter writing helps in saying goodbye, teachers and counsellors must ensure students understand that "this is what we want to say, if the lost one could read and hear". For those who believe the spirit lives on, they can understand that they are addressing the person's spirit. Some schools chose to have students write to families of the deceased recalling happy memories of the deceased. These letters can include:

- Things people wanted to say to the one grieved
- Statements of caring to relatives of the one grieved
- The seeking of forgiveness from the one grieved
- Happy and sad memories about the one grieved
- Stories about family including the grieved member.

Rituals involving the letters used in schools included: burial, burning, being sent up in a helium balloon or collected into an album and given to relatives in a small presentation ceremony.

Lists

Worden (1996) suggests that lists are especially useful in assessing the children's understanding about death and the specifics regarding their own loss. They are appropriate for younger children and also may be useful in identifying and discussing misinformation about death or information about the person being grieved. The lists can be facts about the person's death, about death itself or even fantasies about the loved

one's death. This activity had not been used in any of the schools researched but is highly recommended in the literature.

Memory Books/Boxes

Memory Books or Memory Boxes are considered to combine the best of both writing and art activities. They are a scrapbook or collection of memories about the one being grieved: be it pets or grandparents, fellow students or teachers. Stories about the lost one can be written and included. Photographs, drawings and artefacts from activities undertaken with the lost one and special mementoes such as articles of jewellery, clothing, tools or equipment associated with them can be included. Phototherapy can be incorporated: that is, children can cut pictures out of magazines which remind them of the deceased. They can then talk about the picture rather than directly about the deceased. These reflections can also include negative memories of the deceased.

Those who have used this intervention suggest that it is best done as a family or group activity, because in this way memories are shared and remembered and group therapy happens because people can talk to each other in a ritualised manner, which in itself provides some boundaries and safety. While it might take some organisation and effort, this intervention is seen as useful, especially for children and young people, because it gives them something concrete to re-visit and review as they get on with relocating the lost one within their lives. The activity also helps young people overcome the fear that they will forget the person. Counsellors report that it is particularly effective for young people who have not yet gained the capacity for journaling or abstract thought.

Word Games

This is a classroom based, small group or individual intervention involving the use of word games and word-and-image association to assist young people with issues of emotional literacy. Use of symbols and images are particularly effective for younger students unable to express themselves verbally or in written formats. Examples from the literature (Dennison & Glassman, 1987), include:

- Word completion (A cloze exercise using words associated with death, loss and mourning)
- Saying Goodbye Chart (Faces with different emotions and appropriate captions)
- Opposites games (Assists in the naming and identification of emotions)
- Picture completion (Use of images rather than words to identify emotions)
- Crossword Puzzle
- Feeling Sad to Me is... (Colouring on body shapes where emotions associated with grief are felt and associating colours with emotions)
- Lifesaver Bouy (An activity about feeling safe using word association)
- Artemus is Anxious (Uses connector lines- word/feeling association).

Communities also came up with their own writing resources and activities. These and other suggestions from the literature are included below:

Saying Goodbye.

Children can look at ways we say goodbye in our society. They could study Obituary columns in newspapers, or poems written by adults and children about death, dying or loss. They could decide what they would write on a headstone for the deceased.

Thinking About the Future.

Young people can brainstorm or create a mind-map on what will be happening to them in a year's time, or five years' time. This helps them to realise that they can survive, that powerful feelings will change. They are also able to identify anxieties and insecurities they have now and for their future and how their future may or may not be changed as a result of this event.

Message Board, Wall

Students write thoughts and unsaid messages to the departed on whiteboards, "graffiti" walls or walls covered with paper.

Release of messages,

Written thoughts are released by burning (smoke, incense) setting free balloons with messages in them, or symbolically releasing bubbles, butterflies or birds; by burying, sinking or releasing written statements (on leaves or bark or paper boats) on water.

Using Artwork and Art Materials to Assist Grief and Loss

Used either in association with other interventions, such as the "special /safe space" or as a stand alone activity, art using crayons, paper, sculpting, clay, plasticine, play-dough, or other materials such as coloured stones, beads, cloth, wood, papier maché etc., have several advantages when considering child psychology. Children remember pain in measured lots and attend to one aspect of death at a time (Worden, 1996). Artwork allows them a single focus and also allows a sense of mastery, something death challenges in us all. Artwork is an activity rich in symbolism and ritualised activity, yet is something teachers feel comfortable doing with children. It is also a calming and therapeutic activity that is often self-contained, though some of the literature suggests that to make these art activities effective, children must be encouraged to share their pictures and talk about them. Informants reported that even older students found release in artwork, including groups of students reluctant to become involved in other activities. Some specific art-related interventions gathered from counsellors and the literature (e.g. Schaefer & Cangelosi, 1993), include:

Murals:

1. The Death Mural

This begins with a sheet of paper with "Death" written on it. Participants draw around it images, symbols, words and statements associated with death. It helps to lessen fears and gives rise to understanding of confused ideas.

2. The Group Mural

Over time, participants write, draw how they feel about the loss event. After the group process is considered finished, a photo is taken and given to each as a memento.

3. The Flower Mural

A flower outline is provided. Participants write in the petals something they have worked through (or Worden's tasks of grieving). Then the petals are covered with colourful paper to depict the growth of participants through the grief process.

Positive Recall

Happy memories made more tangible by drawing a picture or making a collage of a happy time or event with the lost one. Clay or plasticine may be used instead to create sculptures.

Recalling the Event

Children can be encouraged to draw a picture of themselves the day they were told about the death. They might choose colours to represent feelings.

