

CHILDREN'S GRIEF CENTER OF NEW MEXICO



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www.childrensgrief.org

Childhood & Teen Bereavement

An ACE

Did You Know?

- Nationwide, approximately 1 in 15 children will become bereaved before the age of 18
- This is significantly close bereavement losing a parent or sibling before age 18.

Childhood & Teen Bereavement

Did You Know?

- NM ranks 4th highest in the nation for childhood bereavement – behind WV, MS, & AL
- In NM, approximately 1 in 10 children will lose a parent or sibling before 18 / ~53,000 children
- Context; for every 1 child diagnosed with cancer this year, 35 children will lose a parent

Higher Risks With Bereavement

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Substance abuse
- High risk behaviors
- Unhealthy coping techniques
- Problems with school attendance
- Problems with concentration / academics
- Decreased immune system – increased illness

Higher Risks (Cont.)

- Hyperactivity
- Inability to feel love or feel loved
- Inability to form attachments
- Inability to make commitments
- Experimentation with criminal activity
- Incarceration

Children & Teens – “Magical Thinking”

(My actions are directly connected to the outcome)

- If I had not been playing soccer, my Mom wouldn't have died in that car accident on the way to pick me up
- If I had not fought with Dad before school, he wouldn't have had the heart attack on the way to work and died

Magical Thinking (Cont.)

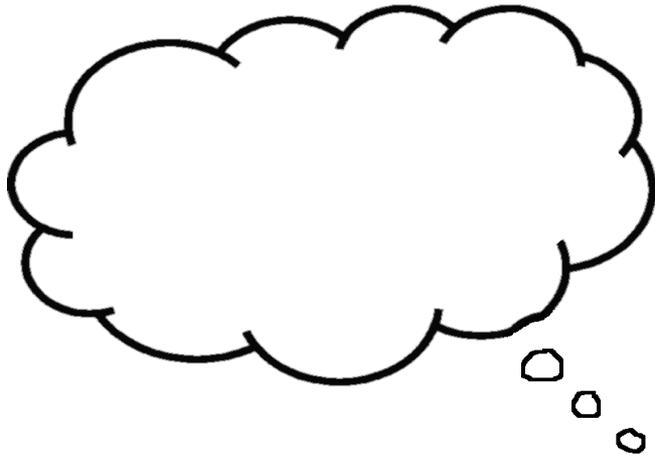
- If I hadn't been such a problem at home, my Mom wouldn't have taken those pills and overdosed.
- My brother was the better child. He should be the one who is here, not me.

The Burden Carried Within

- Shame
- Blame
- Survivor Guilt
- “Woulda” ... “Shoulda” ... “Coulda”

- Natural, normal, developmental reaction
- Very harmful and damaging
- Often unspoken!

Grief Reactions



Thoughts/cognitive



Relationships/social

FEELINGS



and



EMOTIONS

Feelings/emotional



Bodies/physical

Factors That Affect Grief

- The nature of the relationship with the person who died
- The cause of death – expected, unexpected, stigmatized
- The grieving person's age and gender
- Past experiences with loss
- The grieving person's personality and coping style
- The support available from friends and family
- Religious or spiritual beliefs

Physical Manifestations

- Tiredness and lethargy
- Colds and illnesses
- Nausea and digestive upset
- Backaches
- Headaches
- Panic attacks
- Difficulty with taking full breaths
- Accident prone / bruises
- Sleep difficulty – getting to sleep, staying asleep

Cognitive / Thoughts

- Mental fogginess
- Problems with memory
- Foreshortened sense of future
- Good actions have no benefit
- Don't belong anywhere
- Old rules of life no longer make sense
- What does it matter anyway?

Relationships / Social

- Fear of getting close to anyone
- No one gets me anyway
- DON'T WANT TO BE DIFFERENT
- “Infectious”
- Don't want to tell others
- Hard to ask for help
- Isolation – Self-imposed and other-imposed

Emotions / Feelings

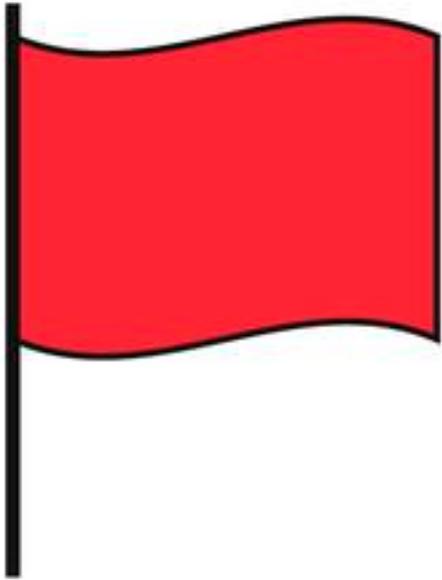
worthlessness hopelessness fear anxiety
panic terror aloneness loneliness
shame blame guilt helplessness sadness
despair deprivation desperation anger
misery vulnerability apathy envy
depression hatred jealousy
embarrassment humiliation sorrow shock
numbness stoicism denial ...

