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## When Your Child is GRIEVING

- ✦ **DEATH** of a family member, friend or pet.
- ✦ **DIVORCE** or separation of parents.
- ✦ **MOVING** to a new place.
- ✦ **INJURY** or disability.
- ✦ Giving up a **DREAM**.

It is normal for children to grieve losses like these. They may not show their grief in the same ways adults do, but it is just as real. Some children have staggering amounts of loss in their lives. Who will help them grieve?

Adults are sometimes scared of this task. It is tempting to turn children over to a caring professional or to minimize their grief and let them take care of it for themselves. "They're young. They'll get over it," we say.

It is true that young children have limited understanding of their losses. But as they grow and mature, so do their grief responses. By the time the child is a teen, his grief reactions may be so intense that he takes his own life. Those who receive help in working through early childhood grief will be better equipped to deal with grief later in life.

Here are some helping skills for parents and adult friends. If you learn and practice these skills with your children in times of grief, you may provide them a happier childhood.

**1 Listen while they talk.** Let them tell their story and share their feelings. Give them a safe setting in which to grieve. Assure them that their feelings are normal, that there is nothing wrong with them. Don't lecture or condemn or try to rescue children

from hurt. Respect their need for privacy. Share your own feelings about loss, especially anger, guilt and fear. Cry if you feel like it; this gives children permission to do the same. Read stories about other children who have experienced loss. Comfort children by holding, touching or rocking them. When you can't be there, a stuffed toy animal can provide comfort. Give simple, honest answers to children's questions about death or loss, but don't tell them everything you know in one sitting.

**2 Observe the child's responses to the loss.** Learn and watch for signs of grief (centre page). Ask children about specific feelings, especially anger, guilt and fear. Help them draw a picture or write a letter or poem to the lost person or pet. Ask older children about suicidal thoughts or feelings. Clarify their statements by putting them into your own words.

**3 Help children adjust to life without the lost person or thing.** Help them



find ways to say good-bye. Include them in grief rituals such as funerals. Give them something to do to combat feelings of helplessness (for example, plant a memory tree or pick flowers for the grave). Keeping normal structure and limits such as

(Continued on next page)

### A Picture of Grief

A story for children

When my neighbour took a leave of absence to go back to school, he had to leave his dog, Mackey, behind.

Mackey was part husky, very friendly, and playful. No one thought he would mind being under the care of another family for a year.

But he did mind. In vain the neighbour dogs invited him out to play. Mackey spent his days lying in the front lawn, nose between his paws, eyes turned toward the road. One day a familiar-looking car drove up. Mackey bounded joyfully to meet it. But when the car stopped, a stranger got out. Mackey whined and waited. But his beloved master never came. So he went back and lay down, nose between his paws.

Have you ever felt like this? Can you tell someone about it?



# A Man of Sorrows

The prophet Isaiah, speaking of the coming Messiah, called him "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). Jesus felt deeply the grief of the hurting people around him. Read the verses below and match them with Jesus' grief responses on the right.

- |                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| _____ 1. Luke 13:31-33 | A. Jesus cried.                            |
| _____ 2. Matthew 26:63 | B. Jesus got angry.                        |
| _____ 3. Luke 22:44    | C. Jesus' body went into shock             |
| _____ 4. John 11:35    | D. Jesus needed private time to himself.   |
| _____ 5. Mark 8:33     | E. Jesus refused to answer some questions. |
| _____ 6. Mark 3:5      | F. Jesus questioned God, asking "Why?"     |
| _____ 7. Luke 5:16     | G. Jesus used sarcasm and name-calling.    |
| _____ 8. Mark 15:34    | H. Jesus rebuked the one who grieved him.  |

But we never read about Jesus doing these things that grieving humans often do:

