

ACTIVITIES TO HELP GRIEVING CHILDREN

PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

- Providing grieving children with physical outlets is an excellent way to give them a temporary release from the grieving process. It allows them to 'get away' from the deep oppressive feelings of bereavement. Physical activities also support the grieving process. Whilst engaged in the physical task, they will be able to release emotions physically and this can often lead to emotions being expressed verbally (or through body language - especially for children who are non-verbal).
- Examples of physical activities: running outside, climbing, (for children who use a wheelchair being taken for an exhilarating fast walk or being pushed on a wheelchair swing etc.), throwing balls, beanbags etc. randomly or into/at targets, manipulating/pounding clay or play dough.

REMEMBERING ACTIVITIES

- Use photographs of the person who has died. Pass them around at circle time and encourage individuals to share thoughts and emotions about the person, if they are willing to do so.
- Use objects related to the individual who died (e.g. an item of their clothing, a favourite toy or book etc.) to help the children talk about the person and share how they are feeling.
- Listen to music that the person who died liked or that relates to them. This may elicit responses and thoughts from the children or may just provide a very happy and reflective session.
- Go to a special happy place, a venue that reminds the child/ren of the person that has died
- Make a memory lantern.
- Create a memory project with the grieving child: a memory box containing items related to the deceased, a photo album, an item of clothing, their favourite toy, a pillow made from an item of the deceased's clothing etc.
- Create a 'stone pile' - every time you share a memory of the person that died add a stone to a decorative bowl. You could write a few words on each stone. This activity could also be done by adding leaves to a decorative tree, flowers into a garden display or whatever other imagery fits with the deceased.
- Choose an activity/routine that the class really identified with the person that has died e.g. playing a certain game, laying the table for snack (as this was the child's favourite job to do in class) etc. As you lead this activity, intentionally talk about the person that has died and how they used to do this task. It can often be much easier to talk about a person who has died when you are actively engaged in doing something that they enjoyed.
- As a class, write a story about the person that has died.
- Laminate photos of the person that has died so that the children can have them in their bag, classroom tray, locker, at home etc. They will then be able to look at them whenever they need to.

REASSURANCE ACTIVITIES

- Make friendship bracelets for each other, so the children can see the friends are reminded of the friends that they still have around them.
- Each child can make a personal family tree (include friends and family), so that the child can see who they still have around them. This allows them to see who is alive and remind them that just because one person has died it doesn't mean everyone else in their life is going to die straight away too.
- Make a 'life story' book. Use pictures and photos to make a book telling the story of the child's life up until now. This includes who has died and when and how it happened. The child will be able to read and retell their life story and see how the death of their friend is just a part of their whole life.

COMFORTING ACTIVITIES

- Have a furry toy or a hot water bottle that they can cuddle in times of great sadness or distress.
- Blanket to wrap up in or a weighted blanket
- A place or a space to be alone, this could even be a large box with cushions etc.
- Make a 'safe box' - put together a collection of things that help to make the child feel safe
- Comfort cards
- Create a special bag for the grieving child which has a range of things in it to help them smile

THERAPEUTIC ACTIVITIES

- Have extra music therapy sessions. Music therapy is not only educational, enjoyable and relaxing for children, but it also allows them to be expressive in a different way. It allows them to release their thoughts and emotions about the death in a musical manner.
- Yoga and breath awareness
- Drama Therapy
- Massage and aromatherapy
- In house counselling
- Use of peer supports
- Develop their understanding of different emotions, what they are and how they make us
- **Emotion stones - have 3 stones: one jagged, one round and one shiny smooth. Use these 3 stones to express different emotions and ways of feeling. The round stone = normal everyday feelings, jagged = difficult emotions, shiny = special times. Ask the children to choose the stone that they are feeling and if possible to express why they are feeling this way. Even if the child is unable to verbalise how they are feeling by selecting the stone relevant to how they are feeling allows them to communicate their emotions. Also the opportunity to handle and explore the stone will be very therapeutic for the child.**
- If the child is able to, get them to tell you their top 5 worries.

UNDERSTANDING OF DEATH ACTIVITIES

- Bowl of fruit
- Vase of flowers
- Fish in a bowl
- Funeral for fish
- Cremation for fish
- As you do these activities, take photographs and videos so that you have visual resources and reminders to use in the future.

For further support and advice please contact -

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