



Supporting Teens through Grief

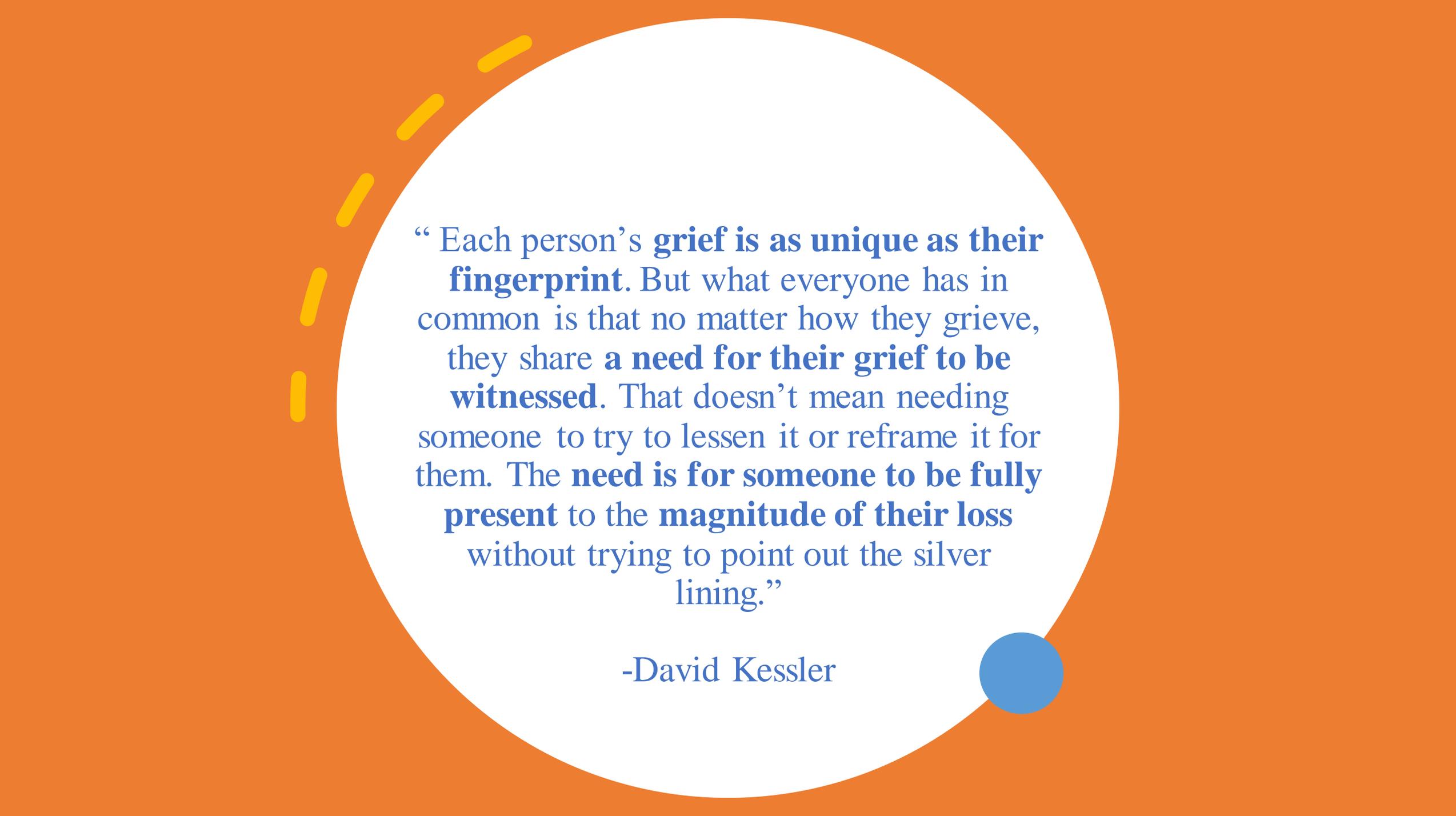
Selina Sanchez Cristobal

Community Outreach and Crisis Response Manager

Kara

Kara Overview

- Non-profit providing emotional support for grief and end-of-life since 1976
- Peer support: individual counseling & group (donation only)
- Grief-related therapy (for sliding scale fee)
- Support for youth and families
- Camp Kara (ages 6-17)
- Support for Spanish Speakers
- Crisis Response
- Community education and professional training
- Clients include: individuals, families, professional and family caregivers, first responders, organizations (schools, agencies, businesses, corporations)
- Contact: 650-321-5272; kara-grief.org



“ Each person’s **grief is as unique as their fingerprint**. But what everyone has in common is that no matter how they grieve, they share **a need for their grief to be witnessed**. That doesn’t mean needing someone to try to lessen it or reframe it for them. **The need is for someone to be fully present to the magnitude of their loss** without trying to point out the silver lining.”