Changes

Children are given paper and crayons. They divide page with vertical line or by folding. On the left side they are invited to depict the family or group before the death or loss. On the right hand side they draw the family or group since the death or loss. They then share the pictures with the group.

Weather Inside

Children are given paper and pencils and asked to draw what the weather was like on the day of the loved one's funeral/death. After they do this, draw what the weather was like inside of them on that day. They discuss this with group.

Feeling Circle

Group members are given a page with large circle. They choose coloured crayons to represent how they are feeling today. They colour the circle and put in it words naming feelings. Or, they draw a number of coloured circles which describe their feelings since the loss.

The Squiggle Drawing Game

The goal of this one-on-one technique is to establish communication with the child's inner thoughts and feelings through an interchange that unhitches something at the place where the patient's development is hitched up (Winnicott, 1971). The technique of the game involves the child being asked if they would like to play a fun drawing game, namely: the squiggle-drawing game. The therapist draws a squiggle. The child makes any kind of drawing using it, then makes up a story about the drawing. The therapist may ask a few questions about it. Then the child makes a squiggle and the therapist makes a drawing out of it and tells the story of it and the child can ask any questions about it. (A squiggle is any variation of a straight, curved, wavy or zig-zag line.) The intention of the activity is that the drawing and storytelling will create a safe environment for the child to express feelings, fears and thoughts about a grief and loss event.

Finger Painting

Finger painting commends itself to children because no great skill is required and is a distinct advantage over other forms of drawing or painting. It is argued that the finger-painter is not discouraged by experiencing failure or inadequacy.

Computer Graphics

In a computer-literate age, even young children can use graphics and computer-generated painting with colours. Use of a computer is often a far more effective motivator than water, paint and paper, though something is lost in terms of ritual and use of symbol and the tactile associations which are missing in cyber-art. Computer art can draw on previous art therapy techniques and theory, such as paintings, to help reveal emotions that may not be expressed orally or in writing.

Expression Using Plasticine and Play-dough

The literature (Schaefer & Cangelosi, 1993) suggests that as the child grows older, sand, mud and water play patterns diminish in importance and are taken over by clay, plasticine and play-dough. Suggested advantages of plasticine include: it doesn't dry out; it is infinitely adaptable; it is three dimensional; it is subject to physical laws; it is often accompanied by acoustics; it is handled directly with both hands; it is suited to projective processes; and it lends itself to the repetitive aggressive-destructive-constructive modes of behaviour which seem to characterise the normal development of children and which are so evident in their play patterns and verbalisations. Plastic creative work is of such value because it enables children to clarify more freely and bring to conscious, tangible levels their own fantasies, which are thus accessible to therapeutic procedures.

Mask Making

Among primal people, the mask is one of the most expressive and dynamic arts and may be so with children. They are simple and inexpensive and can be modelled in clay, or are cheap to buy in bulk from art supplies or discount stores. The literature suggests that children frequently respond more freely to modelling than to drawing. Masks can be easily made by pressing papier-maché over a clay model. The mask can be painted and varnished according to moods and feelings. New masks can be made to trace changes in moods, feelings and stages of grieving. The masks can then be used as part of drama performances if required.

Other artwork interventions directly related to death used in schools include:

- Creation of a pall for the coffin,
- Creation of banners for the funeral ritual, or ends of pews in church
- Creation of prayer cloths for classroom use.

Storytelling and Bibliotherapy

Storytelling

Distinct from Bibliotherapy, which is discussed below, this intervention uses the students' own imaginations and thoughts to create stories around the issues of grief and loss. Children might write a story about their own loss and share the story, or create a story wheel where children sit in a circle with backs to each other or lie on their backs on the floor with heads to centre and begin a story and add to it. Such distancing lessens the trauma and makes it more manageable. Another way is to use an existing story such as the incident of the leaves falling in the Bambi story (Salten, 1928). Having heard the story, each person can be asked to write a letter to the tree as if they were the leaves in the story. Then the letter is given to someone else who writes back as the tree. Then that reply goes back to original writer. Students read and discuss replies to their letters.

(Use of storybooks)

There is a growing collection of excellent books that deal with grief and bereavement written for children of various age levels. Classics in this area of grief and loss include *The Fall of Freddie Leaf* by Leo Buscaglia (the 50th anniversary of its writing occurs in 2003) and *Arvy Aardvark* by Donna O'Toole. New books to assist in coping with grief and loss are now being published regularly. For examples of recurring themes in some books on death and loss and lists of age appropriate books for use in Bibliotherapy, see Appendix D

Games and Group Activities

Games in group settings and group sharing activities are very useful for building resilience during the grieving process. They help to express taboo feelings because it is "only a game" and permit humour, which is one avenue children use to cope with trauma. They also allow for legitimate touching and holding for security and safety. Some examples from the literature and in use in schools include:

Water Play

There are claims in the literature (Schaefer & Cangelosi, 1993) that no other material, even clay or finger paint, has the same effect as water. The repetitious and somewhat monotonous nature of water play, (ritual) together with the soft and yielding quality of the material, may account for its relaxing effect on tense and anxious children. The fact that it demands no special skills and involves no achievement goals may explain why it never threatens or thwarts the anxious child who cannot take the pressure of other adult-directed products. The chance to pour and splash and mess offers these children a means of expressing aggression and the pressures of growing up, but also regaining the privileges of infancy. It is especially appropriate in the primary classroom, as most primary classrooms have wet areas.

