

COMPASSION IN ACTION

Activities for Finding Hope in Grief

A-C





A PERFECTLY MESSED UP ACTIVITY

P—Y—M

Suggested Group(s): Preschool, Young, Middle

Purpose: To explore feelings related to loss, change, and how to manage frustration; coping skills

Task/Need:

- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Making meaning of the loss
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- The book, *A PERFECTLY MESSED UP STORY* by Patrick McDonnell
- Paper
- Crayons or markers

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Introduce the plan to read a book and do an activity related to the book.
- Show the cover of the book and ask them if they notice anything about the book (*stains on cover, looks dirty*).
- Ask them what they think about the title and what it might be about.
- Have them look at the back of the book and what it says—things don't always go as planned.
- Ask them if they have ever felt like their life hasn't gone as planned and to think about that as you read.

Activity Description:

- Read the book, pausing to allow the kids to see the imperfections on the page. Ask questions while you read, such as:
 - “How do you think Louie felt when he first discovered the jelly in his story?”
 - “How did Louie’s feelings change from when he discovered the jelly to when the crayons smudged?”
 - “Have you ever had anything that messed up something you were working on or something that ‘messed up’ your life?” (Can be related to grief or other general times they felt frustrated; just let the kids lead the discussion.)

- When you approach the part where Louie says he “gives up,” ask kids in the group if they ever felt that way and encourage them to share what they did when they felt that way.
- “*Did you ever have a time when you felt like Louie when he thought his story was ruined? How did you deal with those feelings?*”
- “*How do you think Louie felt at the end of the book? What did he do to help when he felt like his story was ruined?*”
- At the end of the book, look again at the title without the crayons—“*A Perfect Story.*” Ask if anyone has ever had a perfect story. Point out that even when we make plans or want things to turn out a certain way, they may not turn out perfectly. Talk about how they manage things when plans don’t work out (*can lead into discussion of how to handle rough times*).
 - During the discussion, use caution:
 - Not to shame feelings or ideas that are offered. If kids offer suggestions that may not be positive ways to handle it, ask them to explain more or elaborate on if it did/didn’t help in the end.
 - Rather than sending the message that they will be fine (as that is noted in the book), make the focus on the feelings Louie has, and validate those feelings.
 - Note that the takeaway is that things were challenging, but Louie found a way to cope with his feelings and adjust, even though things weren’t how he wanted them to turn out.
- After you finish reading the book, let the kids know that you’re going to have them do an activity related to the book.
- Choose one of the following activities:
 - Draw a picture of what they might encourage Louie to do when his life is a perfectly messed up story (to reflect a good idea they currently use or could use in their own life).
 - Make art out of mistakes! Give each child a blank piece of paper and use crayons or markers to make a scribble. Then trade papers with a partner and have the partner make something out of the scribble. See what they can turn the “messed up” scribble into.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Ask the group:
 - What Louie could do when things got messed up.
 - To share their scribbled pictures and what their partner made them into.

- Thank them for sharing their pictures and ideas and feelings related to the book.
- Be sure to process the activity with questions like—“*What coping skill did you draw?*”
- Point out commonalities or ask the group—“*I wonder if anyone has used that skill themselves? Was it helpful?*”
- Ask the kids to share how they transformed the scribble—“*How did it feel to change someone else’s drawing? What was it like to see your scribble changed?*”

Notes:

- If your site does not have the book available, you can use the YouTube link: [Read Aloud: A Perfectly Messed Up Story](#).

For Ongoing Groups:

- This is appropriate for Introductory and Ongoing Groups.
- If anyone has read the book previously, you can ask what suggestions they had for Louie last time. Are they different than the coping skills the group discussed today?

AIRPLANE MESSAGES

Y—M—T

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To allow the group members a way to express their thoughts and feelings to their family member/person who has died

Task/Need:

- Sharing memories and continuing bonds with the person who died
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Paper
- Pens, pencils, or markers

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Begin by acknowledging that grief is a unique and personal experience and that sometimes after a person dies, we miss the things that we did or wish we could have done with or said to that person. Reinforce that this is a natural part of grief.
- Ask the group members, *“Can you think of some things that, if you had the chance, you would like to say to the person in your life who died? What would you want them to know?”*
- Explain that the group is going to make a PAPER AIRPLANE with messages to their person on them.

Activity Description:

- Have the group members make a PAPER AIRPLANE. Provide instructions or examples if needed. It’s OK if group members write their message(s) before folding it.
- Encourage group members to write a message to the person who died on the wings of the PAPER AIRPLANE.
 - Emphasize that there is no right or wrong way to do this activity; it is simply an opportunity for them to write down something they’d like to share with the person who has died.
 - This message can be:
 - Something they’d like to say to them
 - Something they’d like to tell them about their lives now
 - A memory they want to share
 - Anything else that feels important to them

- In the Community Room, have group members go to the highest riser and launch their PAPER AIRPLANE.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- If they wish, group members can share the messages they sent to their loved ones, but this is entirely optional and the **I PASS RULE** always applies.
- After the launch, discuss this as one way of staying connected to the person who died. Acknowledge that it is painful to be physically separated from our loved ones. This activity is just one way to connect to the memories, feelings, and stories we still carry about our person.
- Ask the group to think about other ways that they stay connected to their person. Remind group members that what feels comforting and connecting to one person may not be for another.
- Invite the group members to share what it was like to do the activity.
 - *“How did it feel to send messages to your person?”*
 - *“Was it hard or easy to think about what you wanted to tell them?”*

Notes:

- This activity is best done in the Community Room or other large space.
- May be considered for a family activity if applicable.