-David Kessler

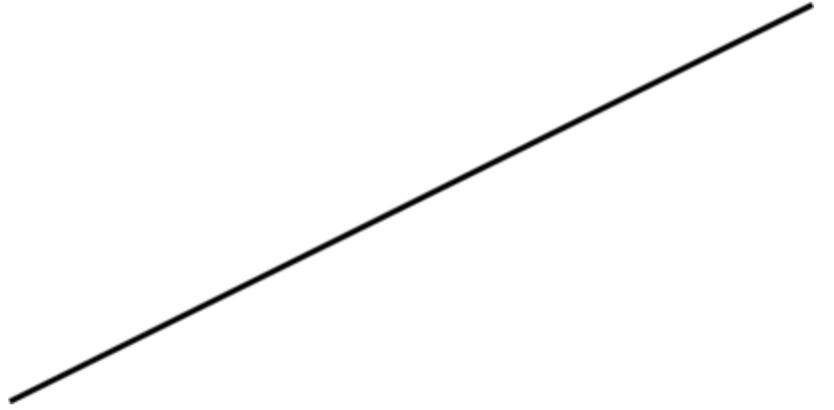
Grief

- The process of adapting to change involving loss
 - Not death specific- it's an emotion that facilitates integration and **REQUIRES** presence for adaption
 - Complex mixture of thoughts and feelings experienced on the inside
 - It's natural, normal, and necessary

Mourning

- The outward expression of grief
 - Crying, talking about the loss, sharing memories, journaling, praying, support groups, art, etc.

“Grief is the wound, mourning is the bandage that we mend with”



Grief is a spiral of feelings
and reactions

It is not a line with a beginning
and an end

This roller coaster of emotions
is often heightened by
triggers or landmines.