Five Faces

This activity uses multiple sets of five cards which portray five different feelings: sad, mad, glad, scared and lonely. These can be depicted as faces or words. The leader shuffles them into a face down pile. The child selects a card and tells group about an experience that made them feel like the feeling portrayed on the card.

Alternatively, each child is dealt five cards. When a child has two of the same feeling words, he/she tells the group about it.

A variation on this is a "faces dice" which has the five faces and a blank on a cube. Players roll the dice and tell of a personal incident for the face which appears uppermost.

Question Box

Slips of paper are given to each child in the group. Questions about death and funerals are invited, with one question only per slip. These are collected and placed in a box. Each child is given the opportunity to select a question, read it to the group and lead a discussion on the question.

It's Not Fair When...

Use small boxes, for example, shoe boxes or boxes that can be bought at variety stores, or something more pliable such as bags of rice. Around the circle, each child is given the opportunity to complete the sentence "It's not fair when..." while slamming the box down onto the floor. After each child has participated, the boxes are stacked in a pile and knocked down by the children. The goal is to connect actions with words and find acceptable ways to express anger.

Scenarios to Explore Loss Feelings

Participants share responses to the following scenarios in a group:

- You are five years old and you are lost. What feelings might you experience?
- You discover you are to move to Western Australia in the morning with no chance to say goodbye to friends. How might you feel?
- You are captain of your sports team at the state finals and you fall and injure your leg. What do you feel?
- You thought you were to play the key role in the school musical, but the part has been given to someone else. What do you feel?

The object of the exercise is to help children understand that other loss situations can generate similar feelings to those experienced at times of bereavement. There is some need for self-disclosure. This could be done as a Think-Pair-Share strategy where participants think for themselves, then share in pairs and then share in the larger group.

Brainstorming

This exercise can follow on from an exercise similar to the one above. Feelings are gathered under terms such as frightened, panic, anxious, alone etc. Another object is being able to show them they have faced and been able to cope with negative feelings and situations in the past. This can help them prepare to cope with current intense feelings about bereavement.

Body Exercise

Extend the feelings exercise into body exercises- for example, using body sculptures.

Feelings on Cards

Card sets are created with feelings associated with grief and loss on them. One set is given to each child. The child chooses feelings they had most when first bereaved. (This assists in owning feelings.) They can choose from the cards one or two they identify most with at present and share them with the group. They might then symbolise these in a drawing or translate these feelings into objects whereby they choose a symbol for the feeling. They might use a body outline and place these drawings/symbols where they feel it most. This exercise helps break down feelings into manageable parts.

Loss of Face

Participants are given paper plates. They write on the back what caused their grief/loss. They then draw/create a face on the other side: eyes to see, ears to hear and a mouth to speak. They then share responses to the questions: *What am I seeing? What am I hearing? What am I saying?*

Use of Drama to Assist Grief and Loss Activities

This may involve a play guided by the helper. It is an opportunity to *experience*, not just discuss, feelings and responses. Some examples include:

Acting Out a Funeral.

Using a doll or teddy, children prepare the “play” and present it to the group. It is useful for those who have not had the opportunity to go to a funeral. It can identify misconceptions. It provides new information, peer information and allows contribution in a non-threatening environment.

Acting Out Problems Caused by Peer Reactions.

This strategy is useful where the bereaved child retaliates to teasing and gets into trouble. It could be done with a group within a school setting who are experiencing this situation.

Sculpting (Suitable for adolescents)

Participants sculpt their family or friendship group using other members of the group to play mum, dad, friends, etc. Participants freeze-frame on typical way people were before the loss. The member whose family or group is being sculpted comments on each person as they are presented, to create a real “feeling” family or group. Each player is then asked how it feels to be that person. Then the person who died leaves the tableau and the family/group is re-positioned. Each player is then asked again how it feels to be that person. In a situation such as this, a child, perhaps for the first time, learns how a parent now feels. The “deceased” is also given a chance to say something. The member then re-sculpts the family to represent how they would want it to be in the future. Discussion again takes place. Potential problems may be resolved through peer and group interaction.

Group Yell

Employ the crescendo effect: that is, all get down on their haunches and make a humming sound. Then they stand up and make a louder hum. Then they hold their

hands up over their heads and yell loudly. This can be done two or three times for maximum effect.

Getting Mad Activities

Participants are given appropriate strategies and tools to express frustration, anger and grief. For example, they are given soft toys for holding or squeezing; punching bags to hit; newsprint for tearing; clay for squeezing; cardboard blocks for knocking down; foam bats for hitting objects; foam balls for throwing; jointed toys for wrenching and twisting; or hammer and pegs for hitting.

Use of Multi Media for Grief and Loss Intervention

Videos

Use whole videos, if appropriate, or use extracts of long movies to stimulate discussion, rather than the whole video. Some examples include:

- *That Morning I Went to School* (Smith & Pennels, 1995)
- *Childhood Grief* (Smith & Pennels, 1995)
- *The Fall of Freddie Leaf*
- *Shipping News*
- *Soft Fruit*
- *Tuesdays with Morrie*.

Use of Music

Music for Guided Meditation

The music needs to be unfamiliar, soothing and relaxing so that imagery and projection can occur. Its healing power has long been recognised (See 4.2.10 below).

Percussion

Drums, or anything associated with percussion, may be used to help with hostile feelings. The helper might begin by establishing a slow, quiet beat which students imitate and then make it louder and more aggressive, returning to a slow, quiet finish.