For Ongoing Groups:

- If this or a similar activity was done in the past, ask the group members what messages they sent to their person before.
 - *“How is the message different this time?”*
 - *“Were the feelings that came up for you today different from last time?”*

ANAGRAMS/ACROSTIC POEMS

P—Y—M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Preschool, Young, Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To provide an opportunity to think of the characteristics that they remember of the person who died

Task/Need:

- Sharing memories and continuing bonds with the person who died

Materials:

- Paper—colored copy paper or construction paper
- Markers

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Begin by inviting group members to think about the person who died.
 - Ask, *“When you think of the person who died in your life, what do you think of?”*
- If a group member has limited or no memories consider prompts like:
 - *“What do you wish you could’ve done with your person?”*
 - *“What do you know about your person?”*
 - *“What have other people told you about your person?”*
 - *“What would you want to know about your person?”*
- Guide the conversation by asking:
 - *“What are some things your person liked to do?”*
 - *“What were they like as a person (funny, energetic, kind, loving...)?”*
 - *“What are some words you might use to describe them?”*

Activity Description:

- Each group member writes the name of the person who died vertically down the left side of the paper, one letter per line. They can use first name only, first and last name, or the name they called them (for example, “Mama” or “Pap”).
- For each letter of the name, brainstorm words, phrases, or sentences that call to mind the person, their personality, or specific memories you shared.
- Write the chosen words or phrases horizontally beside each of the letters of that person’s name to create an ACROSTIC POEM that celebrates the person who died.
- Invite group members to decorate the paper in any way that feels meaningful to them. They may use drawings, stickers, or other elements to further memorialize the person who died.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Invite the group members to share their poems. Emphasize that the **I PASS RULE** always applies if they prefer not to share.
- *“What was it like to think about the characteristics or qualities of your person?”*
- *“What letter did you struggle with?”*
- *“I wonder if the activity was easy or hard for you?”*
- *“What similarities did you hear as everyone shared about their person?”*
- *“Do you think you have any of your person’s traits or characteristics? Which of your person’s characteristics do you have?”*
- Thank the group for their work in creating the poem.

Notes:

- This can be a useful activity to help children prepare for Quilt Night, as it offers an opportunity to think about the aspects of the person who died that the child might want to depict on the quilt square.
- This can be adapted for use in the Preschool room. Remember to scribe for younger group members.

For Ongoing Groups:

- A slight variation could be to have group members think of a question they would want to ask their person that starts with a letter of their name.
- Prompt group members to think about what they would want to tell their person.
- If they have done this activity before, ask them if the traits they identified are the same or different.

Examples:

S illy A rtistic L oving L ively Y oung at heart	B right A ctive R etired T eacher	H ow old were you when you learned to ride a bike? O ut of all the foods in the world, which one is your favorite? P lease tell Grandma, “Hi.” E very time I see a butterfly I think of you.
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ART GRAB

M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To reflect on one or more themes that these cards evoke in one's own experience

Task/Need:

- Group building
- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- One set of ART CARDS (*available at each Caring Place site from staff*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Before the group arrives, ensure you have reviewed the CARDS to familiarize yourself with them.
- Acknowledge that sometimes it can be hard to find the words to describe our feelings or experiences, particularly during challenging times.
- Wonder with the group members about the times that they have seen a picture, read a book, or seen a movie and felt it reminded them of themselves, someone they know, or the person who died.
- Draw their attention to the CARDS (which may be in a box or basket or may have been laid out on the table by the facilitator before the group began). Let the group know that this activity uses art as a way to reflect on and share about their feelings and experiences during their grief journey.
- Remind group members that there is no right or wrong way to participate in this activity. It is simply a tool to invite them to think about their grief journey in a new way.

Activity Description:

- The set of ART CARDS represents a selection of artwork from a variety of sources.
- The artists, media, themes, and styles will vary throughout the set—the key is to get a good variety of CARDS.
- Spread out the CARDS in the middle of the table, ensuring everyone can see them.
- Invite the group members to take their time to look through all the CARDS. You might use words like, *“Don’t overthink it. Just let your eyes wander until one or more CARDS simply grab your attention. It might be the colors, the imagery, the feeling it evokes, or something you can’t quite pinpoint. There’s no need to pick the ‘best’ CARD, just the one that speaks to you right now.”*

- Ask group members to select one or a few CARDS that they feel drawn to. They might find a CARD that represents:
 - Something about *them* and how they're feeling right now
 - Something that reminds them of the *person who died*
 - Something about *those around them*—their family, friends, or others in their support system
 - A reflection of their *grief journey*—where they are, where they've been, or where they hope to go
- After group members have selected their CARD(s), invite each of them to share what they chose and what drew them to the particular CARD(s).

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Thank the group for engaging in the activity. Ask them if they'd like to share what it was like for them to participate.
- Wonder aloud whether it was surprising to use art to evoke feelings and memories and whether they found it interesting/effective.
- Point out any similarities or differences you might have noticed (*something like: "As we've listened to everyone share, I noticed some interesting threads or feelings emerging. For example—'Many of you chose CARDS with serene landscapes'—or—'Several CARDS seemed to speak to feelings of transition'—etc."*).
- Note that even though everyone's grief journey is unique, there are often common human experiences and emotions that connect us.
- Ask group members if they would like to share a thought or feeling they're taking away from this ART GRAB activity.

For Ongoing Groups:

- No specific modifications needed. Prompts can change and be adapted to the specific needs of the group. As grief is an ongoing journey, it is interesting to think about how the selection of CARDS may change over time.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY TIMELINES

M—T

Suggested Group(s): Middle, Teen

Purpose: To examine where the loss of a family member fits in the context of their lives

Task/Need:

- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Large pieces of construction paper or legal-sized copy paper
- Rulers
- Pens or markers
- Optional—stickers, old magazines for collages, glue sticks, scissors

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Explain that the group will be creating a TIMELINE to represent their lives.
 - *“Today, we’re going to create something special—an AUTOBIOGRAPHY TIMELINE. It’s a way for us to think about all the things that have happened in our lives, the ups and the downs, and to see where we are now on our personal journey.”*
- Begin by asking the group members to think about their entire lives from the time that they were born until the present time and what memorable moments, experiences or life changes they have been through.
- As they think about their lives, ask what jumps out at them regarding the events and experiences that they have had.
 - Allow them to share out loud if they like, or to reflect quietly. Let them know that this is their TIMELINE so they can choose whether to share or not as they work.

Activity Description:

- Based on the events and experiences that they were thinking about in the introduction, ask the group members to draw a LINE representing their lives.
- The beginning of the LINE represents the beginning of their lives and the end of the LINE represents their future.
 - For some, their TIMELINE may want to start before they were born, for example if their person died prior to their birth.
- Ask the group members to use the LINE to plot the important parts of their lives—the events and experiences that stick out to them.
 - *“You can write words, draw small pictures, use symbols, or even change the LINE itself”* (for example, make it squiggly for a confusing time, thick for a strong feeling, dotted for a dream, etc.).

