Facilitating Grief Groups for Children - Elementary age boys (6 years – 10 years)

- **Changes**
  **Supplies needed:** drawing paper, markers, colored pencils, crayons

**Instructions:** Fold the drawing paper to make 4 squares. Label each square “How I am the same,” “How I am different,” “How my family is the same,” and “How my family is different.” Have the child draw or write in the appropriate boxes. Many things change in children’s lives when someone dies. This will facilitate conversation around these changes.

- **Invisible String**
  **Supplies needed:** The Invisible String by Patrice Karst, beads of various colors, string for making bracelets

**Instructions:** Read The Invisible String, focusing on how we are all connected, no matter if we are together or apart. Discuss as a group then make personalized bracelets. The beads can have meaning (ex- deceased loved one’s favorite color) or just be something that brings the child comfort.

- **Comfort Box**
  **Supplies needed:** baggie or box, bubbles, play dough, popsicle sticks, small stuffed animal, small notepad, pencil, crayons

**Instructions**—Often times, children who have someone that has died feel alone in their pain. They sometimes feel comforted by various activities. The idea of this activity is to create a box or bag that is full of things that bring the child comfort when they are feeling sad. The items can be things you provide or things they have of their loved one.

- Play dough—for stress or anger
- Notepad—to promote journaling, drawing or zentangle
- Bubbles—to practice deep breathing
- Sticks—for counting or writing encouraging thoughts or phrases
- Small stuffed animal—for comfort
- List of feeling faces & words
- Small package of tissues

- **Nature Walk**
  **Supplies needed:** Wherever You Go, My Love Will Find You by Nancy Tillman

**Instructions**—This book is about finding memories and comfort anywhere you are. Take the child(ren) on a walk outside. Have them listen for sounds and notice how the breeze feels and what they see. Then, read this book. Begin a conversation about where or how they will be able to feel their loved one who died when they are not with them.
Facilitating Grief Groups for Children - Elementary age girls (6 years – 10 years)

- **Display pictures of loved ones who have died.**
  
  **Supplies needed:** place to display pictures, thumb tacks or tape, pictures (I asked guardians to email me or send a copy of a picture)

**Instructions:** This ongoing display provided a focus for many of our activities. One of our camp volunteers decorated a beautiful bulletin board for us to display our pictures. During our first group meeting, children who brought pictures shared information and memories about their loved ones. The girls enjoyed showing the pictures, and the other group members enjoyed “seeing” the loved ones of their friends. The group members asked questions and commented on the pictures, and it seemed to create a more open dialogue during group.

When children wrote letters or wishes for their loved ones, they had the opportunity to take their picture off the bulletin board and use the picture as they drew or wrote. This seemed to add a deeper dimension to the activity. During our closing activity, I used the display as a focal point with candles and music, and the girls wrote wishes to tie to a balloon.

- **Wishing Tree**
  
  **Supplies needed:** card stock stars (we bought ours at Michaels already cut out, but die cut or kid created could work), markers/ crayons (Sharpies were best for us because they don’t smear), hole puncher, yarn or string, lights or decorations for the tree

**Instructions:** We cut out star shapes and had yarn attached to the stars. After some guided imagery, we had children write wishes or draw pictures on the star for their loved one. The girls shared what they wrote on their star (if they chose to) and hung the stars on a tree outside of our therapy cabin. This could work for ANY kind of tree (plastic, bulletin board, Christmas, etc.). At the end of group, the girls took their stars home.

- **Memory/ Feelings Mobile**
  
  **Supplies needed:** paper (cut 4 * 4 or 4 * 6) in any shape, clothes hanger, yarn or string, hole punch, crayons/ markers/ pencils/ colored pencils

**Instructions:** There are many possibilities with this activity! I had the children brainstorm and share memories they had with their loved ones, then write or draw those memories on the paper I provided. You can be as directive or as non-directive as you want with this activity. One idea may be give each child 4-5 shapes, and give them a list of “topics” you want them to answer on the mobile. Some topics or questions to answer may be:

1. Draw a picture/ write about your family before your loved one died
2. Draw a picture/ write about your family after your loved one died
3. Draw a picture/ write about the day you found out your loved one died
4. Draw a happy memory of your loved one
5. Draw/ write something you miss about your loved one
Memory/Feelings Mobile continued...

Another activity may be to create a “Feelings Mobile”. Have child/group brainstorm different emotions they may feel related to their loved one who died. On the mobile, have them choose a few emotions that mean something and draw/write/define those emotions to add to the mobile.