Use of Song Lyrics to Stimulate Discussion of Feelings

Lyrics of songs about loss and grief may be helpful, such as *Tears in Heaven* by Eric Clapton to begin a discussion of participants' fears, questions, ideas and issues. They could be invited to bring their own music on the theme.

Relaxation / Meditation / Centering / Visualisation for Resilience

These activities allow for appropriate body contact and touch at a time when this is needed. They are suitable for older children and young adults. For more details see Schaefer and Cangelosi, (1993).

- Back scratch
- Heel of hand rub
- Flat of hand rub
- Tickle back

- Knuckle stroking
- Side of hand chop
- Hand and arm massage
- Foot massage
- Forehead massage

For younger children, the following relaxation techniques bring interest and fun into the activity:

For hands, enact squeezing an imaginary lemon; for arms, cradling an imaginary lazy cat; for shoulder/neck, being a turtle; for the jaw, chewing an imaginary piece of gum; for face & nose, imagine trying to move a fly using face muscles only; for the stomach, imagine an elephant is about to step on it and moves on: that is, stomach becomes hard, then soft; for the whole torso, squeezing through a splintery fence; for legs/feet, imagine walking through a squishy mud puddle.

Fantasy journey.

This exercise is accompanied by music. It needs to be unfamiliar, soothing and relaxing so that imagery and projection can occur. Its healing power has long been recognised. The guided exercise consists of a meeting with the deceased. It is framed in a positive mood, but can evoke powerful and sad memories. The departed person appears in the guided meditation. Questions are asked. The departed person walks away into the distance and disappears. The exercise helps look at unresolved issues. It can help assure that “all is well” with deceased. It confirms the loved one is dead. This exercise actualises the loss and is an important step in the process of moving to next stage of grieving. Guided meditation may also be used as a background to artwork.

Age and Other Factor-Related Interventions

It was the hope of this research project to be able to collate and classify the ritual and symbolic interventions into age and developmentally appropriate categories. However, as reported in the survey results, counsellors and other staff of schools involved in containing grief and loss responses in the system of schools surveyed, have not had a sufficient repertoire of these resources either to make those judgements for themselves or for it to be done as part of this project. Where any such analysis has been possible, either in the literature, or by informants of the survey or the researcher’s own judgements, they have been included in the description of the interventions above, or have been listed in Appendix E.

Appendix D

Bibliotherapy Resources

The following lists of books for use in bibliotherapy, categorised by themes, issues and age appropriateness, have been compiled with the help of the literature survey and informants of the survey. A criterion for inclusion was their current availability to schools through libraries or bookstores.

Themes

| Title of Book | Recurring Themes | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------|------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | A | B | C | D | F | M | N | S |
| <i>Emma's Cat Dies</i> | | | | | | X | | X |
| <i>The Tenth Good Thing About Barney</i> | | X | | | X | X | | X |
| <i>Grandpa and Me</i> | | | | | X | X | | X |
| <i>My Grandson Lew</i> | | | | | | X | | X |
| <i>Why Did Grandma Die?</i> | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X |
| <i>My Grandpa Died Today</i> | | | | | | X | | X |
| <i>Badger's Parting Gifts</i> | | | | | | X | | X |
| <i>When Uncle Bob Died</i> | X | | X | X | X | X | | X |
| <i>Bridge to Terabithia</i> | X | X | X | X | | X | | X |
| <i>Dusty Was My Friend</i> | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X |
| <i>Mama's Going to Buy You a Mockingbird</i> | X | X | X | | X | X | | X |

A: Expressing anger; B: Behaving out of character; C: Coming to Terms with the reality of what happened; D: fear of others dying; F: Significance of funeral; N: Need to say goodbye; M: Mourning; S: Expressing sadness.

A List of Issue Specific Books on Death and Grieving

Aaron, M. (1995) *Lily and me*. Random House. (Leukemia, dying child)

Buscaglia, L. (1982). *The fall of Freddie the leaf: A story for all ages*. Thorofare, NJ: Charles B. Slack.

Coer, E. (n.d.). *Sadako and the thousand paper cranes*. Hodder Press. (Leukemia, courage, hope)

Dumbleton, M. & Denton, T. (2001). *Passing On*. Sydney, Australia: Random House, (Death of grandmother, moving on)

Gof, B. (1969). *Where is daddy?* Boston: Beacon press.

Hathorn, L. & Magerl, C. (2000). *Grandma's shoes*. Sydney, Australia: Hodder Headline Australia.

- Isherwood, S. & Isherwood, K. (1994). *Remembering Grandad*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jaslin, M. (n.d.). *The goodbye boat*. Lion Publishing (Loneliness, loss)
- Kidd, D. (n.d.). *I love you Jason Delaney*. Angus & Robertson. (Love, death, loss)
- Little, J. (n.d.). *Mama's going to buy you a Mockingbird*. Penguin. (Death of father, denial, communication)
- Metzenthien, D. (n.d.). *Gilbert's ghost train*. Scholastic. (Terminal illness of sibling). Adolescent
- Moser, A. (1996). *Don't despair on Thursday*. Kansas City, MO: Landmark Editions, Inc.
- Norman, L. (n.d.) *Grandpa*. Margaret Hamilton Books. (Death of grandparent, loss)
- Nystrom, C. (1990). *Emma says goodbye*. Oxford: Lion.
- O'Toole, D. (1989). *Aarvy Aardvark finds hope*. Batavia, IL: Lion Publishing Co.
- Padoan, G. (1987). *Remembering grandad*. Italy: Happy Books.
- Paterson, K. (n.d.). *Bridge to Terabithia*. Penguin. (Accidental death, grieving)
- Salten, F. (1928). *Bambi*. London: Jonathon Cape.
- Simmonds, P. (n.d.). *Fred*. London: Puffin Books
- Temes, R. (1992). *The empty place*. Dallas, TX: New Horizons.
- Varley, S. (1985). *Badger's parting gifts*. London: Picture Lions.
- Wild, M. & Vivas, J. (1989). *The very best of friends*. Sydney, Australia: Margaret Hamilton Books. (Loss of spouse, loneliness)
- Wild, M. (2002). *Jenny Angel*. Viking Press. (Loss of sibling. Bargaining.)
- Wild, M. (2000) *Old pig*. Allen & Unwin. (Loss of grandparent, preparedness for death celebration of life)
- Wilhelm, H. (n.d.). *I'll always love you*. Hodder Press. (Death of pet)
- Wilson, J. (n.d.). *The cat mummy*. Doubleday. (Loss of pet, mother. Memories.)