- *“Don’t feel like you have to put everything on there. Just focus on what feels important to you right now.”*
- Remind them to leave part of the LINE for the future.
 - *“Without needing to predict specific events, what kind of things do you imagine being on that part of the LINE? It could be dreams, hopes, new experiences, new interests, or even just what kind of feelings you hope to have. There’s no pressure to fill it in completely; just allow yourself to think about what lies ahead.”*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Invite group members to share their TIMELINES.
 - *“Now we’ll have a chance to share our TIMELINES with each other. Remember, you decide what and how much you want to share. You don’t have to talk about anything or share if you don’t want to; or just share one small part, or simply hold up your TIMELINE without saying much. It’s up to you. Does anyone want to share?”*
- Discuss the decisions that they made regarding what to include on the TIMELINE.
 - *“Tell us about what you’ve included on your TIMELINE.”*
 - *“What made you choose to put [specific event/feeling] on your TIMELINE?”*
 - *“Was there anything you thought about including but decided not to?”*
- If they wish, allow them to share what emotions are attached to the different parts of the TIMELINE or creating the TIMELINE.
 - *“How did it feel to create this TIMELINE?”*
 - *“What was it like to think about the different parts of your life?”*
 - *“What does it mean to you to see your loss as part of your overall life journey?”* (Only if they’ve explicitly placed their loss on the TIMELINE.)
 - *“What’s one thing you noticed or thought about while you were making it?”*
 - *“Is there anything on your ‘future’ part that you’re comfortable sharing?”*

Notes:

- Group members may want to add collage pictures or drawings to the TIMELINE to graphically represent their experiences—if you are using collages, allow extra time for this to be completed.

For Ongoing Groups:

- It may be helpful to assess if group members have done this previously in an Introductory Group—if so, determine appropriateness of doing the activity again or adapting it by having them do a collage this time; adding feelings as a layer on their TIMELINE, or focusing on how each event shaped them into who they are today.

BADGER’S PARTING GIFTS

P—Y—M

Suggested Group(s): Preschool, Young, Middle

Purpose: To explore intangible gifts received from and remaining with a child after the death of someone important to them

Task/Need:

- Sharing memories and continuing bonds with the person who died
- Making meaning of the loss

Materials:

- The book *BADGER’S PARTING GIFTS* by Susan Varley

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Ask group members to share what comes to mind when they hear the word ‘gift.’ (Maybe something they can unwrap, like a toy or a special treat? Allow a few moments for them to respond).
- Wonder aloud whether a gift might also be something you can’t hold in your hands or wrap in a package. (Like a special memory, or a lesson someone taught you, or even a feeling?)
- Let the group know that you will be reading the book *BADGER’S PARTING GIFTS*. Tell them that the story is about a kind Badger who was loved by all his friends. After Badger dies, his friends start to remember all the wonderful things he taught them and the special ways he made them feel.
- Ask them to listen carefully while you read to see if they can notice the different kinds of ‘gifts’ Badger left behind for his friends—not just things they could hold, but feelings and memories too.

Activity Description:

- Read *BADGER’S PARTING GIFTS*.
- While reading, pause at times to involve the group members in the story. You might ask questions like, “*What do you think Squirrel might be feeling here?*”

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Ask the group members to name some of the gifts Badger left behind for his friends (*Mole learned to cut paper, Fox learned to skate, Rabbit learned to bake*).
- Discuss whether those gifts were things they could hold in their hands, or whether they were more like skills or special feelings. Guide the discussion to highlight the intangible nature of these gifts.
- Invite the group members to recognize that just like Badger left special gifts for his friends, sometimes the special people in our lives who have died also leave us with gifts that we can’t wrap in a package, like special memories, things they taught us, or even feelings they shared with us.

- Ask whether anyone would like to share a special memory or an ‘intangible gift’ that their person who died gave them (perhaps a way they made you laugh, or something they taught you to do, or a special feeling you had when you were with them).
- Validate all contributions. (For example, *“That sounds like a really special memory,”* or *“It sounds like they taught you something very important.”*)
- If a child struggles to articulate, you might offer a gentle prompt like, *“Did they ever make you feel super brave?”* or *“Did they teach you a game?”*
- Remind the group members that as time goes by, our memories of our special person can change a little bit. We might remember new things or think about old memories in a different way. This is a normal part of the process and doesn’t mean we’re forgetting them; it just means our love for them keeps growing and changing, just like we do.
- Note that even though we can’t see or touch our special person anymore, the gifts they gave us, like their love, their lessons, and our memories, stay with us forever and help make us who we are today.
- Thank the group members for sharing their stories and the gifts their loved ones shared with them.

Notes:

- Consider the make-up of your group. For instance, if many do not have pleasant memories of their person, this may not be an appropriate activity. If children were very young when their person died, this may be too difficult of an activity, or they may need their parent/caregiver’s assistance. One father told his son that he had his mother’s “crinkly ears.” Talk with staff in these situations for guidance.
- If a group member has unpleasant, limited or no memories, incorporate language about wishes. For example: *“What do you wish your person could give you?”*
- This book can be very helpful to be used as a group is coming to a close to talk about the intangible gifts the group members have received from their loved ones who have died but also the gifts the group members have given each other. This modification can be helpful for group members who have few memories of their person.
- This book can be used to introduce the “GIFTS FROM THE PERSON WHO DIED” activity.

For Ongoing Groups:

- Use an adaptation for gifts the group members have given to one another.
- Additional prompts could be:
 - *“What gifts has the Caring Place given to you?”*
 - *“What gifts have you given to others?”*
 - *“What new gifts have you discovered that your loved one gave you since your last time at the Caring Place?”*

BALLOON POP

Y—M

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle

Purpose: To encourage group sharing about grief in a fun way, while also allowing kids to release some energy

Task/Need:

- Group building
- Telling their story
- Identifying and expressing feelings

Materials:

- BALLOONS
- BALLOON pump to blow up BALLOONS
- Small slips of paper with GRIEF-RELATED QUESTIONS (QUESTIONS can be found in the “Questions for Q & A Activities” in the Appendix)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Explain that death can bring up many questions, and there are no right or wrong answers. Talking about these questions with others who understand or who are going through something similar can be helpful.
- Let them know that there are questions hidden inside the BALLOONS. They will take turns POPPING BALLOONS and answering the questions.
- Let them know that if they don’t want to POP the BALLOON, a volunteer can simply read them a question, or that they can opt out (*see notes section below*).