A Note About Stigmatized Deaths

- Homicide
- Suicide
- Overdose
- Alcohol-induced
- Accidents from high risk activities
- Depression or mental health-related

Extra shame, blame, guilt, terror, survivor guilt

Warning Signs A Child Might Need Some Help



- Can't speak about the dead person
- Lies or denies person died
- Aggression that becomes destructive or doesn't subside
- Persistent anxiety that affects functioning
- Self harm or punishing behaviors (cutting, anorexia, bulimia)
- Risk-taking (using drugs, alcohol, taking physical risks, sexual)

Warning Signs (Cont.)

- Change in grades
- Apathy or worthlessness
- Self-blaming comments
- Withdrawn or isolated
- Excessive fear or terror (PTSD)
- Complete lack of involvement of parents or caregivers

Unresolved Grief

- Affects normal development
- Creates new unwritten rules for life that are internalized and often not evident
- Affects all relationships going forward
- Take into adulthood for a lifetime
- Increases probability of more ACE's

Stages of Grief vs. Tasks of Grief

Stages:

*Elizabeth Kubler-Ross,
MD*

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance

Tasks:

William Worden, Ph D

- Understanding
- Feeling the feelings
- Remembering
- Moving On

A Note About Grieving Parents

- Adult grief is like a blow to the head there is cognitive impairment
- Feel overwhelmed a lot of the time and have a hard time prioritizing
- Struggle with taking care of themselves
- Struggle with parenting a grieving child
- Need empathy, support, caring, mindful assistance
- Are managing two very different griefs – own & child's!

When Grief Is Supported...

- See healthy role models
- Learn tools, skills, and techniques
- Learn healthy coping habits
- See others like them moving forward
- Know not alone
- Find hope
- Learn have a right to happiness again
- Stays connected to others!

How You Can Help

- Be warm, caring, connecting, supportive
- Ask questions gently
- Offer support periodically
- Be a connector and offer resources
- Suggest a meeting with parents and child
- Offer some flexibility with rules/standards
- Ask or acknowledge regularly as time goes on
- Remind students when hear insensitive comments
- Share if you've had a similar circumstance

What's Helpful To Say

SINCE THE DEATH, I LIKE HEARING PEOPLE SAY...

- She means so much to me.
- I miss her.
- I remember how she wore tennis shoes all over!
- She went for a lot of walks and every day we would see her.
- Our _____ won't be the same without her.
- She had such a green thumb and her garden and violets were so beautiful.
- I brought this _____ because I knew your mother would have liked it.
- Offer sincere condolences, "I am so sorry."
- Do not put the mourner in a position to feel like they have to comfort you!
- Silence is ok – simple contact – a hand on the shoulder, a hug, taking deep breaths together can be very grounding.
- From a father whose 12 year old daughter died, "give an ear, not words"
- What is the thing you miss most about your Mom, Dad, Brother, Sister?

What's Not Helpful To Say

- “He/She is in a better place.”
- “I know just how you feel.”
- “It was God’s will.”
- “You’ll get over this with time.”
- “You’ll find someone else, you’ll see.” (loss of a spouse)
- “You’ll have other children.” (loss of an infant)
- “You still have other children.” (loss of a child)
- “My father died the same way.” (sharing life stories)
- “My dog died, it was really hard.”

Long Term Success Looks Like:

- Less fear-based decision-making.
- “Others focus” – a sense of giving back, contributing
- Building resilience through experience
- Demonstrating the ability to cope
- Creating connection within communities
- Learning coping skills and techniques for a lifetime