- getting revenge
- staying angry
- turning against people or God

*He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.*

*Isaiah 53:3-5*

## GRIEVING (Continued from front page)

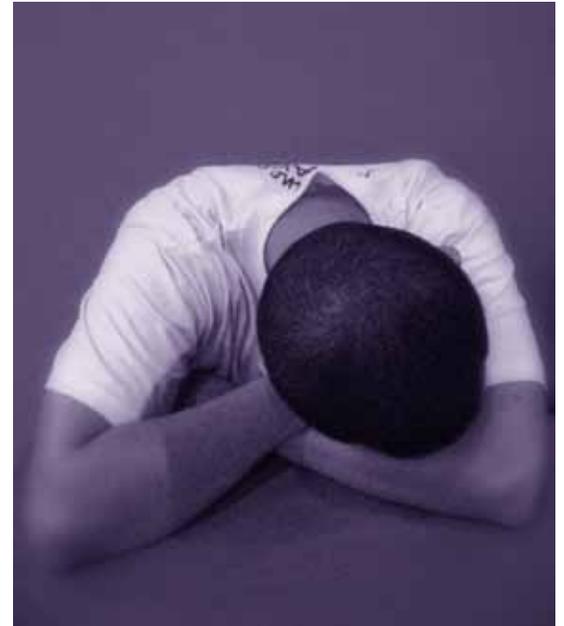
regular meals and nap times will provide security. Give older children alternatives to self-destructive acts such as drinking or sniffing. Use kind and fair discipline for unacceptable behaviours. Plant seeds of hope by planning for the future. Find support for both yourself and the child. Being a helper is hard work. For teens, make sure there is healthy peer support.

Most of all, be patient. Grief can be a long journey which goes by small steps. But we have the final choice in the matter. We can be paralyzed and destroyed by our losses. Or we can use those losses to shape us into better human beings.

Cover article written by David Hertzler. Used by permission.

## Making Sense of a Grieving Child's BEHAVIOUR

- » Children often release their grief with their bodies: through nightmares, tummy aches, headaches, or loss of appetite.
- » Children in grief may act in ways that felt secure when they were younger, such as bed-wetting and tantrums.
- » Children in deep mourning still laugh, play and have fun. Their selection of toys and play experiences and the pictures they draw tell a lot about how they are feeling.
- » Children who feel angry about loss may lash out at other children. Angry actions may be a cover-up for fear or guilt feelings.
- » Children mourn differently. Some cry, some don't. Some with draw, some don't. Children will do what feels best to them.
- » Academic problems at school can come from the grieving child's inability to concentrate.



## Moving Into the Light

While grief is different for each person, it tends to move through a number of stages which almost all grieving persons experience.

1. **Denial:** a desire to avoid knowing about the loss. Denial helps a person absorb reality slowly. Denial may be experienced as shock, numbness or confusion.
2. **Emotional Extremes:** intense grief, rage, acute guilt, depression. Going over and over the loss is common at this stage. The grieving person is experiencing the depth of the pain, a necessary step for healing.
3. **Physical Symptoms:** those in the list above, as well as shortness of breath, tension, feelings of "something stuck in the throat," weight loss or gain, and feelings of emptiness or heaviness.
4. **Helplessness and Loneliness:** difficulty doing normal activities and sustaining normal relationships. Children's performance in school will often suffer.
5. **Rituals and Appeasement:** efforts to relieve guilt feelings and find some structure for life.
6. **Hope and Acceptance:** as the pain of the loss becomes less, the future looks brighter. Expectation of recovery increases. Physical symptoms begin to disappear and strength for living returns.





# Today's Native Mother

## Dear Friends,

Most adults have a child inside who grieves over hurts of the past. Is there comfort for this inner child?

When I have time to talk to ladies like this, here is what I say to them:

“What were you like? You are now older, but let’s tiptoe back through time. Peek into your house. Stroll down to the dock. Walk to the residential school. Stay the same age you are now, but let’s find this Little You, this little girl you used to be. What is she like? Is she pretty, friendly, and smart? Is she scared, skinny, troubled and lonely? Stand there and ponder awhile. Do you see her crying? Does she need help? Could you comfort and hug her? Is she worth liking, this Little Girl who was/is you?”

“Have you seen a picture of Jesus blessing the little children? He said, ‘Let the little children come to me...’ And He took them in His arms and blessed them. Are you in that picture? Could you be? If so, where would you be in that group of children? Would Jesus be ignoring you? Or would He have a twinkle in His eye and have His arms outstretched to you? Would Jesus like the Little You?”

“I am 53 now and I still have that Little Me inside. It keeps me child-like, wondering and trusting. I like her.