- Sensory Triggers
- Memory Triggers
- Time Triggers

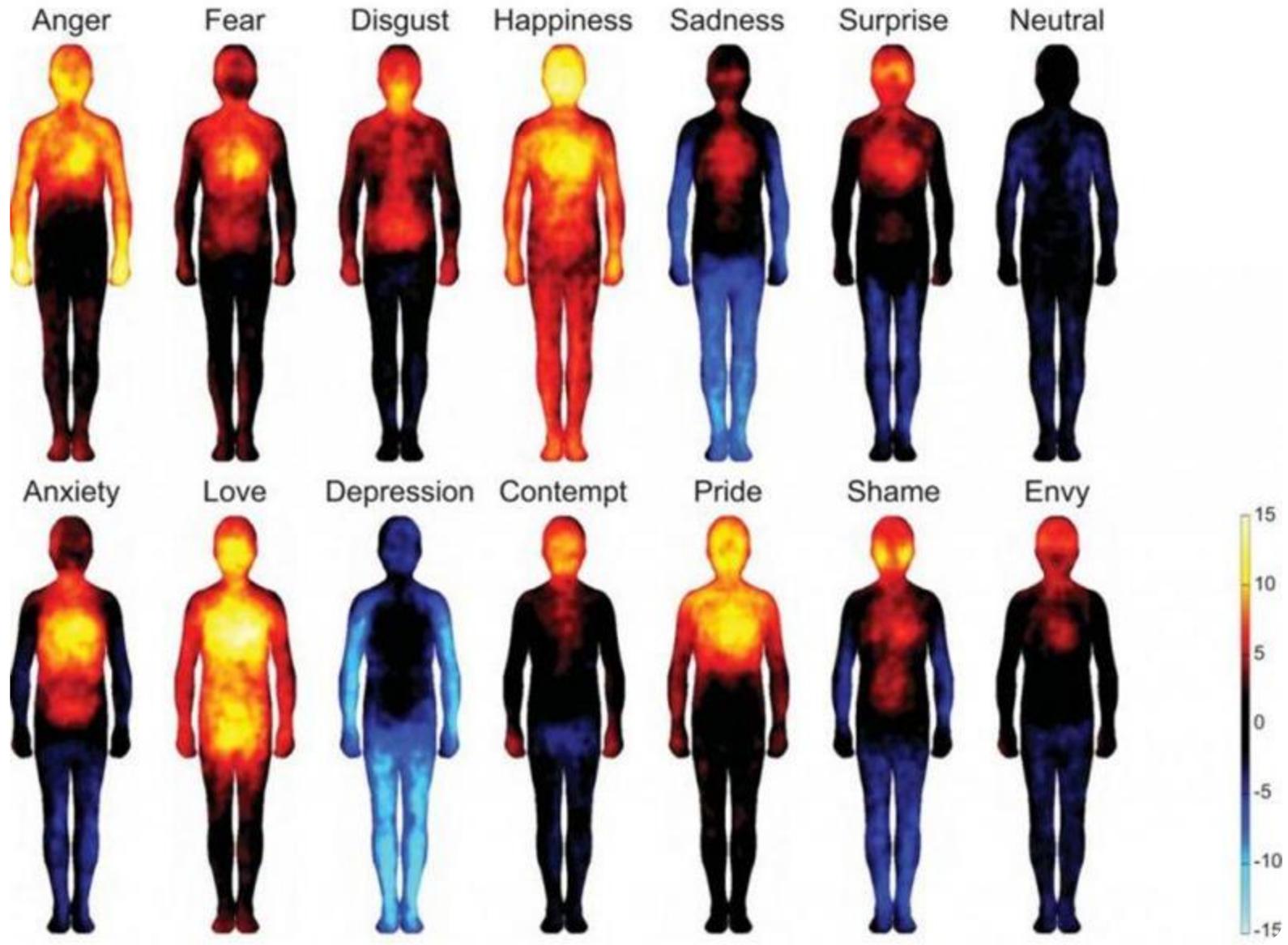


Grief knows no time



**Intrinsically Connected
-Mind-Body-Heart-**

The body
remembers in ways
we may not expect.



Lauri Nummenmaa, Enrico Gleason, Riitta Hari, and Jari K. Hieten, "Bodily Maps of Emotions," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* 111, no.2 (January 2014): 646-651, <http://www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1321664111>.

Grieving Styles



Intuitive

Feelings are intensely experienced

Expressions such as crying and suffering mirror the inner experience