Zolotow, C. (1976). *My grandson Lew*. Windmill Press.

Age Related Books on Death, Loss and Grief

Ages 3-7

Carlstrom, N. W. (1990). *Blow me a kiss, miss Lily*. New York: Harper Press.
(Death of a friend)

Cadset, D. (1987). *A fish in his pocket*. New York: Orchard Books. (Attitude toward death)

Cohn, J. (1987). *I had a friend named Peter*. New York: Morrow & Co. (Loss of a friend)

Douglas, E. (1990). *Rachel and the upside down heart*. Los Angeles: Price Stein Sloan.
(Death of a father)

Gould, D. (1987). *Grandpa's slide show*. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books.
(Death of a grandparent).

Le Tord, B. (1987). *My grandma Leonie*. New York: Bradbury Press. (Death of a grandparent)

Palmer, P. (1994). *I wish I could hold your hand: A child's guide to grief and loss*. New York: Impact publishers. (Death of a loved one)

Powell, E. S. (1990). *Geranium morning*. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda Books. (Death of a mother)

Prestine, J. (1993). *Someone special died*. New York: Fearon Publishers. (Loss of a special person)

Rogers, F. (1988). *When a pet dies*. New York: Putnam & Grosset Group. (Death of a pet).

Ages 8-12

Auch, M. J. (1988). *Pick of the litter*. New York: Holiday House. (Death of sibling)

Berry, J. (1990). *Good answers to tough questions about death*. Chicago: Children's Press. (Q&A about death)

Boyd, C. D. (1985). *Breadsticks and blessing places*. New York: Macmillan. (Funeral issues)

- Clardy, A. F. (n.d.). *Dusty was my friend. Coming to terms with loss*. New York: Human Science Press. (Death of a friend)
- Clifford, E. (1987). *The man who sang in the dark*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. (Death of father)
- De Clements, B. (1988). *The fourth grade wizards*. New York: Viking Penguin. (Death of mother)
- Dyzak, E. (1990). *I should have listened to moon*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. (Death of pet)
- Foley, P. (1990). *John and the fiddler*. New York: Harpercollins. (Death of a friend)
- Goble, P. (1989). *Beyond the ridge*. New York: Bradbury Press. (Funeral issues)
- Hartling, P. (1990). *Old John*. New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books. (Death of a friend)
- Temes, R. (1992). *The empty place: A child's guide through grief*. (Far Hills, NJ: New Horizon NJ. (Death of a sibling)

Ages 12 and up

- Asher, S. F. (1984). *Missing pieces*. New York: Delacorte Press. (Death of a father)
- Cross, G. (1987). *Chartbreaker*. New York: Holiday House. (Death of a mother)
- Davis, J. 1987). *Goodbye and keep cold*. New York: Orchard Books. (Death of father, maturation)
- Ferris, J. (1987). *Invincible summer*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux. (Death of a friend to leukemia, attitude toward death)
- Gulley, J. (1988). *Wasted space*. Nashville: Abingdon Press. (Death of friend, lack of communication)
- Mazer, H. (1985). *When the phone rang*. New York: Scholastic. (Death of mother)
- Miklowitz, G. D. (1983). *Close to the edge*. New York: Dell Publishing. (Death of a friend)
- Maggio, R. (1990). *The music box Christmas*. New York: William Morrow. (Death of a grandparent, accepting change)
- White, E. E. (1987). *Life without friends*. New York: Scholastic. (Murder)

Wood, P. A. (1986) *Then I'll be home free*. New York: Dodd, Mead & co. (Death of a grandparent, attempted suicide).

Appendix E

Developmentally Appropriate Interventions

Smith & Pennells (1995, p. 137) have identified some of the approaches named above as suitable for different grief stages. This may be of help for teachers and counsellors seeking to identify appropriate strategies for students.

| Stages of Grief | Interventions | Age Range |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Shock Numbness Disbelief | Use of story wheel Bambi Story Phototherapy Link Objects Drawing Happy memories Fantasy Journey | 6-8 yrs 9+ yrs All ages All ages All ages 9+ yrs |
| Anger Guilt Denial | Use of video Brainstorming Feelings and body outline Group yell Death Mural Loss Cards Use of Music | All ages All ages 8+ yrs 6-11 yrs All ages 9+ yrs 6+ yrs |
| Yearning | Question Box Cemetery Visit Monumental mason Acting out a funeral Sculpting | All ages 6-11 yrs 9+ yrs 6-11 yrs 9+ yrs |
| Acceptance | Use of poems Conflict situations Epitaph/Headstone design Projections of future Group Mural Flower Mural | 9+ yrs 6-11 yrs 9+Yrs All ages 9+ yrs 6-11 Yrs |
| Other Exercises | Relaxation Icebreaking Games Support package Work folders Cultural aspects Food and drink Good news/bad news | 12+ yrs All ages 12+ yrs 6-11 yrs All ages All ages All ages |

In a more complex set of processes, Geldard & Geldard (1999) have rated various ritual and symbolic interventions. They are included for consideration by teachers and counsellors considering strategies for grief and loss interventions.