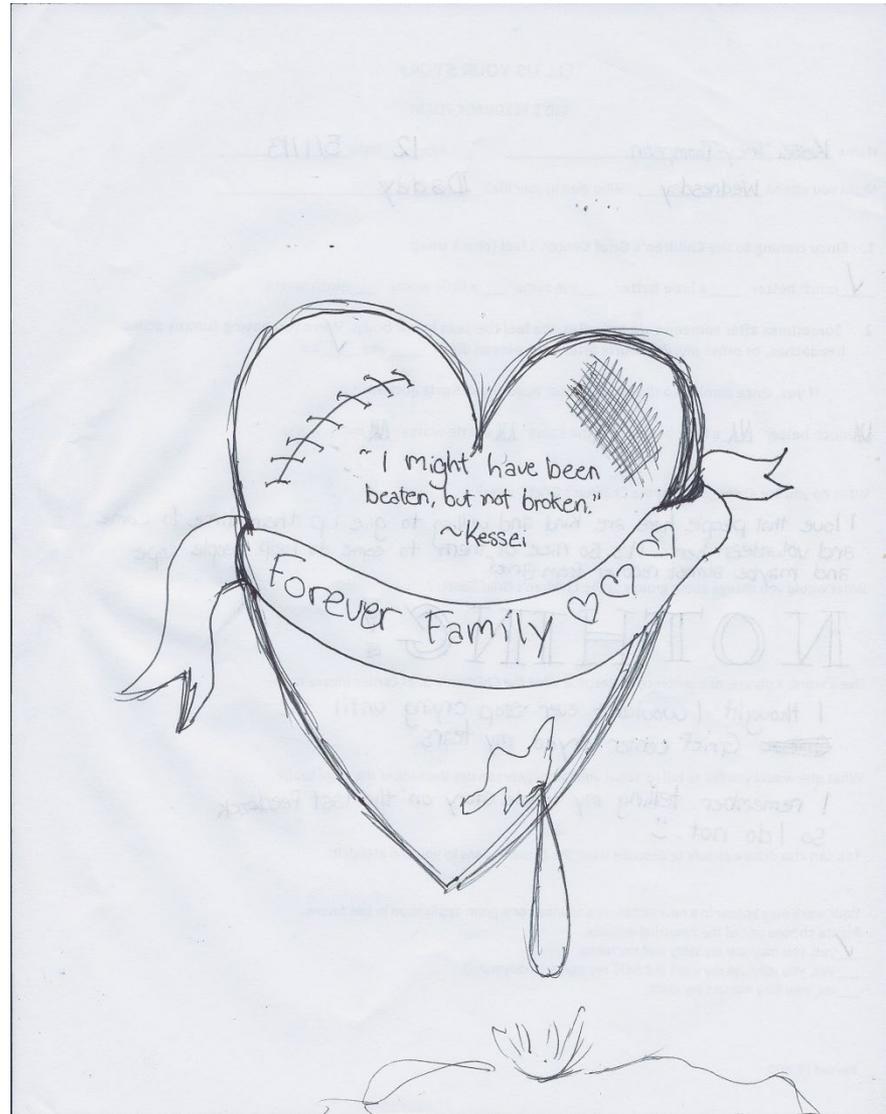
“Grief Never Ends”



Grief Triggers

- Having to explain that he died
- Seeing their loved ones favorite food, song, activity, or place
- New grade, new school; “How many brothers and sisters do you have?” “What does your Dad do?”
- Award or promotion ceremonies where loved one would have participated and been there
- “Marking” days (Holidays, Birthdays, Anniversaries)
- Special Events (Graduation, Weddings)
- Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, Donuts for Dads, Muffins for Moms, Dad & daughter dance, Brother escort

**“I might
have been
beaten,
but I am not
broken.”**



Hallmarks of Post Traumatic Growth

- A new appreciation for life
- A changed sense of priorities
- Warmer and more intimate relationships
- A greater sense of personal strength
- Recognition of new possibilities
- New meaning and purpose for life

Children's Grief Center of NM

Mission:

to provide a safe and supportive environment where children, teens, young adults, and their caregivers can share experiences and feelings while grieving the death of a loved one

Children's Grief Center of NM

- Serve children ages 5 to 25, since 2001
- Primary program is Ongoing Peer Support Groups:
 - In groups with peers of like ages
 - Groups: Littles, Middles, Tweens, Teens, Young Adults, Adults
 - Led by trained and skilled adult bereavement facilitators
 - Meet twice per month September – May
 - Ongoing – On average families stay 6-18 months
 - Serve the whole family at the same time after work and school
 - Develop a community of others with similar experiences
 - Additional holiday and specialty programs provided
 - **ALL SERVICES ARE PROVIDED FREE OF CHARGE**

“Grief and darkness are not the final say. They are experiences through which the light is not yet visible.” – Paula D’Arcy



Additional Resources

- www.childrensgrief.org – Children’s Grief Center of NM - brochures, links, videos, support
- www.childrengrieve.org — National Alliance for Grieving Children & Grief Center Locator