

GOOD GRIEF!

Resources for Working with Grieving Children & Teens



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BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Marianne Esolen has worked in a wide variety of environments with children and families for over twenty years. She has served as a Camp Counselor, Youth Program Director, Career Coach, Crisis Counselor, Oncology Camp Director, Education Specialist, Trainer and Consultant working with United Way, FECS, American Cancer Society, Camp Happy Times, Camp Hope, Camp Comfort Zone, CASA, Tuesday's Children, & New York State Education Department. In the consulting arena, she has provided technical assistance and customized trainings for camps, schools and agencies in many areas including: leadership, stress management, crisis response, resiliency, peer leadership, parenting, and community-building. As a licensed social worker, Marianne maintains a private practice in Huntington, NY where she works individually with young children, teens, and adults. She specializes in work with issues of grief, chronic illness, and managing life transitions. Above all else, Marianne believes first and foremost in fostering resiliency and promise in people & programs. Dedicated always to learning and teaching best practices, she believes that all that is RIGHT within every person will always be more powerful than any of the challenges they face.

Do all the good you can
By all the means you can
In all the ways you can
In all the ways you can
In all the places you can
At all the times you can
To all the people you can
As long as ever you can.

John Wesley

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

There's an elephant in the room.

It is large and squatting, so it is hard to get around it.

Yet we squeeze by with, "How are you?" and "I'm fine"
and a thousand other forms of trivial chatter.

We talk about the the weather.

We talk about work.

We talk about everything - except the elephant in the room.

There's an elephant in the room. We all know it is there.

We are talking about the elephant as we talk together.

It is constantly on our minds,
for you see, it is a very big elephant.

It has hurt us all.

But we do not talk about the elephant in the room.

Oh please, say her name.

Oh please, say "Barbara" again.

Oh please, let's talk about the elephant in the room.

For if we talk about her death,
perhaps we can talk about her life.

Can I say "Barbara" to you and not have you look away?

For if I cannot, then you are leaving
me alone. . .

in a room. . .

with an elephant.

- Terry Kettering

My Grief Rights: Ten Healing Rights for Grieving Children

by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

Someone you love has died. You are probably having many hurtful and scary thoughts and feelings right now. Together those thoughts and feelings are called *grief*, which is a normal (though really difficult) thing everyone goes through after someone they love has died. The following ten rights will help you understand your grief and eventually feel better about life again. Use the ideas that make sense to you. Post this list on your refrigerator or on your bedroom door or wall. Re-reading it often will help you stay on track as you move toward healing from your loss. You might also ask the grown-ups in your life to read this list so they will remember to help you in the best way they can.

- 1. I have the right to have my own unique feelings about the death.** I may feel mad, sad or lonely. I may feel scared or relieved. I may feel numb or sometimes not anything at all. No one will feel exactly like I do.
- 2. I have the right to talk about my grief whenever I feel like talking.** When I need to talk, I will find someone who will listen to me and love me. When I don't want to talk about it, that's OK, too.
- 3. I have the right to show my feelings of grief in my own way.** When they are hurting, some kids like to play so they'll feel better for awhile. I can play or laugh, too. I might also get mad and scream. This does not mean I am bad, it just means I have scary feelings that I need help with.
- 4. I have the right to need other people to help me with my grief, especially grown-ups who care about me.** Mostly I need them to pay attention to what I am feeling and saying and to love me no matter what.
- 5. I have the right to get upset about normal, everyday problems.** I might feel grumpy and have trouble getting along with others sometimes.
- 6. I have the right to have "griefbursts".** Griefbursts are sudden, unexpected feelings of sadness that just hit me sometimes—even long after the death. These feelings can be very strong and even scary. When this happens, I might feel afraid to be alone.
- 7. I have the right to use my beliefs about my god to help me deal with my feelings of grief.** Praying might make me feel better and somehow closer to the person who died.
- 8. I have the right to try to figure out why the person I loved died.** But it's OK if I don't find an answer. Why questions about life and death are the hardest questions in the world.
- 9. I have the right to think and talk about my memories of the person who died.** Sometimes those memories will be happy and sometimes they might be sad. Either way, these memories help me keep alive my love for the person who died.

10. I have the right to move toward and feel my grief and, over time, to heal. I'll go on to live a happy life, but the life and death of the person who died will always be a part of me. I'll always miss this special person.

Grief and Children

In the U.S. 8 million people suffered through the death of someone in their immediate family last year.

1.2 million children will lose a parent to death by the age of 15. That is one out of every 20 children!

Mortality rates for adults in their 40s and 50s have risen dramatically over past two decades making it more likely that younger children will experience the death of a parent, or a classmate's parent.

**National Mental Health Association, Ohio State University, Wall Street Journal

Widening the Scope of GRIEF for kids

- ✓ Moving to a new home
- ✓ Friend or family member moving away
- ✓ Changing schools
- ✓ Health issues of a family member
- ✓ Health issues faced by child
- ✓ Financial issues faced by family
- ✓ Change in parent's work schedule/job
- ✓ Developmental and learning challenges
- ✓ Change in school class assignment (special needs or advanced placement track)
- ✓ Loss of a friendship
- ✓ Loss of key adult connection - changes in teachers, coaches, group leaders
- ✓ Not making it onto sports team

Grief work, like life work, is about having the opportunity to create and share our experiences. The stories we shape from those experiences help us make sense of our world. Our stories will differ based on gender, ethnicity, religion, and culture. Even if denied details, as so often is the case with children, they will weave their own stories in order to understand their life experiences and find meaning in those experiences. Our job as caregivers, friends, and MENTORS is TO BE THERE and to listen to the stories and beliefs that children carry after a significant loss in their life. We do not need to

fix, we need to bear witness to the wide range of feelings and thoughts. We need to be a safe place where they can talk or not talk, a place where they can still be children.

