

THE COUNSELORS' CONNECTION



The Newsletter of the
Elementary Counseling Department

What's in this month's issue:

- CHILDREN AND GRIEF
- DEATH OF A PET
- TRY IT AT HOME!
- SOCIAL STORY ABOUT GRIEF
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CHILDREN AND GRIEF: WHAT TO EXPECT AND HOW TO HELP THEM COPE

A child's exposure to grief and loss often varies along a large spectrum of experiences. We may want to shield our children from these heartaches, however life doesn't always cooperate. As parents and caregivers, we can provide the space and forum to support our children through the loss and help to foster healthy coping skills for the future.

Developmental Responses to Grief

Grief responses vary by age and developmental stage. Very young children do not understand the concept of permanency and may ask when the loved one will return. Early elementary aged children may see death as reversible and also may attach a sense of responsibility for the loss. Children in the upper elementary grades typically begin to understand the permanency of death and focus their thoughts on how the loss will affect them over the long-term. To read more about developmental responses, take a look at the [fact sheet from The Dougy Center: The National Center for Grieving Children and Families](#).

Tips for Supporting Your Child

- **Be Direct:** Use words like "death" and "died" rather than "passed" or "went to sleep". Euphemisms can be confusing and scary for children.
- **Funerals:** Whether or not to attend a funeral is a personal decision and you know your child best. If a decision is made to attend, prepare your child for what they will see and hear. Offer them an exit plan if the experience becomes overwhelming.

- **Stick to Routines:** Routines provide your child with comfort and predictability. Try to stick to the regular schedule as best as possible. Seek the support of other family and friends if you need help getting your child to school, to their activities, or friendship opportunities.
- **Remember to Take Care of Yourself:** Children look to the adults in their life as models for how to respond. Allow yourself to show your child your grief while also demonstrating positive coping skills.
- **Seek Support:** If you notice that your child is struggling to move past the grief or is expressing their grief in a big way, it is beneficial to consult your pediatrician or a mental health provider for guidance or support.

Ehmke, R. Helping Children Deal with Grief, 17 November 2021. <https://childmind.org/article/helping-children-deal-grief/>



DEATH OF A PET

A pet can be a best friend. They often become members of the family and it can be devastating when we lose them. Yet, a final gift they may give is the opportunity to set the stage for how to cope with losses throughout life. Here are some tips:

- **Share the News** - Do so privately, in a safe environment, and in a developmentally appropriate manner.
- **Realize the Magnitude** - Pets often provide constant and unconditional love and connection. They greet, comfort, and provide companionship.
- **Stick to the Facts** - Tell the truth about the circumstances. Avoid making up a story or using the words "put to sleep" as that creates a correlation between sleep and death.
- **Be Together** - Grieve together. Cry together. Tell stories together. Laugh together.
- **Allow for Differences** - There is no right way or a wrong way to grieve. There is no timeline. Check in with each other and listen to each other.

SOCIAL STORY ABOUT GRIEF

Someone I
Love died



Understanding and coping with grief can be stressful, especially for young children. Here is a social story that can help.

[Click here to view a social story about grief.](#)

TRY IT AT HOME: CREATING A MEMORY BOX

A memory box is a box or other container which holds special things that will assist your child in remembering the loved one and the experiences they shared with that person. This box is a way for your child to cope with the loss they are feeling.



Step 1: Decorate the box

Allow your child to express creativity

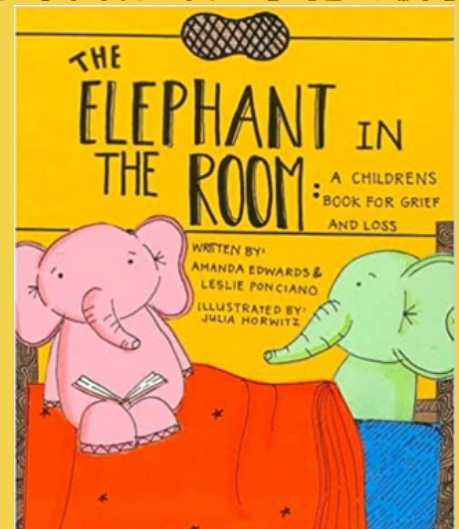
Step 2: Fill the box

Gather photos or mementos of your loved one

Step 3: Process emotions

Allow your child to share stories behind each object in the box

SEL BOOK OF THE MONTH



The Elephant in the Room is a children's storybook that provides positive strategies for coping with grief and loss. It helps children cope with emotions that children may experience when faced with any type of loss such as the death of a pet or a relative, a friend moving away, foster care, hospitalization, etc.