

# Building Bridges for Kids: Loss & Grief

## Activities:

Emotions charades (most appropriate with preschool children, but a fun way to get older children warmed up)

Balloon conversation:

Have you ever lost a balloon?

What happened?

How did you feel?

Have you ever lost anything else that felt that way or a little like that?

How does it feel to lose a game or a race? How is that the same and different?

What if it was something you didn't get to do? (like have a birthday party this year or go on a trip)

Even if all these things don't feel exactly the same, they still share something. That something is loss.

Loosing something or someone we care about can cause grief.

## Topic Overview:

Grief is messy. Lots of different feelings happen.

All of the emotions we talked about are a natural, normal, and healthy way to respond when we lose someone or something.

Grief means you care about something enough to miss it, love someone enough to wish they were still here.

**Book:** The Goodbye Book by Todd Parr

## Tending to Grief:

What are some things we can do to help us grieve? (*hint: use the list of emotions we just created*)

This list will vary depending on what feelings you named and what is acceptable behavior at your house.

See the "grownups" section for examples if you get stuck

When you're angry:

*we do not hurt ourselves or others on purpose*

- 

When you feel sad:

- 

When you're confused:

- 

When you feel scared:

- 

## Practice breathing exercises

Place one hand on belly, one on heart and breath in slow and deep then breathe out the same way

Bumblebee breathing

In one nostril, out the other

## For Grownups to explore and use later

“Grief is not a problem to be solved [or]... an illness to be cured” Megan Devine

With this in mind, I was very careful in this program to say “help” “help with,” “help us grieve,” or “help us through” instead of “feel better,” “fix it,” or “get better.” However, I don’t encourage you to share my reason with your children. If they are grieving, it helps that we acknowledge their feelings without trying to fix it, but telling them it isn’t fixable might be too much information.

**Locally** Brooke’s Place <https://www.brookesplace.org/> (317) 705-9650  
8935 N Meridian St Suite 200, Indianapolis, IN 46260

**Yoga** for Grief Playlist <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLR8PVbHMUAHiZXMf7foXaetSO-M6ElljB>

<https://mysticmoonlightyoga.com/yoga-for-grief/>

<https://youtu.be/IRmimOCXK-E>

Emotional regulation activities for children <https://www.yoremikids.com/news/emotional-regulation-activities-for-kids>

### Breathing exercises

for children: <https://www.gopaintlove.org/breathing>

<https://www.ellevatenetwork.com/articles/9280-the-path-to-mindfulness-part-2-the-three-part-breath>

<https://mindfulnessandgrief.com/breathing-exercise-for-grief-stress/>

<https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/breathing-lessons-0501124>

**Tending to Grief (examples)** *some of these can be used for more than one emotion!*

When you’re angry:

- Punch a pillow/hit your bed with your pillow
- Slam a door
- Jumping jacks, run in circles, dance really crazy
- Pop bubble wrap
- Yell (outside, into your pillow, alone in the car)

When you’re sad:

- Go to bed early
- Draw a picture
- Listen to or play music (tongue drum <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qp0by1SVLro>)
- Go for a walk

When you’re confused:

- Ask questions
- Write about it

When you feel scared:

- Make yourself a fort
- Distraction (play a game)
- Find a grownup

## Tending to Grief (ideas)

Create a “weather chart” for your child’s emotions, providing them a non-verbal way of letting them share how they’re doing each day

Create a grief scale, meter, or thermometer– how heavy does it feel today? How big? How hot/cold?

Both of these ideas can be used verbally, but may be especially helpful for those times your child isn’t comfortable verbalizing their grief. Maybe you can also create pictograms of things to do together while tending to grief. If they can add those to the chart, it’s a way of non-verbally expressing their needs. The trust you build by checking the chart and responding will hopefully also help them process.

**Tools** mentioned in *Speaking of Psychology: Children, loss and stress*

<https://www.calm.com/>

<https://insighttimer.com/>

<https://buddhify.com/>

CBT Toolbox for Children and Adolescents (over 200 worksheets and exercises for Trauma, ADHD, Autism, Anxiety, Depression & conduct disorders) by Lisa Phifer <https://www.amazon.com/CBT-Toolbox-Children-Adolescents-Worksheets/dp/1683730755>

## Misc. for Grownups

(podcast) Terrible, thanks for asking <https://www.ttfa.org/>

(book) *Non-Death Loss and Grief: Context and Clinical Implications* edited by Darcy L. Harris

(research article) *The Role of Social Support in the Relationship Between Adolescents’ Level of Loss and Grief and Well-Being* by Firdevs Savi Çakar

## Creating space for a conversation about death

If your child has not experienced death, you can start making space for the topic now. Children as young as four are learning about family relationships. For example, “You’re my mom, and grandma is your mom.” “This is my brother and my uncle is your brother.” If you have lost a grandparent that your child has never met, looking at pictures and sharing that relationship might start a conversation.

PLEASE NOTE: I am not recommending you bring out pictures and say “That’s my grandma who died.”

## Let your child guide the conversation.

Recently, my sister was showing her four-year-old son pictures of our grandfather and **he asked** “where is your grandpa now?” It provided an opportunity to gently and honestly explain that death happens. “My grandpa died. It was a long time ago. I miss him, but it’s okay.” My nephew was genuinely shocked, and while his empathy for my sister was beautiful, he wasn’t devastated. He had lots of follow up questions. My niece is the same age and did not ask even that first question, and that’s okay too.

## Final notes

The books listed on the green handout are not exhaustive or perfect. Some of them do a wonderful job until the very last page or there’s one line that I wish they had written differently. As a parent, I encourage you to use what works for your family. Skip that page or that sentence if it doesn’t fit with what you, your child or your family is experiencing. Please do not hesitate to call or email me for more titles or resources, I am happy to keep digging. [slockwood@jcclin.org](mailto:slockwood@jcclin.org)