Activity Description:

- Place grief-related questions inside BALLOONS and blow BALLOONS up prior to the kids arriving in the room.
- Group members take turns POPPING a BALLOON and answering the question inside. (*This combines physical energy release with thoughtful reflection.*)
- Be mindful of self-esteem and anxiety. Some group members might find POPPING BALLOONS frightening. Help them problem solve ways to participate comfortably (*For example, have another child POP the BALLOON for them.*) If a child is genuinely distressed by the noise, please do *not* force participation. Discuss this beforehand and check in with group members about their comfort level.
- Be aware that this activity might increase energy levels; some group members may need more time to settle down afterward.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Ask which questions were difficult or easy to answer.
- Discuss any recurring themes in the answers.
- Ask the group how they are feeling after answering the questions.
- Thank the group for their participation.

Notes:

- Ensure that there are no latex allergies (with volunteers or kids) prior to considering this activity.
- Consider using a larger space (like the Community Room) due to the noise.
- Pre-assess group members' comfort levels with the activity before starting.
- Group members who are uncomfortable with the activity can go with a volunteer into another space for a different activity.
- Staff may suggest an alternative activity based on the needs of your specific group members.

For Ongoing Groups

- Consider using questions that focus on the grief journey. *(See Appendix for a list of questions in the “Questions for Q & A Activities” section.)*

BLACKOUT POETRY

Y—M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To create POETRY and express creativity using existing text. This activity provides a unique and often less intimidating way to work with feelings and experiences, offering a gentle pathway for self-expression without the pressure of starting from a blank page.

Task/Need:

- Telling their story
- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Sharing memories and continuing bonds with the person who died
- Helping them understand who they are after their loss
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Provide a variety of options with pages of texts, such as:
 - Old book pages
 - Newspaper articles
 - Magazine pages
 - Printed copies of song lyrics
- Black permanent markers
- Pens, pencils
- Optional: Colored pencils, fine-tip markers, crayons, gel pens

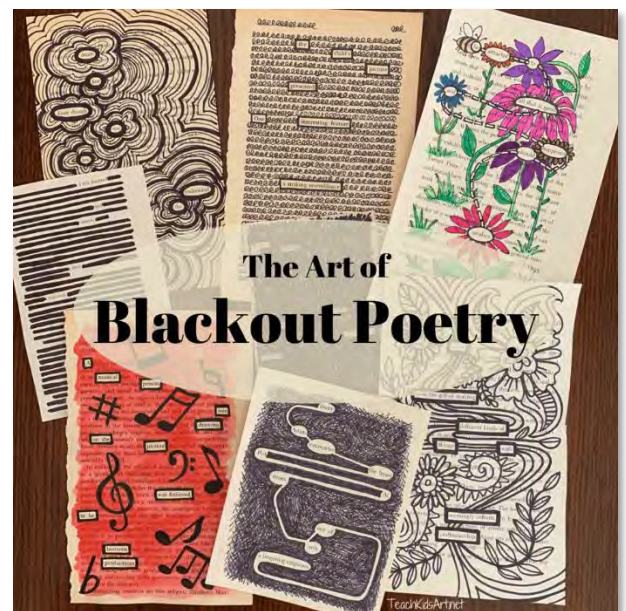
Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Welcome the group back and introduce the activity, noting that it is a creative way to explore words and feelings.
 - *“The idea of BLACKOUT POETRY is straightforward: you’ll pick a page of existing text from the materials provided—it could be from a book, a newspaper, song lyrics, whatever you feel drawn to.”*
 - *“Your task is to find words that resonate with you on that page. These could be single words, short phrases, or even just fragments that catch your eye. Once you’ve identified them, you’ll lightly circle or underline them with a pencil.”*
 - *“Then, the BLACKOUT part comes in: you’ll use a permanent marker to black out all the other words on the page, leaving only the words you’ve chosen visible. The words you choose will form your unique POEM or message.”*
 - *“Think of it like you’re a detective uncovering a hidden message, or an artist revealing a sculpture from a block of stone. The text is already there; you’re just bringing certain words into focus.”*

- Explain that there are no rules and the POEM doesn't have to rhyme or make sense—it is more about what is speaking to them in the moment.
 - Guide them to start by scanning the page—they don't have to read every word. Let their eyes wander and see what jumps out to them.
 - *“As you search for words, you might find some that connect to your feelings about your loss, or special memories of the person who died, or even how you're feeling about yourself today as you navigate your grief journey. Or, you might simply find words that feel important to you for other reasons right now. Trust your intuition; whatever words you're drawn to are the right ones for you.”*

Activity Description:

- Ask group members to take their pencils and lightly circle or underline words and short phrases that catch their eye. They are not blacking anything out yet—just identifying potential words.
- Once they have a collection of circled words, they can start to think about what kind of message or POEM they want to create. They might connect them in the order they appear on the page, or they might jump around between words. They can add or remove words as they go. They may want to try reading their chosen words aloud to see how they sound together.
- When they're happy with their chosen words and their arrangement, they can take their marker and BLACK OUT all the words that they don't want in their POEM. Encourage them to take their time with this step, as it will make their chosen words stand out.
- If they wish, they can use other art supplies to decorate their POEMS. They might draw designs around the words, add colors, or create illustrations that connect to their POEM's meaning.
- As they work, circulate quietly, offering encouragement (*“I see you've found some powerful words,”* or *“That's a really interesting combination.”*) Avoid offering direct advice on word choice unless asked.



Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Invite anyone who feels comfortable to share their POEM with the group.
 - *“When you’re ready, if you feel comfortable and would like to, we’d love for anyone who’s willing to share their POEM with the group. Please know there’s no expectation or pressure to share if you don’t feel like it. What you created is yours and keeping it private is perfectly OK.”*
- You may want to invite the group members to consider the following:
 - *“What words or phrases stood out to you on the page? Was there a reason those words caught your eye?”*
 - *“What kind of message or feeling did you find yourself creating? Did it surprise you?”*
 - *“Was there anything about this process that was challenging for you? Or perhaps something that was surprisingly easy or enjoyable?”*
 - *“Did this activity help you think about your feelings, your memories, or your person who died in a new or different way?”*
 - *“Did you notice how finding certain words led you to create a particular story or thought? How did it feel to ‘uncover’ a message within the existing text?”*
 - *“If you’re willing to share, can you tell us about one word or phrase you chose that holds particular meaning for you today?”*
- Thank all the group members for participating and validate their experiences.
 - *“Sometimes, when we’re navigating grief, it can feel hard to put everything into words or to feel like we’re moving forward. Activities like BLACKOUT POETRY remind us that expression can take many forms, and even a small act of creativity can be a way to process, reflect, and just be with what’s happening.”*
- Remind them that grief isn’t a straight line; it has twists and turns, ups and downs. Note that creating something like this can be a small way to acknowledge where they are on that journey today.