Suitability of creative strategies for achieving primary counselling functions

| Creative Strategy | Art | Role play | Journals | Relaxation | Imagination | Dream Work |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----------|----------|------------|-------------|------------|
| Primary Counselling Function | | | | | | |
| Relationship Building Getting to know the adolescent and the adolescent's constructs within the relationship | ✓ | - | ✓ | - | - | - |
| Assessing the Problem Assessing and exploring the adolescent's emotional state, constructs, self-concept and beliefs; identifying issues and themes. | ✓ | ok | ok | - | ✓ | ✓ |
| Addressing the Problem Changing behaviours by exploring and promoting change in intra-personal beliefs, personal growth and interpersonal relationships; experimenting with behaviours | - | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ok |

| | |
|----------------|----|
| Most suitable | ✓ |
| Suitable | ok |
| Least suitable | - |

Suitability of media and activities for achieving goals

| Goals Media | To gain mastery over issues or events | To be powerful through physical expression | To encourage expression of emotions | To develop problem solving and decision making skills | To develop social skills | To build self-concept and self-esteem | To improve communication skills | To develop insight |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| Books/stories | ✓ | ok | ok | ✓ | ok | ok | ✓ | ✓ |
| Clay | ok | ✓ | ✓ | - | - | ok | - | ok |
| Construction | - | - | - | ok | - | ok | - | - |
| Drawing | ✓ | ok | ✓ | - | - | ✓ | ok | ✓ |
| Finger Painting | ok | ✓ | ✓ | - | - | ✓ | - | ok |
| Games | - | - | - | ok | ✓ | ✓ | - | ok |

| | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Imaginary journey | ✓ | - | ok | ok | - | - | ✓ | ✓ |
| Imaginative Pretend Play | ✓ | ✓ | ok | ok | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Miniature Animals | - | - | ok | ok | - | - | ✓ | ✓ |
| Painting/collage | ✓ | ✓ | ok | - | - | ✓ | ok | ok |
| Puppets/soft toys | ✓ | ✓ | ok | ✓ | ✓ | ok | ✓ | ✓ |
| Sand tray | ✓ | ✓ | ok | ✓ | ok | - | ✓ | ✓ |
| Symbols/Figurines | ✓ | ✓ | ok | ✓ | ok | ok | ✓ | ✓ |
| Rituals | ✓ | ✓ | ok | ok | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Worksheets | - | - | - | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | - | - |

| | |
|----------------|----|
| Most suitable | ✓ |
| Suitable | ok |
| Least suitable | - |

Suitability of media and activities by Age Group

| Media \ Ages | | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| | Pre-school 2-5 yrs | Primary school 6-10 yrs | Early adolescence 11-13 yrs | Late adolescence 14-17 yrs |
| Books/stories | ✓ | ✓ | ok | - |
| Clay | ok | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Construction | ✓ | ✓ | - | - |
| Drawing | ok | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Finger Painting | ✓ | ✓ | ok | - |
| Games | ok | ✓ | ✓ | - |
| Imaginary journey | - | ok | ✓ | ✓ |
| Imaginative Pretend Play | ✓ | ✓ | ok | - |
| Miniature Animals | - | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Painting/collage | ok | ok | ✓ | ✓ |
| Puppets/soft toys | ✓ | ✓ | ok | - |
| Sand tray | ok | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Symbols/Figurines | ok | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Rituals | ok | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Worksheets | - | ✓ | ✓ | - |

| | |
|----------------|----|
| Most suitable | ✓ |
| Suitable | ok |
| Least suitable | - |

Suitability of media and activities per counselling situation

| Situation \ Media | Individual Counselling | Family Counselling | Group Work |
|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Books/stories | ✓ | - | - |
| Clay | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Construction | ✓ | - | ok |
| Drawing | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Finger Painting | ✓ | ok | ✓ |
| Games | ✓ | ok | ✓ |
| Imaginary journey | ✓ | - | - |
| Imaginative Pretend Play | ✓ | - | ok |
| Miniature Animals | ✓ | - | - |
| Painting/collage | ✓ | - | ok |
| Puppets/soft toys | ✓ | - | ✓ |
| Sand tray | ✓ | - | - |
| Symbols/Figurines | ✓ | - | - |
| Rituals | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Worksheets | ✓ | - | ok |

| | |
|----------------|----|
| Most suitable | ✓ |
| Suitable | ok |
| Least suitable | - |

Group Rituals and Support for Grief and Loss

Children and young people who are familiar with ritual and group sharing profit more from these activities than those for whom it is an unfamiliar experience. In a society that has lost many of its formal rituals, schools and individual teachers can provide opportunities regularly which enable students to ritualise and share issues and events impacting on their lives.

The use of symbols and ritual in psychology are powerful ways and means of accessing thoughts, feelings and responses beyond the levels of the conscious, language and rationalising.

All use of symbols and symbolic action in rituals should be done with respect and care. Children should never be asked to do anything which makes them uncomfortable or embarrassed, especially in front of their peers. They must be given the option before every ritual to participate at the level to which they feel comfortable. Leaders need to be alert for when the experience triggers deeper responses than may be safe for the individual in this group. Affirmation for courage and discreet referral to experienced counsellors should follow.