Successful adaptive strategies facilitate experience and expression of feelings

Prolonged periods of confusion, inability to concentrate and disorganization and disorientation

Physical exhaustion and anxiety may result

Instrumental

Thinking is predominant to feeling as an experience; feelings are less intense. There is a general reluctance to talk specifically about feelings

Mastery of oneself and the environment are most important

Problem-solving as a strategy enables mastery of feelings and control of the environment in creating the new normal

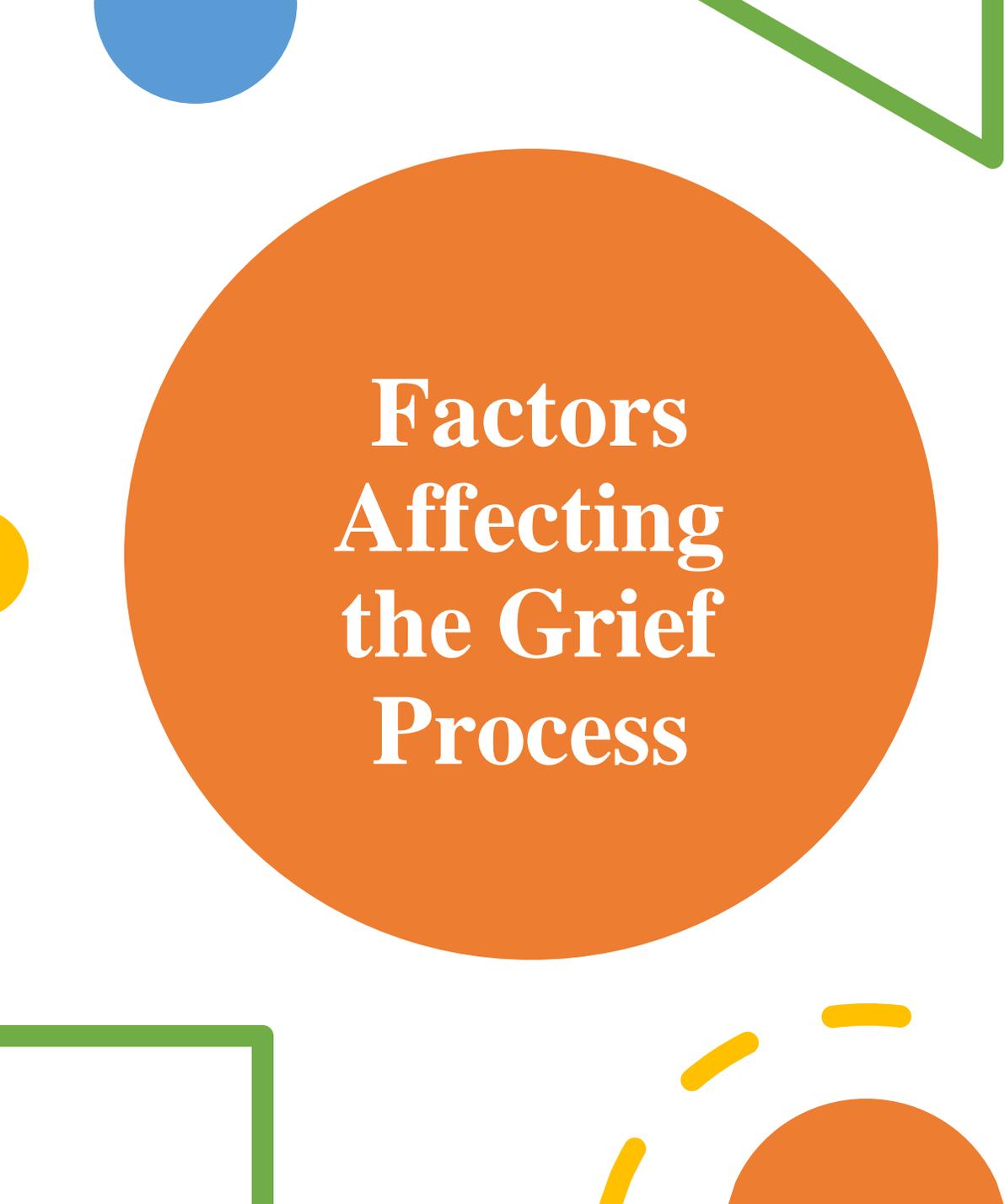
Brief periods of cognitive dysfunction are common- confusion, forgetfulness, obsessiveness

