



Helping Children Cope

With the Death of a Loved One





What is the Caring Place?

When a family member dies, a child's life is turned upside down. The impact is shattering. It is often the defining moment of their lives.

These children need help and support. The Highmark Caring Place, A Center for Grieving Children, Adolescents and Their Families, provides this support.

The Caring Place is a safe place where grieving children and families can come together and be with others who understand what they're going through.

The Caring Place is committed to helping grieving children get the support they deserve. A community resource, the Caring Place offers services at no charge to grieving families throughout the community.



“I was scared. And I was scared to tell anyone I was scared. I was scared to go on, scared to grow up. I couldn’t imagine how I could go on without my dad.”

-Megan, 15, whose father died



Death in a Family

Death does not enter the life of a child quietly. It crashes in, and nothing is ever the same.

Realizing that the road ahead is a completely new one can be frightening and disorienting. More than ever, children need help at this time.

And yet, children who are grieving the death of a family member are often called “forgotten mourners.” Their pain is often unrecognized and misunderstood.

Children will survive the death of a loved one, but without support, grieving children can continue to struggle, sometimes for many years.

Harvard Bereavement Study research has shown that parentally bereaved children are more at risk, emotionally and psychologically, than their peers, two years after the death occurred.

And grief affects many children. In fact, one child in five will have someone close to them die before they graduate from high school. One-and-a-half million children are living in a single-parent household due to the death of a parent.

It is clear: Many children are grieving the loss of someone close to them. And grieving children have a very hard time handling their grief on their own.

At the Caring Place, they don’t have to.



A Place Where Others Understand

After a loved one dies, many of those around us just don't understand what we're going through.

Some people avoid us, like we're contagious. Others expect that we should "be over it by now," as if somehow the loss should no longer affect us even though we continue to live each day with the one we love still gone. Even close friends and relatives don't have much of a clue for what we're feeling.

Often, it feels very lonely to be grieving—for kids and adults.

At the Caring Place, grieving children (and adults) get together with others their own age who have also experienced the death of someone they love.

At the Caring Place, grieving children can feel understood. And no one expects them to "be over it by now."

Through this peer support, kids and adults are able to connect with other grieving families, other kids, other adults.

In the groups with their peers, the kids get to know each other, and over time they learn that they are not alone in the thoughts and feelings and experiences they have.

Although they may feel completely set apart at school, at the Caring Place, they're the same as everyone else. Many children (and adults) have expressed their relief at just being able to feel like someone truly understands.



"I felt different from my friends since no one else that I knew had experienced the death of a parent. I had no one to talk with. They just didn't understand how I felt. Even the teachers didn't understand. I was alone in my grief."

-Carrie, 16, whose father died

What a Caring Place Evening Looks Like

Children and teens come with their families to the Caring Place at evening meetings. The same group of families, volunteers and staff members come together to provide support and encouragement to each other over ten meetings, usually every other week.

These meetings last about two hours each. The first part of the evening consists of eating dinner together, socializing, and playing games with family members and with new friends.

For the second hour, children and teens meet with others their age, while adults meet with other adults.

Through activities, games and conversation, children and teens have the opportunity to open up about the hard things, things they can't talk about in other places or with other people.

But no one at the Caring Place has to say or do anything that they don't want to. Not everybody is able to open up at the same time; some have a hard time opening up at all. That's OK. There is a benefit just in being with and listening to other children and teens who have gone through similar feelings and thoughts and experiences.

“Being at the Caring Place with the other kids, I finally felt there was someone to talk with, someone who understood how I felt. It helps, knowing I'm not the only one.”

-Caleb, 13, whose sister died

Adult Support for Children and Teens

In each of the age groups, two or more adult volunteers help out.

These volunteers are not in the groups in order to teach anyone how to grieve. There's no need for that; everyone grieves in their own unique way, the way that is right for them.

What the volunteers do is to let the children and teens (and adults too) just be themselves, to talk about what they want to talk about—from how their day went in school, to memories they have about the person who died. Or to not talk at all, but just listen to the others, or to have fun with a game or activity.

The volunteers allow the children or teens to feel whatever feelings they have—angry, sad, or happy—in a place where they don't have to experience these feelings alone.



Further Services

The Caring Place offers comprehensive services to children and their families after the death of a loved one, including:

- Peer support groups
- Memorial ceremonies
- Referral services
- Educational programs
- Adult telephone support and resources

For schools and other professionals in the community who work with children, the Caring Place provides:

- Peer support groups in the schools
- Consultation services
- Educational presentations
- Resources, including brochures such as *"Questions Grieving Teens Ask"* and *"Preparing a Child for a Funeral or Cremation"*

The Highmark Caring Place believes:

- Grief is natural and normal
- Grief is unique and universal
- Everyone has the capacity to heal themselves
- Caring and support makes a difference
- Everyone who has had someone close to them die grieves
- Children of every age grieve and they grieve differently than adults
- Children benefit the most from the largest community of support possible
- A death in the family (especially the death of a parent) is a major life loss and adjustment for both the individual and the family
- Grief is a lifelong process





A Center for Grieving Children,
Adolescents and Their Families

Is a Program of:



“It is only natural that we and our children
find many things hard to talk about.

But anything human is mentionable
and anything mentionable
can be manageable.

The mentioning can be difficult,
and the managing too,
but both can be done
if we’re surrounded by love and trust.”

— Fred Rogers

*Honorary Chairman, Caring Foundation
From 1985 until his death in 2003*

For More Information

To learn more about the Highmark Caring Place, or to find out
how your family can become part of a support group, contact us:

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Erie

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HighmarkCaringPlace.com



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