Notes:

- There are no set rules for BLACKOUT POETRY; they can do it any way they like. This activity is about personal expression and discovery.
- Be prepared for some participants to create humorous or lighthearted POEMS, and others to create very poignant ones. All are valid expressions.

- Avoid interpreting a participant's POEM. Instead, focus on listening and reflecting on what the participant shares about *their own* meaning. *"It sounds like this word was very important to you,"* or *"You created a powerful message about..."*
- This activity can be a wonderful, less intimidating entry point for participants who may struggle with direct journaling or verbal sharing.

For Ongoing Groups:

- Even if participants have done this in an Introductory Group, doing this again in an Ongoing Group has value—the beauty of creative activities like this is that they can reveal something different every time they do them, as their grief journey is evolving. If they have done it previously, have them think about their previous poem and compare/contrast to what they create in this session.
 - *"For those who've done this before, what words or phrases stood out to you this time compared to perhaps a previous Session? Did you notice any shifts or changes in what you were drawn to?"*
 - *"Did the message or feeling you found yourself creating today differ from what you might have created in the past, or did you notice a deepening of similar themes?"*
 - *"Was there anything about approaching this activity again that felt challenging or surprisingly easy? Did you use a different approach this time?"*
 - *"Did you notice how your 'word treasure hunt' today revealed something about where you are in your grief or your understanding of yourself now?"*

BODY DRAWINGS

P—Y—M

Suggested Group(s): Preschool, Young, Middle

Purpose: To explore feelings, how and when these feelings might be experienced physically, and how they were experienced related to the death and grief

Task/Need:

- Telling their story
- Identifying and expressing feelings

Materials:

- Large pieces of butcher paper—large enough to trace the BODY of group members
- Markers
- A full-length mirror (optional but helpful)
- *NOTE: See the BODY DRAWING WORKSHEET at the end of this activity*

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Ask, *“Do you ever have a feeling, such as sadness, fear, worry, excitement, or happiness, that makes your BODY feel different from when you aren’t having this feeling?”*
- This may be a new concept for some group members. If they are having difficulty, you may even have them express the emotion in real time and while doing so, notice what part of their BODY they are using. If they are expressing “ANGRY,” they may notice they are clenching their fists or scrunching their face or making a loud roar. A mirror might help with this as well.
- Talk about those feelings and their physical sensations and let the group members know that they will have a chance to express more of them in the BODY DRAWING activity.
- Explain that you are going to have the group members lay down on top of the paper while the volunteers trace around them. They will get to see their BODY outlines. Then they will draw some feelings on their BODY DRAWINGS.

Activity Description:

- After the BODY TRACINGS are done, the group identifies what feelings they have (for example: HAPPY—SAD—SCARED). Ask, *“Where in your BODY might you feel them?”—“What might they look like—“What color might they be?”*
- Next, invite the group members (either individually or as part of a group) to draw something on the BODY to represent the different feelings and the physical sensations that they create.

- It may be useful to pose a few questions, such as:
 - What color represents a certain feeling (for example, black for sadness)?
 - Is there a picture that best represents that feeling (for example, butterflies in the stomach for nervousness)?
 - Is there a word that best fits (for example, yuck for a tough feeling)?
- Let the group members add their feelings to the BODY TRACING using colors, pictures, and/or words and discuss those feelings and physical sensations.

Activity Wrap-Up Ideas:

- Invite group members to share their BODY DRAWING, the meanings of what was added to the DRAWING, and the feelings associated with it.
- Ask, *“When do you feel those feelings?”*
- Point out if the group has a lot of feelings represented: *“It looks like you all have a lot of feelings right now. Tell me more about that...”*
- Remember to validate feelings and throw it back out to the group: *“I notice you have tears in your eyes. I wonder if anyone else has tears. I wonder if that means sad.”*
- Offer an opportunity for the group to share what it was like to think or draw out their feelings.
- Observe any similarities in DRAWING as well as differences.
- Thank the group for sharing.

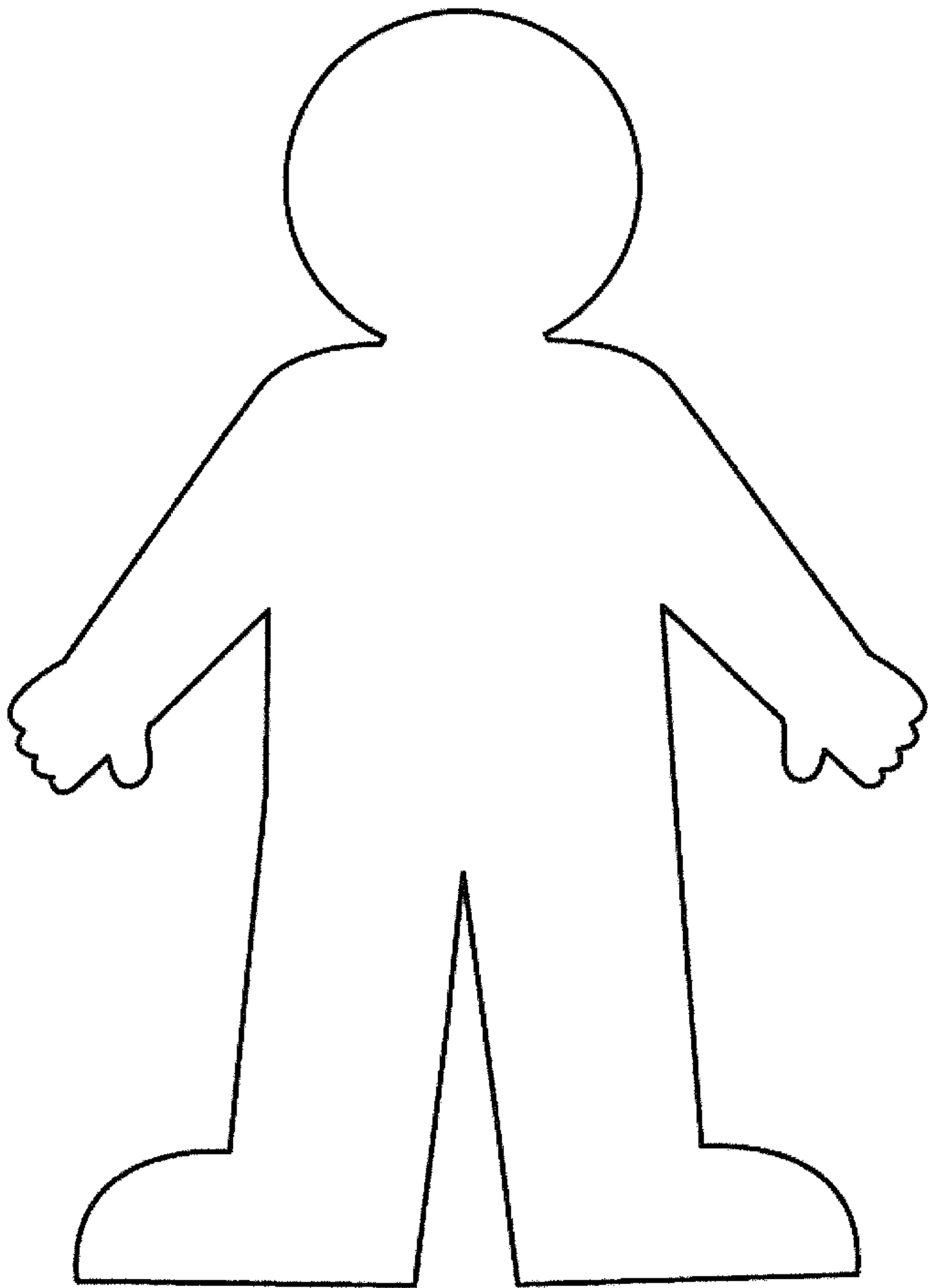
Notes:

- This activity can be done individually, in small groups, or with the entire group in a manageable-sized group. One DRAWING can be used for the whole group, subgroups can work on a DRAWING, or each person can do their own.
- When facilitating the BODY TRACING activity, please ensure you always ask for permission before tracing and maintain clear awareness of personal space, ensuring all participants feel comfortable and respected throughout.
 - An alternative to BODY TRACING is using a WORKSHEET instead of tracing the kids’ bodies. Or use pre-drawn bodies of various sizes based on the characteristics of your group.
 - It also may feel more comfortable for a child to remain standing when being traced. In this case, tape the paper to the wall and have the child stand against the paper.

- For Preschoolers, volunteers will need to use more concrete language or prompt feelings for the group members to draw. Ask the staff for help with modifications when working with younger children.
- Consider pairing this activity with a feelings book to help give group members some ideas of different feelings.

For Ongoing Groups:

- Ask if participants have done this in a previous group. If so, how is this DRAWING different from past DRAWINGS?



BRACELET CIRCLE

P—Y—M

Suggested Group(s): Preschool, Young, Middle

Purpose: To foster connection and support within the group; to establish a consistent and comforting opening routine for group meetings; to provide a gentle and age-appropriate way for children to share memories of someone who has died and understand it's OK to remember and talk about people who are no longer with us.

Task/Need Addressed:

- Group Building
- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Sharing memories and continuing bonds of the person who died
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Small, colorful beads (various colors and shapes) with holes large enough for stringing
 - Ensure there are unique beads for each group member. Each child will need the number of beads equal to the number of group members. For example, if there are 8 group members, one child should have a set of 8 blue beads, another child should have a set of red beads, etc. They will be giving one of their beads to each group member as part of the activity.
- Elastic string or craft cord suitable for making BRACELETS or KEYCHAINS
- Small plastic cups (*one per child and one for the facilitator*)
- A special “Memory Box” or treasure box to store the BRACELETS safely between meetings

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Begin by acknowledging that everyone in the group has likely experienced the death of someone special—a family member, but maybe also a friend or pet. Use simple, direct language.
 - *“Today we’re going to do a fun activity that will allow us to share some memories if you like. It’s very common to miss someone special who is no longer with us. Everyone here has someone they are missing who has died. That might be a family member, a friend, or even a special pet. It’s OK to feel sad, or sometimes even happy when you think about them. We can always keep them in our hearts, even when they’re not here with us in person by remembering them.”*
- Explain that the group will be making BRACELETS or a KEYCHAIN to remember and share about all the people we are missing as a group. Each bead will represent something special about a person we are remembering and will help keep that person close to our hearts.

Activity Description:

- Give each child a plastic cup to keep beads in.
- The volunteer shows how they can place a bead in each person's cup that represents their person who died or a brief memory of their person. Example: *"This blue bead is for my grandpa. I remember he always used to take me fishing."*
- Guide the children to take turns placing one bead in each other's cups and sharing their memories.
 - It's OK if they repeat a memory or simply say something like, *"This bead is for my grandma. I miss her."*
- Make sure every child receives a bead from everyone else in the group but allow them to decide whether they share a memory. If a group member passes on the activity altogether, remember that's OK.
- Once everyone has a bead from each member, help the group members string the beads onto their BRACELETS or KEYCHAINS. Ensure the BRACELETS fit comfortably and use surgeon's knot to tie securely (*see tutorial at the end*).
- Explain that they can wear BRACELETS during group time or have the KEYCHAIN with them as a reminder of the people they're remembering and the support they have from each other.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Gather the group in a circle and invite each child to share a final thought or feeling about their BRACELET before placing it in the group Memory/Treasure Box.
 - *"We've all created something truly special today. These aren't just beads on a string; they are memories, feelings, and pieces of all the important people we carry in our hearts, and pieces of support from everyone in our group."*
 - The group can decorate the box together as a part of this activity if they like.
- Reassure the group that their BRACELETS/KEYCHAINS will be kept safe in the Memory/Treasure Box until the next meeting.
- If time and emotional capacity allow, provide an opportunity for children to share anything else they'd like before putting their BRACELETS away.
 - Consider asking open-ended questions like:
 - *"When you look at your BRACELET/KEYCHAIN, do any feelings come up for you?"*

- *“What was it like to share a memory about your person with the group?”*
- *“Did you learn anything new about a group member or the person they are missing today?”*
- *“Is there anything you want to share about how it felt to receive a bead from each person in the circle?”*
- *“Is there anything else you’d like to say about your feelings today, after making your BRACELET/KEYCHAIN?”*
- Explain that at the beginning of the next session, they will each retrieve their BRACELETS/KEYCHAINS from the Memory Box to keep with them during group.