Energy levels are enhanced and symptoms of general reactions to the loss go unnoticed.

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- Present grief can tap into grief that has occurred in the past
 - All our grief meets in the moment of our present loss or trauma.
 - What may help is to identify what has been brought up from the past—realizing it may have as much emotional impact as the present.

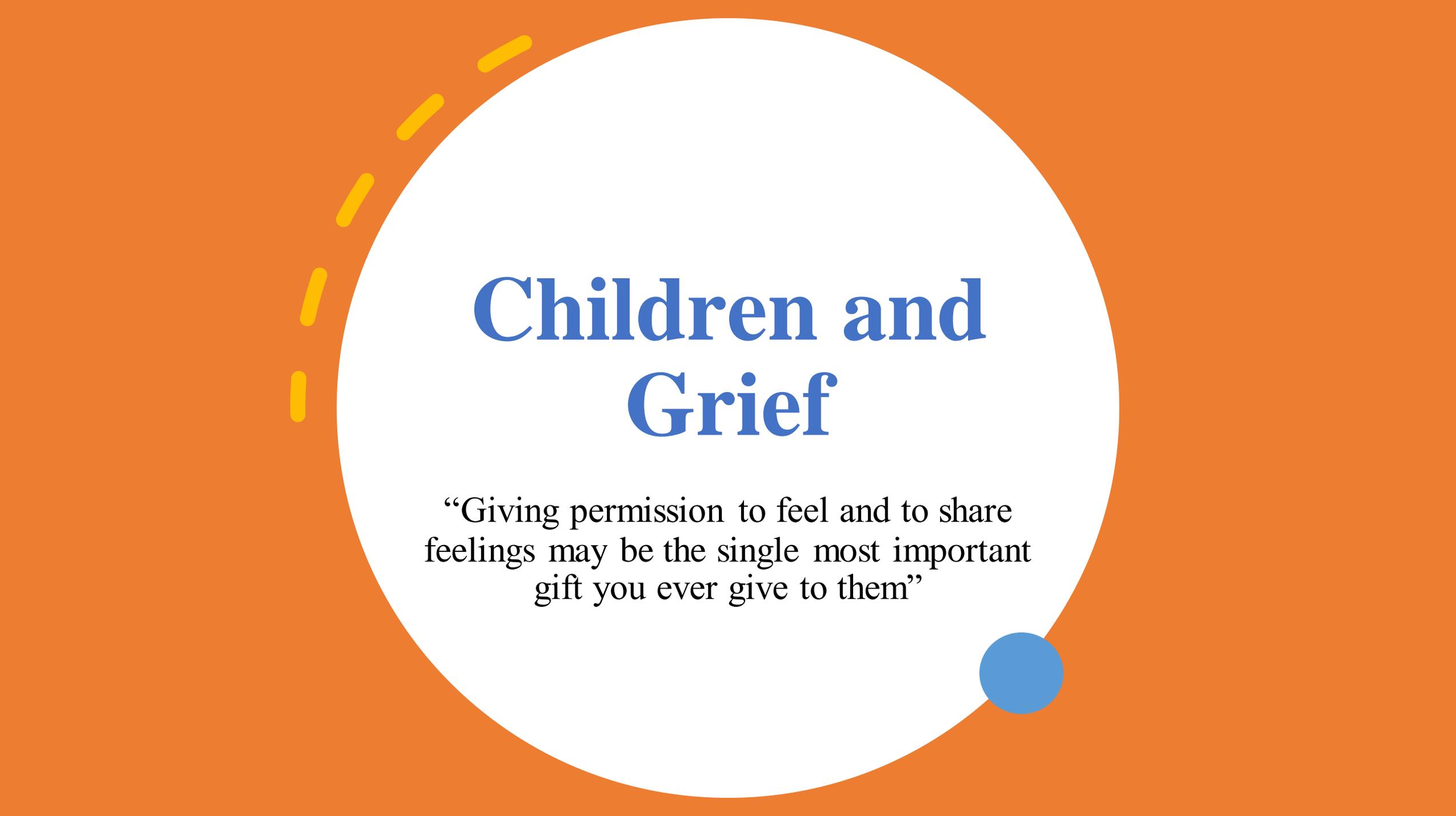


The Backpack Effect



Factors Affecting the Grief Process

- Age of the griever and the one who died
- Anticipated vs. Sudden Death
- Cause of Death
- Nature of the relationship between griever and deceased
- Griever's support system
- Griever's mental & emotional health



Children and Grief

“Giving permission to feel and to share feelings may be the single most important gift you ever give to them”

Children in Grief

Children grieve differently than adults

- Depending on the age, kids will react differently to grief, crisis, and trauma
- At each developmental level or situational challenge, will re-experience death in a new way and will need to find ways to reintegrate death into their lives
- Grief intertwined with normal developmental tasks

Children in Grief (4-6)

Ability Being Developed

Purpose & Direction (Intuitive v. Logical Reasoning)- an emerging interest in the use of primitive reasoning to know why things are the way they are

Child's Beliefs about Death

- Death not fully understood as permanent – reversibility
- Magical thinking -- causality in view of death

Grief Reactions

- Tell and retell about death
- Confusion and uncertainty – repeated questions
- Anxieties and fears about others
- Often visible regression, act younger





Children in Grief (7-11)

Ability Being Developed

Competency: problem-solving limited to concrete objects or events, not abstract concepts or hypothetical tasks. Move towards mastery and understanding

Child's Beliefs about Death

- Begin to see death as final and universal for others
- May believe they can escape by being good/trying hard
- Perceive the irreversibility and inevitability of death, AND perceive their own mortality

Grief Reactions

- Increased interest in facts around death
- May act like nothing happened or deny that things are different
- Tend to show grief through play or behaviors (i.e. shock, fear, embarrassment, humor)
- Peer relationships are increasingly important

Teens in Grief

Attitudes towards death becoming similar to adults'. Recognize their own mortality but may act as though it could never happen to them.

Ability Being Developed

Individuation (Identity v. Role Confusion): able to integrate concrete and abstract thought, growth in egocentrism as seen in invincibility mindset

Teen's Sense of Self, Expression, and Development

- Developmental separation from parents
- Reference peer group
- Verbal expressions are more prominent
- Increased risk-taking behavior may occur
- Social consciousness is more acute
 - Being a part of a bigger picture, belief, or ideology is important; their place in the world



Grief Reactions

Physical

- Fatigue
- Sleep more
- Gain/loss weight
- Headaches
- Get sick more easily
- Be accident prone
- Restless
- May be attracted to alcohol, smoking, drugs, excessive-risk taking

Mental

Trouble concentrating

Forgetfulness

Lack of motivation

“No one understands” mind set

May need to ask “why?” or say “if only”

Mourning what might have been

Grief Reactions

Emotional

- Sad
- Irritable
- Worried
- Angry
- Anxious
- Fearful
- Joyless

Emotional

- Mood swings
- Crying spells
- Frustration
- Vengeful
- Guilty
- Lonely
- Relieved