After the child has completed the artwork part of this activity, have them punch holes in each shape, thread the string through the hole, and tie the paper to the hanger leaving room between each knot. You can have them wrap yarn around the hanger to make it colorful, or they can leave the wire blank. This activity could be time consuming, so you may want to plan for several sessions, or choose one picture to create for each session depending on your time frame. Good for used with individual children or groups.

- Kimochi Dolls with Feelings
  Supplies needed: Kimochi Dolls (available at Amazon.com, Kimochi doll website), basket for feeling faces

Instructions- This helps children be able to identify different emotions, label their own emotions, and share them. Again, the possibilities are endless with this activity, but this is how I use them.

Every day, the girls came in to group and chose a feeling face to identify the way they are feeling. I set this up our first group meeting, give them the ground rules for choosing a face, and show them the different choices that are available. Every group meeting, after the girls have chosen their feeling, we go around the group and each child shares their feeling and why they feel that way (if there is a reason they can identify). Sometimes I use the Kimochi doll as they go around the circle to hold as they share their feeling, sometimes not.

The Kimochi dolls themselves come with a story and description, which could be beneficial to share with a group or individual child.

Facilitating Grief Groups for Adolescents-
Middle school girls & boys (11 years – 13 years)

- Key to my Heart
  Supplies needed: Old keys of any kind and various colors, leather or cord for beading/necklace making (plastic does not work well), letter beads, colored beads (various styles, types including hearts and crosses), key to My Heart poem (may be rolled like a scroll for each child or copied to a poster for the group)

Late at night when I'm sound asleep,
Into my heart you softly creep.

I sit and wonder how it could be,
But you must have stumbled across the key.

This key holds the secret to true love and more,
So take it now and unlock the door.
And I pray that we will never part,
Now that you have the key to my heart.

Author: Nicole C. Moore

Instructions- Begin with the question, “What does it mean when people say that someone has a key to their heart?” or “The person we lost is forever in our hearts?” Allow children to share what they keep in their hearts, what the person who died meant to them, memories of the person they loved, etc. Introduce the poem and allow the group to read it together. Explain that they will be making a necklace today in memory of their loved one with a key which will lie close their hearts to symbolize that the person who died has a key to their hearts. Demonstrate or show an example of the necklace. Allow each child to choose one key and whatever beads they need. Play soft music in the background as each child makes the necklace, helping as needed and encouraging a quiet space. When each is finished, reconvene in the circle and allow each child to share how they made the necklace and why they chose the colors or beads they chose.

• Memorial Candle/Opening Ritual

Supplies needed: votive candles and glass containers or the large candles in glass containers sold at most dollar stores, colored tissue paper cut or torn into 1-2 inch pieces, white glue or Modge Podge, flat stickers, sponge brushes, area to decorate and to dry, copy of the following quote:

“The light of this candle is a symbol of pain and loss, but also a reminder to face change and sorrow with courage, to cherish the memories, and to allow the love that lives forever in our hearts to help us heal.”

Instructions- As a group activity, begin with a discussion of rituals (eg., definition and purpose of a ritual, each child’s family traditions and the rituals observed in their families including the funeral, wake, burial, cremation, observances, etc.). Introduce memorial candles as one example of a ritual (show an example). Discuss how they might be used at home. Introduce the quote above, which may be copied for each child and/or posted in the room. Allow children to read the poem aloud together and briefly discuss what it means to them. Provide memorial candles and other materials. Demonstrate use of glue or modgepodge and either make or show an example candle. Paper on the floor or table helps keep the mess under control. Use of music in the background and encouragement of a quiet space will help keep children focused. When candles are complete, allow each child to share why they chose the items they chose and how they made their candle as well as how they might use the candle at home as a way to remember their loved one.

When used as a group ritual, allow each child to share why they chose the items they chose and how they made their candle, as well as how they might use the candle at home as a way to remember their loved one. When everyone who wants to share has shared, light all the candles as the children hold them. Have the children stand in a semi-circle in front of the table or shelf and together read the poem aloud. At the end of the poem, ask each child to say what he or she is bringing with him or her to the group. For example... “Today, I’m bringing _____ to the group.” (Possibilities might be memories, love, sadness, confusion, my heart, etc.) When each child has made a statement, they may place their lighted candles on the table or shelf and go the meeting area. Their statement of what they are bringing to group can then be used as the check-in by asking if anyone would like to make a connection or say more about what they are bringing to group that day. At the end of the group session, reconvene around the table or shelf and each child takes their candle. The poem is read again together, and at the end each child one at a time says what he or she will take as they leave (“Today, I will take friendship...” or love, peace, etc.) They each blow out the candle and place it back on the shelf before leaving to be used the next group session
• How We Felt, How We Feel, and How We Will Feel  
  **Supplies needed:** copies of the worksheet, markers or crayons, pencils or pens

**Instructions**- Distribute a copy of the activity (see attachment). Explain that many of us feel different ways when we grieve and that it is even normal to feel many different feelings at the same time. Discuss how feelings of grief change as time passes and that sometimes actively identifying and discussing those feelings can help with the process.