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Common Characteristics of Children's Grief:

- ✓ Children tend to grieve intermittently
- ✓ Children often act out feelings in play
- ✓ Children may seem overly concerned with daily life activities and routines
- ✓ Children may exhibit regressive behavior
- ✓ Children may exhibit separation anxiety
- ✓ Children may have trouble concentrating/difficulty with school work
- ✓ Children may act out or have problems with self-control
- ✓ Children may have reduced confidence
- ✓ Children may be uncomfortable around peers
- ✓ Children may feel secretly responsible

REMINDERS OF THE DOS TO HELP GRIEVING CHILDREN

- Do know your own grief history and be aware of your own unfinished business
- Do remain PRESENT in child's life even if at times you don't know what to say, your presence is CRUCIAL regardless of whether the loss is discussed
- Do remain willing to talk about their grief and answer questions about your own beliefs and experiences - always BE TRUTHFUL
- Do share compassion, understanding, and unwavering support
- Do give kids permission to talk about it and create opportunities for them to share favorite memories, stories, and qualities of their loved one
- Do maintain normal routines as much as possible and let them know it's okay to still play, laugh, and go back to activities

- Do let the child be in charge of the pace and rhythm of their own grief journey - remember your role as COMPANION not counselor!

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COMMUNITY- BASED GRIEF SUPPORT

- COMFORT ZONE CAMP 1-866-488-5679 www.comfortzonecamp.org
- East End Hospice/CAMP GOOD GRIEF 631-288-8400 www.eeh.org/campgoodgrief
- BOB SWEENEY'S CAMP HOPE www.bobsweenyscamphope.org
- Good Shepherd Hospice (631) 465-6524 www.goodshepherdhospice.chsli.org
- TIME FOR TEENS (631) 338-7258 www.time4teens.org
- Hospice Care Network (516) 224 - 6465 www.hospice-care-network.org
- VNS Hospice (631) 261-7200 www.visitingnurseservice.org
- North Shore LIJ's Center for Hope (516) 470-3123 www.northshorelij.com
- COPE Foundation (516) 484-4993 www.copefoundation.org
- Diocese of Rockville Centre www.holyroodcemetery.org Directory of bereavement programs/groups
- SIBS Place (516) 374-3000 www.sibsplace.org

Hotlines and Crisis Numbers

- ³⁵/₁₇ National Hopeline Number: 1-800-SUI-CIDE (784-2433)
- ³⁵/₁₇ Long Island Crisis Center : 516-679-1111
- ³⁵/₁₇ The Samaritans of NY Suicide Prevention Hotline: 212-673-3000
- ³⁵/₁₇ Covenant House National Nineline Hotlines (General crisis hotline):1-800-999-9999
- ³⁵/₁₇ LifeNet: 1-800-LIFENET (543-3638) (www.800lifenet.com)
- ³⁵/₁₇ Response of Suffolk County (for any crisis): 631-751-7500

Loss Organizations and Grief Websites

- ³⁵/₁₇ Griefnet.org (www.griefnet.org)
- ³⁵/₁₇ Grief Loss Recovery (<http://grieflossrecovery.com/cms/>)
- ³⁵/₁₇ Grieving Child Organization (www.grievingchild.org)
- ³⁵/₁₇ Living With Loss (www.livingwithloss.org)

³⁵₁₇ The National Center for Grieving Children and Families (www.dougy.org)

³⁵₁₇ ShareGrief.com (www.sharegrief.com)

³⁵₁₇ Survivors of Suicide (www.survivorsofsuicide.com)

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"I'll Be There" by Escape Club

***Music a powerful means to start and end group work with children, including the challenge of inviting children to bring in their own chosen song to share that comforts or reminds them of their loved one. This song is one of my favorites in memory of my father.

Over mountains, over trees, over oceans, over seas
Across the desert I'll be there
In a whisper on the wind, on the smile of a new friend
Just think of me and I'll be there

Don't be afraid, oh my love, I'll be watching you from above
And I'd give all the world tonight to be with you
Cause I'm on your side, I still care
I may have died, but I've gone nowhere
Just think of me and I'll be there

On the edge of a waking dream
Over rivers, over streams, through wind and rain, I'll be there
Across the wide open sky, thousands of miles I'll fly
To be with you, I'll Be There

Don't be afraid, oh my love, I'll be watching you from above
And I'd give all the world tonight to be with you
Cause I'm on your side, I still care
I may have died, but I've gone nowhere
Just think of me and I'll be there

In the breath of a wind that sighs, oh there's no need to cry.
Don't be afraid, oh my love, I'll be watching you from above
And I'd give all the world tonight to be with you

Cause I'm on your side, I still care
I may have died, but I've gone nowhere
Just think of me and I'll be there
Think of me , I'll be there