Leaders should first experience the rituals they ask others to participate in. Good preparation, foresight, care and anticipation are necessary. Rituals can be enjoyable. Laughter has its place. But personal dignity and safety is paramount. Leaders must ensure that group members do not use the process to humiliate, or give any negative feedback to other participants. Such attempts must be stopped, corrected and reversed at once.

Many participants choose not to use words- that after all is the power of symbols- so group members should be invited to use a symbol and participate, even if they do not wish to share verbally.

Below are some sample activities which may be adapted for use in times of grief and loss:

1. Flowers in the Bowl Ritual

Requirements:

- 30-40 mixed, coloured polyester flower heads
- Large shallow flat bowl
- Large central flower, or candle (Jesus symbol)
- Water (or sand, or stones)
- Small branch for blessing
- Cloth- blue for the oceans

Ritual Outline:

Leader speaks of how, each day, we bring ourselves to be part of the group. Each day we may feel, or be different because of the events in our lives: we come happy, sad, angry, quiet, noisy, confused, fearful, thankful etc.

Regardless of how we feel, this group, which shares the values of Jesus, should support us and challenge us to belong, to co-operate, to rejoice with us and care for us.

Each person invited to choose a flower which represents how they come to the group today: choice can be by colour, shape, size, symbolic of mood, state etc.

Before putting in the bowl around the larger flower (or candle) [a Jesus symbol], each person is invited to say, briefly, why they chose it. They may need help such as starting with: "I chose this flower to represent me today because...."

Song or short prayer may follow: don't crowd the ritual with too many words.

Teacher can then bless the group with water from the bowl, symbolising that "though many they are one".

Symbols should stay in that central place for the whole day/ period of the day.

2. Wishing Well Ritual

Requirements:

- **Large Deep Bowl half full of water.**
- **Coloured Stones/Glass (some colours)**
- **Coloured beads from old necklaces**
- **Floating Candle or citronella oil.**
- **Christ candle**
- **Branch for blessing**

Ritual Outline:

Leader has set up bowl and stones beforehand.

Leader invites group members to think of a wish they have for the group, or for each other in this time of loss and grief or sadness.

Invite each student to "make their wish" or prayer and then add it to the water.- eg They could have the template: "I wish that..... would....." (You could give them a start- eg "God" or the lost one's name). Or they could just say, I pray for..... or I pray that.... I'd like to ask God....

Speak briefly about the stones symbolising their wishes/prayer and suggest they have the power as a group to help God answer people's prayers.

This power comes with the help of the spirit of Jesus (hence the fire/candle)

Then leave the candle burning in the bowl of water as their prayer rises to God.

Bless the group, calling on them to act justly and to love with compassion to help make those wishes and prayers come true or to heal their pain, sadness, loss.

Leave the bowl in place all day and "re-bless" after each break.

Alternative Suggestions

- ❖ Use floating tea candles instead of stones. Use sand instead of water. Make a wishing well out of an old bucket. (Depends on size of group)
- ❖ Use rocks for problems/sadness in the group and replace with coloured stones as people come up with solutions to the problems.
- ❖ Use shells instead of coloured stones
- ❖ Use small cubes/balls of ice: their prayer becomes the prayer of Jesus as it melts.

3. Floating Leaves Ritual

Requirements:

- 30-40 mixed, leaves from different plants which are named- ie clover leaf.
- Large shallow flat bowl
- Large central flower, or candle (optional)
- Water (coloured optional)
- Appropriate leaf for blessing

Ritual Outline:

Leader speaks of how, each day, we bring ourselves to be part of the group. Each of us is different, but we are all given life by the same creator God whose sun shines on us all each day.

Regardless of how we feel, this group, which shares the values of Jesus, should support us and challenge us to belong, to co-operate, to rejoice with us and care for us because we are all God's creation.

Each person invited to choose a leaf which represents how they come to the group today: choice can be by colour, shape, size, symbolic of mood, state etc. This could be particularly effective for a group experiencing sadness, grief or loss.

Before putting in the bowl around the larger flower (or candle) [a Jesus symbol], each person is invited to say, briefly, why they chose it. They may need help such as starting with: "I chose this ...leaf to represent me today because...."

Alternatively, have members of the group choose a leaf which represents what they would *like* to be/feel today.

Song or short prayer may follow: don't crowd the ritual with too many words. (eg Jesus the vine scripture passage)

Teacher can then bless the group with water from the bowl, symbolising that we draw life from Jesus and God the creator of all life.

Symbols should stay in that central place for the whole day/ period of the day, or attached to a tree or branch as a symbol of their continued prayer/memory.

4. Oil for Affirmation and Support Ritual

Requirements:

- **Containers for oil- eg furniture casters**
- **Cotton squares for casters**
- **One or more scented oils**
- **Centre display- Christ Candle, sand/stones, cloth**
- **Incense sticks (optional)**
- **Small slips of paper for affirmation.**

Ritual Outline:

Group invited to sit in a circle.

Leader speaks of how, each day, we bring ourselves to be part of the group. Each day we may feel, or be different because of the events in our lives: we come happy, sad, angry, quiet, noisy, confused, fearful, thankful etc.

Regardless of how we feel, this group, which shares the values of Jesus, should support us and challenge us to belong, to co-operate, to rejoice with us and care for us- in this case, in our sadness/anger etc.