Notes:

- Using this activity as a routine for opening and closing meetings fosters better organization and allows group members to become familiar with the evening’s structure.
- For use in a Preschool Room:
 - Consider pre-stringing some beads onto the BRACELETS or KEYCHAIN to simplify the activity or assist them.
 - Adapt the language and sharing prompts to suit the specific needs and developmental levels of the children in the group.
 - This activity is best suited for older Preschool children (*ages 4–6*) and early Elementary students.
 - If the activity is being conducted in a mixed-age Preschool setting, ensure that beads are kept out of reach of younger toddlers due to choking hazards.
- Have extra beads and string available in case a child wants to make an additional BRACELET or KEYCHAIN to take home. Additionally, if they don’t want to leave their BRACELET or KEYCHAIN in the Memory Box, they don’t have to do so—it’s OK if they take it with them.

For Ongoing Groups:

- No specific modifications are needed for use in an Ongoing Group. This activity effectively helps group members learn about others in the group who have experienced a death, helping them feel less alone and different.

BUBBLE BREATHING

P—Y—M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Preschool, Young, Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To offer a simple, accessible technique to calm and relax the mind and body through mindful breathing

Task/Need:

- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Developing coping skills and supports

Materials:

- Optional: BUBBLE WAND and BUBBLE SOLUTION (*providing these can add a visual and playful element, especially helpful for younger participants or when the group might benefit from a lighter approach*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Acknowledge that sometimes when we are experiencing big feelings, like sadness, anger, or worry, our bodies can feel tense, and our minds can race.
- Explain that we are going to practice mindful breathing. Mindful breathing simply means paying attention to our breath, without trying to change it. We are just noticing it. It's like a quiet check-in with ourselves. When we focus on our breath, it can give our minds a little break from all the thoughts swirling around, and it can help our bodies feel a bit more relaxed.
- Emphasize the importance of remembering that all feelings are OK, and that they can make space for whatever feelings they notice without judging them or trying to push them away.
- Encourage group members to be kind and gentle with themselves, just as they would be kind to a friend having a hard time.
- Let them know that the goal of the activity is not to achieve a 'perfect' state of calm.
- Introduce the bubbles (if applicable):
 - *"For those who'd like, we have some BUBBLE WANDS and SOLUTION today. Blowing BUBBLES can be a really helpful way to visualize our breath and make this exercise feel a bit lighter. If you don't want to use BUBBLES, that's perfectly fine too; you can just imagine you're blowing a soft, big BUBBLE with each exhale."*

Activity Description:

- *“Let’s all take a moment to find a comfortable position. If you’d like to, you can close your eyes. Let’s pause and take a moment to gently feel the ground beneath your feet, or your seat beneath you. Notice that connection and support.”* (Allow a few seconds for this.)
- *“Now, let’s take a slow, gentle breath in through your nose. You might imagine you’re smelling a beautiful flower. Let the breath fill your belly like a balloon. Hold that breath for a count of three... one... two... three....”* (Guide them slowly.)
- *“And now, slowly breathe out through your mouth. If you have a BUBBLE WAND, gently blow a BUBBLE as you exhale. Watch it float, light and free, carrying away any tension or worries. If you don’t have a WAND, just imagine that soft, light BUBBLE floating away.”* (Emphasize the slowness and gentleness of the exhale.)
- *“As you breathe, notice any feelings that come up. Don’t try to change them, just observe them. Are they big feelings? Small feelings? Do they have a color or a shape? Just notice them, like clouds passing in the sky.”*
- *“Allow yourself to feel whatever comes up, without judgment. This is a safe space for all your feelings. Remember to be kind and compassionate with yourself during this time.”*
- *“Let’s repeat this several times. Each time you breathe in, imagine bringing in calm. Each time you breathe out, imagine gently releasing what you no longer need. Focus on your breath, the feeling of the air, and if you’re using them, the BUBBLES floating away.”* (Lead the group through 3–5 more repetitions, offering gentle guidance.)
- *“When you’re ready, slowly bring your attention back to the room. Wiggle your fingers and toes and gently open your eyes if they are closed.”*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Thank the group for participating in the BUBBLE BREATHING experience.
- Ask the group members to reflect on the following and invite them to share if they wish:
 - *“What sensations did you notice in your body during the breathing? Does anything feel different from before we started?”*
 - *“Did you notice any feelings during the exercise? Were they expected or surprising?”*
 - *“Did you find it easy or difficult to focus on your breath? What was that like for you?”* (Many people do find it difficult, and acknowledging this is helpful. It normalizes distraction and validates individual experiences.)

- *“Did this brief moment of mindful breathing offer a sense of calm, or simply a moment of pause?”*
- *“Do you think this is a tool you might try again on your own when you’re feeling overwhelmed or having big feelings?”*
- Ask group members to share other activities that help them feel calm.
- Remind the group members that learning to take these small pauses and focus on our breath is a wonderful gift they can give themselves anytime. Acknowledge that it’s a skill that gets easier with practice.

Notes:

- For Preschoolers and young children, use concrete language.
 - Allow them to BLOW BUBBLES.
 - Ask them how they feel afterwards.
 - *“When would BLOWING BUBBLES help you calm down?”*
- Consider pairing this with another activity that focuses on coping skills (*see Table of Contents*).

For Ongoing Groups:

- If the Group did this activity before, ask them to share times they have used BUBBLE BREATHING to help themselves calm down.
 - *“What was helpful about BLOWING BUBBLES?”*
 - *“How often do you use BLOWING BUBBLES?”*
 - Have the group brainstorm other coping skills they have found helpful.

BUBBLE BREATHING

Mindful breathing can help to calm and relax our minds and bodies.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Pause.
2. Feel the ground beneath your feet.
3. Take a deep breath in through your nose and hold for 3 seconds.
4. Slowly breathe out through your mouth creating bubbles.
5. Notice your feelings.
6. Allow yourself to feel however you feel with no judgement. Be kind and compassionate with yourself.

**You can also practice "bubble breathing" without a bubble wand. Use your imagination and your breath!*

HIGHMARK.

CARING PLACE

finding hope in grief



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CARING PLACE

finding hope in grief



BUILDING OUR SUPPORT SPACE

Y—M

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle

Purpose: To offer group members an opportunity to reflect on their experiences at the Caring Place and express what has been meaningful to them. This activity aims to help them visualize and articulate how they've experienced support and personal growth during their grief journey.