“Do you like your Little Girl? Could you take her



on your lap and cuddle her, dry her tears and say, ‘I’ll take care of you. I won’t let anyone hurt you again.’

“I would like to bring Jesus to that Little Girl, so precious, so worthy to be loved. No matter how bad you were when you were growing up, Jesus would have hugged you and blessed you. You were worth loving. No matter how lonely you were, you were worthy of Jesus’ friendship. He would have been tender and loving with you.

“Even today, that Little Girl is in you. She is still longing to be loved and cherished not only by her parents, her family and friends, but by You, the Big You. Can you do it? Is there anything worth loving in Little You or Big You?”

Sometimes big people pay no attention to the little people in their lives. Or there is abuse and neglect. No one cares very much for her, including you. This Little Girl walks around dying slowly. The thunder of pain drowns out her longings to be noticed, cherished and loved by people important to her. Even you start ignoring, even hating her. Even today, Little Girls wants to be recognized and contribute to Big You. She wants to be loved and valued. Can you do that?

Can you sing to this Little Girl:  
Jesus loves me, this I know  
For the Bible tells me so.  
Little ones to Him belong  
They are weak, but He is strong.  
Yes, Jesus love me!

Yes, Jesus truly loves you.

*Ilva*

## FAMILY FUN

## Get-Well Plant

Help your children look beyond their troubles by doing something for a child with a prolonged illness or injury.

Dampen several pieces of cotton and put them into a glass jar. Push a grapefruit or

tomato seed, a pea or bean, or some other seed into the cotton. When it has sprouted, take it to your sick friend so he can watch it grow.

Tell the sick child that you will pray that he will get well before the plant is fully grown.



*It's hard to take others where you have never been yourself...*

# COPING with your Own Loss



Admit the loss. Feel the pain, anguish, rage, guilt and fear.

Expect healing. Nature is on your side.



Let others into your life. Everyone experiences loss. There is strength in numbers.



Expect ups and downs in the healing process.

Take care of yourself with rest, nutrition and exercise. Stick to a schedule.



Be gentle with yourself. It's okay to need comforting.



Postpone big decisions if you can. Expect your judgement to be clouded for awhile.

Pray and meditate. Grief can soften your spirit to respond to God better.



# Smile Awhile

## What is a Boy?

Between the innocence of babyhood and the dignity of manhood we find a delightful creature we call a boy.



Boys are found everywhere - on top of, inside of, climbing on, swinging on, jumping on and jumping off. Mothers love them, little girls hate them, older brothers and sisters tolerate them, adults ignore them, but heaven protects them.

A boy is truth with dirt on his face, beauty with a cut on his finger, wisdom with bubble gum in his hair, and the hope of the future with a frog in his pocket.

When you're busy, a boy is an intruding, inconsiderate, bothersome jingle of noise. When you want him to make a good impression, his brains turn to jelly.

No one but a boy can cram into one pocket a rusty old knife, a half-eaten apple, three feet of string, a steel ball... two gum drops, six cents, a sling shot and an unknown substance.

A boy is a magical creature. You can lock him out of your workshop but you can't shut him out of your heart. You can run him out of your study but you can't get him out of your mind. You might as well give up. He's your captor, he's your jailor, he's your boss, he's your master. He's a freckle-faced, pint-size, cat-chasing bundle of noise.

But when you get home at night with only shattered pieces of hopes and dreams, he can mend those shattered hopes and dreams with only two magical words: "Hi, Dad!"

By Allen Beck  
Submitted by Josh Hario



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## DEAR DAD,

Jesus can bring peace to your heart and home. Why not invite Him in today. Here's how:

**A**dmit that you are a sinner and cannot be a good father in your own strength (Romans 3:10, 23).

**B**elieve on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household (Acts 16:31).

**C**onfess with your mouth that Jesus is your Lord and Master (Romans 10:9). Call on the name of the Lord, and you will be saved (Romans 10:13).

**D**o good deeds that go with a repentant heart. (Acts 26:20).

**Happy Fathering!**



**NYM MINISTRIES**  
Site 306 Box 1 RR 3  
Dryden ON P8N 3G2

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