Members of group are invited to suggest simple phrase/wish/ blessing for others. These may need to be written up on a whiteboard for some group members to people to memorise. Or group members might write one on a slip of paper.

And/or, the group can be allocated someone else as a partner. The pairs can share their sadness/loss etc. Then, with the help of the leader, each person in the group is invited to share their sadness, and, when this is finished, the "partner" can anoint their head/wrists with oil, calling a blessing on them as it is done. For younger group members, the leader may need to actively assist for the first few times the ritual is performed.

The leader can finish by saying that every time each person in the group smells the oil on their wrist, they will be reminded of their value and support of their group.

Symbols should stay in that central place for the whole day/ period of the day.

Alternative Suggestions:

- ❖ Some variations are offered in the outline of the ritual.
- ❖ A simpler ritual may be used initially, in which the oil is passed around the group and each person anoints the one beside them, praying a common blessing such as "May your day be filled with smiles today".
- ❖ As part of the ritual, members of the group may write the blessing on a slip of card and give it to them at the anointing.

5. Cleansing/Healing Through Fire Ritual

Requirements:

- Paper Bark or large dry leaves or paper cut into shape of leaves
- Gum leaves (green)
- Drum or tin to burn "leaves"/material
- Marker pens

Ritual Outline:

This ritual focuses on being able to name negative thoughts, or thoughts of loss, grief or anger. s. You might like to speak a little of the paschal mystery in Christianity- we must enter into the pain and suffering of life in order to become our whole selves.

Participants write/ draw on the leaf/bark etc something which hurts at the moment, or pain, loss or grief feelings they have.

Group gathers round container and one by one members place their "leaf"/bark in the container after sharing with the group the failing for which they want forgiveness.

Gum leaves added and fire is lit.

Members stand and walk around container, drawing the smoke onto themselves as in an Aboriginal cleansing smoking ceremony.

Group then can reform for final prayer/blessing/ rite of forgiveness.

Alternative Suggestions

- ❖ "Church" incense could be used instead of gum leaves.
- ❖ This ritual could be used as a farewell rite after a bereavement or loss: either messages, notes or just words can be written on paper, leaves, sticks and then burned. This works very well with boys around a campfire at night.
- ❖ Messages could be put in balloons and released to release feelings and loss.

6. Broken Lives, Broken Bread Ritual

Requirements:

- Different types of bread in a basket
- Empty second basket.
- Serviettes
- Clean hands.
- Appropriate song (perhaps)

Ritual Outline:

Leader sets scene in terms of the loss, grief, sadness facing the group.

Members are invited to select a type of bread, break a little off and place it in the second basket, sharing their loss, grief or sadness experience.

When all who wish to speak are finished, the rest of the group (if any remain) are invited to break some bread and place it in the second basket, as a symbol of their unspoken times of grief and loss.

Members then share the broken bread, by taking a piece of the bread from the basket as it is passed around.

Group offers each other a sign of peace.

Leader prays a prayer of blessing on them and reinforces the notion of group strength when any one member feels vulnerable.

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Mr Ray Reynolds, Principal Education Officer, Guidance, Counselling and Equity Services, Brisbane Catholic Education

Mrs Lesley Lavercombe, Counsellor Supervisor, Counselling and Equity Services, Brisbane Catholic Education

Members of Counselling and Equity Services and the Religious Education Support Team, Brisbane Catholic Education

The Principals of the following schools who gave permission to approach their staff:

St Patrick's College, Gympie

Our Lady of the Way School, Petrie

Kolbe College, Petrie

Holy Spirit School, Bray Park

St John Fisher College, Bracken Ridge

Carmel College, Thornlands

Chisholm Catholic College, Cornubia

St Francis College, Crestmead

St Mary's College, Ipswich

St John's College, Nambour

St Agatha's School, Clayfield.

Our Lady Help of Christians School, Hendra

The following staff of schools which had experienced critical incidents Involving grief and loss in the past five years, who agreed to be interviewed:

Ms Cathy Cleary, Counsellor, St Mary's College, Ipswich

Mr John Crowson, AP-Religious Education, St Mary's College Ipswich

Ms Mil McCormack, Counsellor, St John's College, Nambour

Ms Catharine Wilmot, AP Religious Education, St John's College, Nambour

Mr Ed Riley, Counsellor, Chisholm Catholic College, Cornubia

Mr Dan Cooper, AP Religious Education, Chisholm Catholic College, Cornubia

Ms Stefana Vella, Campus Minister, Chisholm Catholic College, Cornubia

Ms Sue Kraljevic, Counsellor, St Patrick's College, Gympie

Mrs Robin Murphy, AP Religious Education, St Patrick's College, Gympie

Ms Elizabeth Power, Yr 12 Co-Ordinator, St Patrick's College, Gympie

Ms Ros Hennessey, Counsellor, Kolbe College, Petrie

Ms Anita Smith, Counsellor, St John Fisher College, Bracken Ridge

Mr Michael Chambers, AP Religious Education, St John Fisher College, Bracken Ridge

Mr Michael Bruynsteyn, AP Religious Education, Holy Spirit School, Bray Park

Mr Joe Miranda, AP Religious Education, Our Lady Help of Christians School, Hendra.

Ms Maree Rose, Counsellor, Carmel College, Thornlands

Sr Margaret Smith, RSM, Counsellor, St Francis College Crestmead

Ms Helen McKay AP Religious Education, Our Lady of the Way School, Petrie

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The ideas, strategies and processes discussed above have been taken mainly from the following texts. I have endeavoured to acknowledge all sources and apologise to any whom I have overlooked.

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