Watch for depression, hopelessness, and helplessness

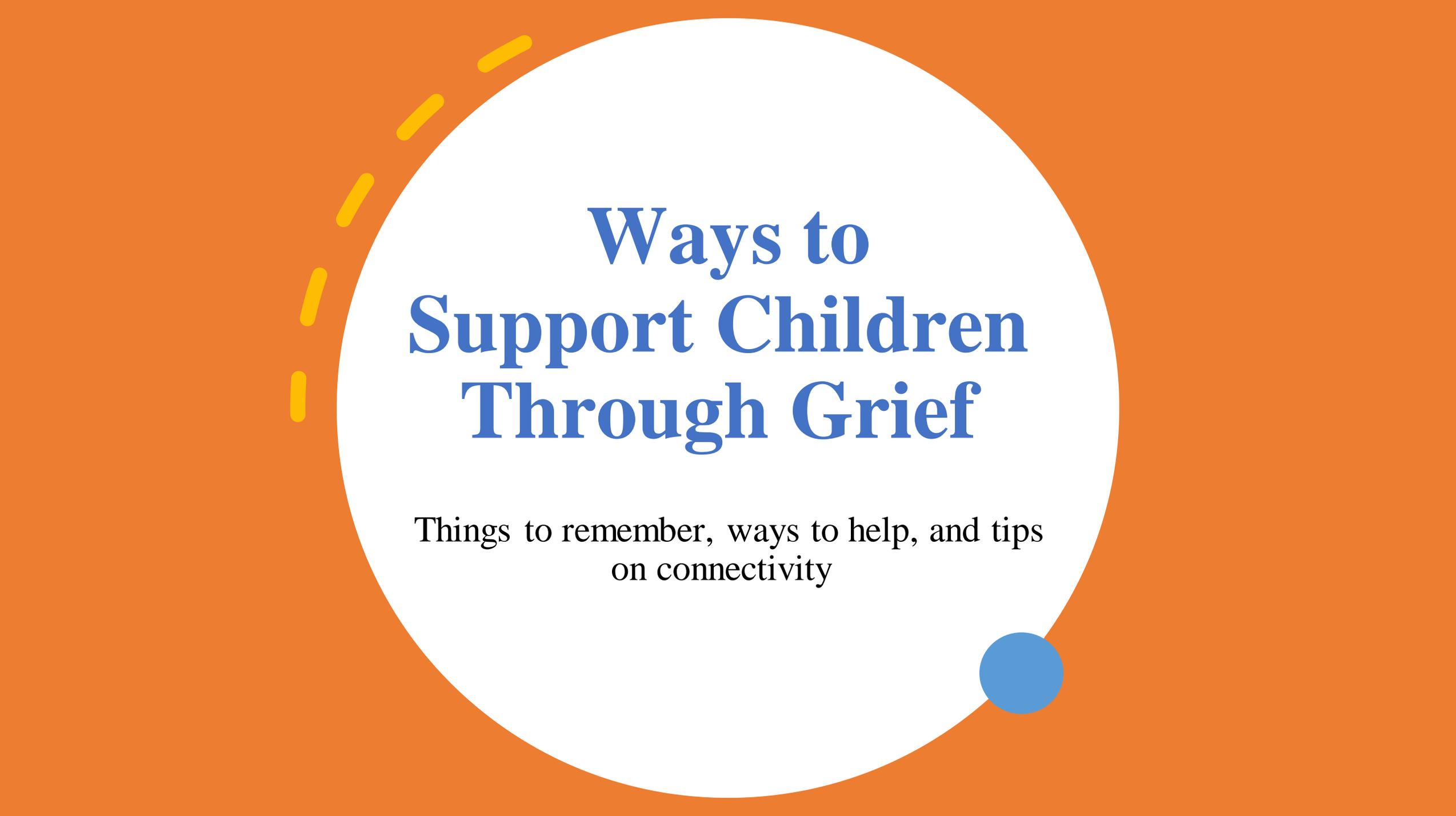
Grief Reactions

Spiritual

- May experience loss of direction, future, meaning, faith

Relational

- Feeling Isolated
- Less Cooperative
- Withdrawn OR getting very busy, perfectionistic
- May lash out or show mood more readily
- May have difficulty with others' reactions and what is said about the death as well as with the everyday content of peers conversations, which may suddenly seem trivial compared to the death.



Ways to Support Children Through Grief

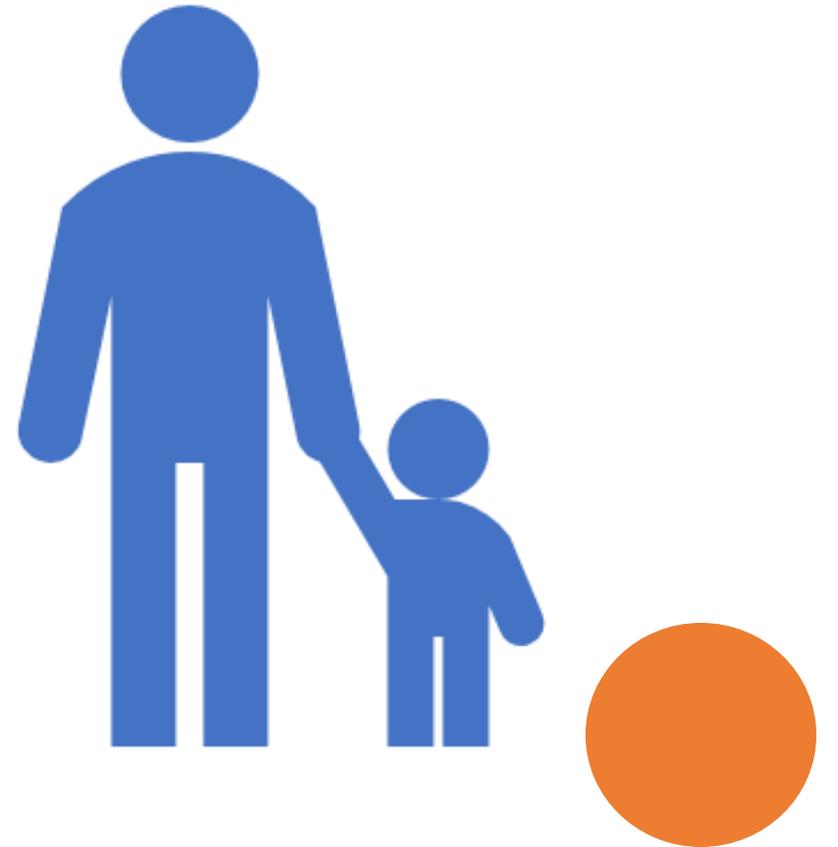
Things to remember, ways to help, and tips
on connectivity