**Facilitating Grief Groups for Teens - High School Boys & Girls (14 years+)**

• **Feelings can be heavy**  
  **Supplies needed:** rocks painted with different feeling words, box or backpack to hold rocks

**Instructions**- Discuss how feelings have emotional weight depending on whether they are pleasant or unpleasant, short term or chronic, traumatic, congruent with other’s feelings, etc. Ask clients to pick feelings associated with a time in their lives (before, during, after the death or as a check in for how they are feeling right then). Encourage them to take more than one rock at a time since feelings are complex and often mixed. After everyone has checked in or described an event, ask that the rocks are returned to you. Begin telling a story of someone their age who feels each of those feelings in the course of the day but doesn’t share their feelings with others. After telling the story, talk about the weight of the box/bag. Ask for suggestions for managing the weight of the bag.

• **Chain of events**  
  **Supplies needed:** strips of different colored construction paper, markers, stapler, pre-made chain for demonstration

**Instructions**- Discuss how our lives are made up of interconnecting events. Even when someone dies suddenly, their lives before and after the death are different. I usually give them the instruction to have at least 2 links before the death, one for the death itself, and 2 links for after the death. Some variations of this activity can include:
  ① Having the group assign meeting to the colors of the construction paper. For instance, dark colors can be unpleasant memories while light colors are pleasant memories. Or white links being wishes or hopes for their future.
  ① The outside of the links can be used to describe the event, while the inside of the links can be used to describe their feelings related to that event.
  ① One side of the link can be used to describe the actual event, while the other side of the link could be used to describe how they would change that event if they could.
- **Forgiving Myself & Others**

  **Supplies needed:** dissolvable paper (bought online for less than $1 per sheet), markers, clear bin with water or other water source such as a fountain, pool, lake, etc.

**Instructions**

Have a discussion about guilt and regret and how it often accompanies grief. Other ways to explain guilt and regret include:

1. Asking group members to list their shoula, coulda, wouldas.
2. Asking group members what they would have wanted more or less of in the relationship with the deceased.

After that discussion, ask the group if they believe forgiving themselves or forgiving others is more/less difficult. This usually leads to a pretty good discussion about what they need to see or feel from someone in order to forgive them and often the group determines that forgiving themselves is most difficult. Next, ask the group if they are willing to begin to forgive themselves. When they identify what they would like to forgive themselves or someone else for, ask them to write it on the paper, not letting them know it is dissolvable. Once everyone has written something, describe the importance of self forgiveness and place a mock piece of paper in the water source while making a statement like “I forgive myself for not saving my father.”
"How You Felt/How You Feel/How You May Feel"
adaptation of “How Do You Feel Today” (Mahaney, E., N.D.).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How did you feel when you found out about the death?</th>
<th>How did you feel the day of the funeral?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="attachment-image1.png" alt="Circle" /></td>
<td><img src="attachment-image2.png" alt="Circle" /></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How did you feel the day after the funeral?</th>
<th>How did you feel the day you went back to school?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="attachment-image3.png" alt="Circle" /></td>
<td><img src="attachment-image4.png" alt="Circle" /></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do you feel today?</th>
<th>How do you think you will feel next year?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="attachment-image5.png" alt="Circle" /></td>
<td><img src="attachment-image6.png" alt="Circle" /></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Bibliotherapy List

There are so many books available for children and teens who are grieving. Here are just a few that we use at camp:

1. The Invisible String- Patrice Karst
2. When Someone Very Special Dies- Marge Heegaard
3. The Next Place- Warren Hanson
4. I Miss You: A Child’s First Look at Death- Pat Thomas
5. Tear Soup- Pat Schwiebert
6. Grief is Like a Snowflake- Julia Cook
7. Grief is Like a Snowflake Activity and Idea Book- Julia Cook
8. The Memory String- Eve Bunting
9. Samantha Jane’s Missing Smile- Julie Kapow
10. Animal Crackers: A Tender Book about Death and Funerals- Bridget Marshall
12. The Fall of Freddie the Leaf: A Story of Life for All Ages- Leo Buscaglia
13. Why Would Someone Want to Die?- Rebecca Schmidt
15. A Terrible Thing Happened- Margaret M Holmes
16. What on Earth Do you Do When Someone Dies?- Trevor Romaine
17. Wherever You Go, My Love Will Find You by Nancy Tillman
18. Rabbityness by Jo Empson
19. Going on a Journey by Susan Harrison