Support for Children and Teens

Let children teach you about their grief

Be Honest with yourself about your own thoughts, concerns and feelings

- Judgments may arise about
 - The situation/ incident
 - Their reactions
 - Our own ability to serve/ help your child
- When we are judgmental toward others or ourselves, we cannot be compassionate
- When we are practicing the skill of compassion we are asking ourselves to sit with suffering, be kind and gentle with yourself when doing so.



A collection of yellow dice with various emoji faces on a wooden surface. The dice are scattered across the left side of the image, showing different emotions like happiness, sadness, surprise, and anger.

Support for Children and Teens

Children's feelings are their allies

- Grief is often more physical for younger children
 - Why?
 - The power of language as a means of organization and orientation. Language development is pivotal and coincides with neurological development and object permanence
- Feelings are neither good nor bad. They may make us feel good or bad, but they in and of themselves are not good or bad.
 - Susan David's work on "Emotional Agility"
 - Emotions are data points, Feelings are interpretation of data, and Behavior is data in action

Support for Children and Teens

Direct and truthful answers

- Developmentally appropriate language that *matches* the cognitive capacity of the receiver **and** *respects* the emotional severity of the context in which you are responding
- **KEEP IN MIND**
 - Word choice
 - Tone
 - Pace
- Remember: Children will ask if they want to know more, and may ask multiple times regardless of response.
 - We are supporting a process, when children ask multiple times it is more about the searching than the uncovering





Support for Children and Teens

The Power of Acknowledgment

- When you are responding to a grieving individual be sure to use statements such as:
 - I feel..... I believe.... I would want/ need.... I acknowledge....
- Be careful of statements that may not give the person the opportunity to express his/her own unique needs and feelings
 - You should/ shouldn't... I know just how you feel...
 - Everything will be ok. Don't worry, be sad, cry, be angry (etc.)
- Support of caring adults and peers who respect their grief, allowing them to express feelings and be heard
 - Be available, but not intrusive: "I'm here if you want to talk or if you need me."

Being Mindful of What We Say

Words that May Hurt

Now she's in a better place.
Time will heal you.
At least.....
Think of all you have to be thankful for.
Just be happy that he's out of his pain.
Be strong. You are holding up well.
Keep busy.
Try not to think about it.
He wouldn't have wanted you to be sad.
This is a blessing.
Now you have an angel in heaven.
You shouldn't feel that way

Words that May Heal

Instead of:
I heard you (person) died. I'm sorry to hear that. I hope you are doing okay.

TRY THIS:
I know you (person) died. I want you to know you can talk to me about this if you want to. I care about you and want to support you.

I'm thinking of you.

If I were in your shoes, I think I'd feel that way too.

One of my favorite memories of _____ (use the name of the person) is....

I have been thinking about you. I wanted to check in and see how you are doing today.

I don't know what to say, but I know this must be very difficult for you.

When people die, they can leave a space in our life. What's something that's comforting right now?

Being Mindful of What We Say

Flip The Script

Instead of
Loved one

Say
Your person

Why?
Using this language allows space for anyone to honor and process their grief regardless of the relationship they had with the deceased or their feelings surrounding the death

Instead of
Committed suicide

Say
Died by suicide

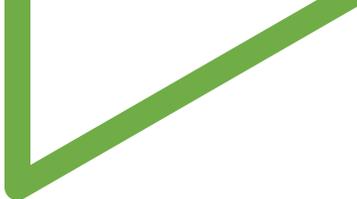
Why?
The phrase “committed suicide” is stigmatizing in a lot of outdated, insensitive ways. “Committed suicide” conveys shame and wrongdoing while ignoring the condition(s) that ultimately led to the death

Support for Children and Teens

Give them choices in expressing and participating in rituals and ways to be involved in memorializing the person who died

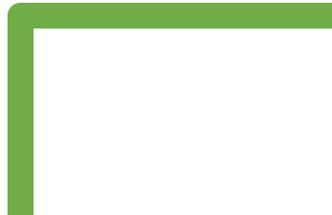
- Grief is disorienting, for it marks a time of change and/ or loss.
 - Out of Control ----- Control
 - Isolation ----- Community
- By restoring decision making power (however small or large) you are in essence restoring their sense of control





Support for Children and Teens

Provide a range of outlets for expression of their grief

- Mind
 - Games and Play
 - Engaging problem solving strategies and planning provide a sense of agency and allow children and teens to enact or reenact transitional times
 - Body
 - Movement- Hiking, Stretching, Sport/ Dance
 - Anchoring a person's grief to an external environment can create a sense of control, for they can visit a place when seeking out solstice or reliving a memory (eg. A hiking trail)
 - Heart
 - Creative Outlets
 - Listening to music, creating with one's hands (painting, Zentangle, cooking/ baking)
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Support for Children and Teens

Routines and stability provide safety and help diffuse anxiety

- Maintaining routines is helpful; however do not be afraid to modify them
 - Example: If unloading the dishwasher is a chore, have kids do it while you are in the kitchen cooking. Shared contributions and shared space
- Bedtime routines for younger ones may be more challenging, give yourself more time and to aid this pivotal transition
 - TIP: utilize a nightlight in the hall ways

Listening is profound healing.

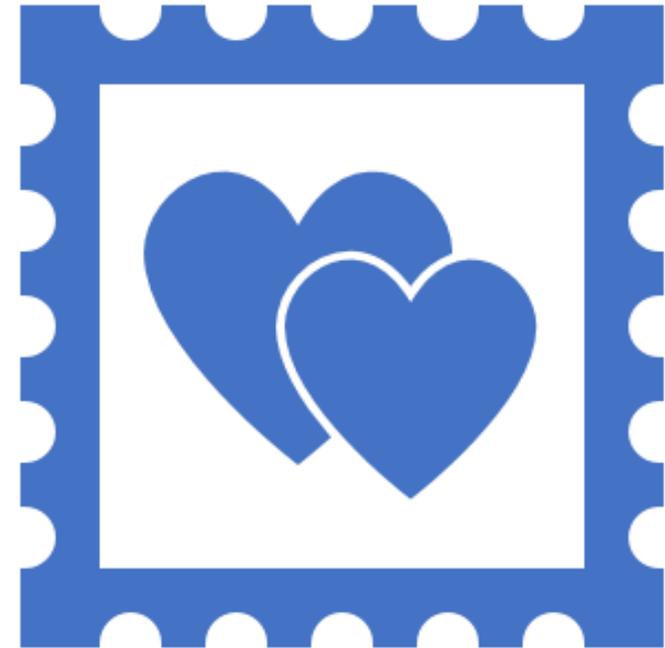
Know that you CAN make a difference

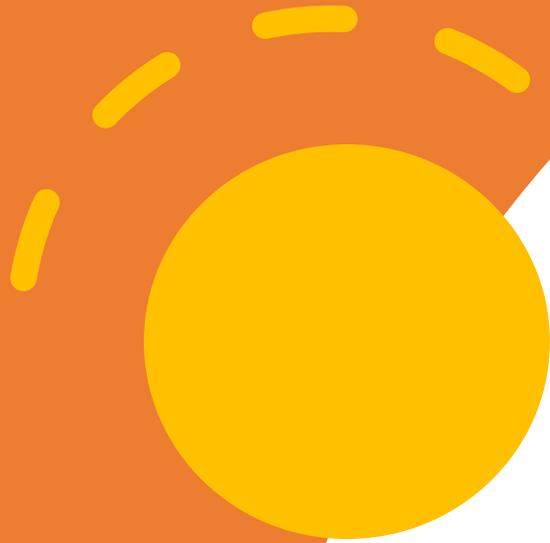
You don't have to make it better

You don't have to have the answers

You don't have to take away the pain

It's their pain. One has to experience it in one's
own time and in one's own way





“We think that the point is to pass the test or to overcome the problem, but the truth is that **things don’t really get solved**. They come together and they fall apart. Then they come together again and fall apart again. ... The **healing comes from letting there be room** for all of this to happen: room for **grief**, for **relief**, for **misery**, for **joy**.”

- Pema Chödrön



Thank you!

For more information please contact
us at:

kara-grief.org

or

call: 650-321-5272