Task/Need:

- Living on the grief spiral
- Helping them understand who they are after the loss
- Developing coping skills and supports

Materials:

- Wooden blocks (various shapes and sizes)
- Paper
- Small play figures (people, animals)
- Toy cars, trucks, or other small vehicles
- Crayons, markers, or colored pencils

Framing and Activity Set-up:

- *“Today, we’re going to think about our time here at the CARING PLACE. We’re all experts in our own experiences, and your thoughts are really important.”*
- Discuss what things have been helpful for them since they started coming to the CARING PLACE. *“What might have been a bit tough or challenging sometimes?”* (Allow time for sharing.)
- *“Do you think coming here has been a good idea? If a friend or someone you knew was going through something similar, would you tell them about the CARING PLACE? Why or why not?”*
- *“Now, imagine you could build your very own CARING PLACE. What would it look like? What special rooms or areas would it have? Who would be in those rooms, or what kind of activities would be happening there?”*

Activity Description:

- *“With all these materials, we’re going to build our own CARING PLACE together as a group. Think about what the CARING PLACE means to you, or what an ideal SUPPORT SPACE would be like.”*
- *“There’s no right or wrong way to build this. Just use the blocks, figures, and other items to create whatever comes to mind.”*

- As the group members build, volunteers can engage with them by asking open-ended questions:
 - *“Tell me about what you’re adding here. What does this part represent?”*
 - *“Why did you choose to put this figure in this spot?”*
 - *“What kind of feelings does this part of our CARING PLACE bring up for you?”*
 - *“If someone new came to our CARING PLACE, what would they experience in this area?”*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Say, *“Let’s take a moment to look at the wonderful CARING PLACE we’ve built together!”*
- Questions to ask the group:
 - *“Who would like to share something unique or special they added, and why it was important to include?”*
 - *“What do you notice about our CARING PLACE? Does anything surprise you about what we’ve created?”*
 - *“What did we learn or remember about support and caring for ourselves by building this today?”*

For Ongoing Groups:

- Ask the group if they have done this activity before.
 - *“Does your structure look different?”*
 - *“Is there something new you added this time?”*

BUTTERFLIES OF HOPE

P—Y—M

Suggested Group(s): Preschool, Young, Middle

Purpose: To give group members a symbol of hope and a keepsake from the Caring Place

Task/Need:

- Telling their story
- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Making meaning of the loss

Materials:

- Round/basket paper coffee filters
- Bingo dabbers or markers
- Clothespins
- Glue
- Glitter (*would recommend placing it in small cups and supervising use*)
- Construction paper
- Small shallow bowls or spray bottles with water
- Optional—pipe cleaners for antennae

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Welcome the group and ask them what they know about BUTTERFLIES—focusing on change and hope.
 - *“BUTTERFLIES are amazing because they start as tiny caterpillars and then go through a big change to become beautiful, flying BUTTERFLIES. They’re often seen as a symbol of hope around the world, because they remind us that even after tough times, there can be new beauty and change.”*
- Show them how the BUTTERFLY is part of the Caring Place logo.
 - *“Did you know the BUTTERFLY is also a special part of our logo here at the Highmark Caring Place? It reminds us that even when we feel sad, we can also hold onto hope and remember the special love we have for those we miss.”*
- Explain the hope that the death of their loved one will not always hurt so much.
- Let them know that they can make a BUTTERFLY today to take with them to be a reminder of hope.

Activity Description:

- Have an example ready to show the group and let them know that volunteers will be able to help them as they create their own BUTTERFLIES.
 - Walk them through how to make it and give detailed steps if needed:
 - Explain the coffee filter are the wings—have them decorate with markers, bingo dabbers.
 - Let them know if they want it to be shimmery, they can use a tiny bit of glue and glitter (may be helpful to have volunteers help). If adding glue/glitter, it will need to dry for a bit before moving onto the next step.
 - To make the colors expand, have them spray with spray bottle, or you can have them use a Q-Tip to gently dab tiny bits of water on the filter where there is marker/bingo dabber—the colors will expand to make neat patterns.
 - Once the filter is dry, pinch it in the middle like a bow tie.
- Once you have the BUTTERFLY shape, help them move onto the next step. Slide or clip a clothespin onto the pinched area and fan out each side of the filter to resemble a BUTTERFLY'S wings.
- Cut two thin strips of construction paper, approximately the size of matchsticks, and glue them onto the clothespin for a pair of antennae. (A pipe cleaner bent in half can also be used for the antennae).

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- After everyone is done, guide the group in sharing if they like. Be curious about the colors the group members used on their BUTTERFLIES and encourage discussion.
 - *“Look at all these BUTTERFLIES! Each one is unique and special, just like each of you. Let’s hold up our BUTTERFLIES and see them all together.”*
 - *“Would anyone like to share something about their BUTTERFLIES? You can tell us about the colors you chose, or maybe what your BUTTERFLY reminds you of.”*
 - *“How did it feel to make your BUTTERFLY? Did your design come out how you wanted it to? How did it change after you put the water on it?”*
- Discuss the BUTTERFLY (“HOPE”) in the Highmark Caring Place logo.
 - *“We talked about how BUTTERFLIES are a symbol of hope. How does your BUTTERFLY make you think about hope? What does hope mean to you right now?”*

- *“Remember the BUTTERFLY in our Highmark Caring Place logo? What does that symbol mean to you now?”*
- *“Coming to the Caring Place is about having a safe space to share and to remember, and to be with others who understand. What is something important to you about being here?”*
- Discuss CHILDREN’S GRIEF AWARENESS DAY, if appropriate.
 - *“We made these BUTTERFLIES today, and did you know there’s a special day each year called CHILDREN’S GRIEF AWARENESS DAY? It’s a day when we help everyone understand that children and teens grieve too, and it’s important to support them. Our BUTTERFLIES can be a little way we acknowledge that.”* (Briefly explain if the date is near, but avoid lengthy discussion if it distracts from the primary activity).

For Ongoing Groups:

- This can be used in Introductory or Ongoing Groups.
 - If using in an Ongoing Group where group members might have made these before, ask if they remember what design they made on their first BUTTERFLY.
 - How is this BUTTERFLY different from the first one they made?
 - Do they still have the previous BUTTERFLY they made? Where do they keep it?

BUTTERFLY “JEOPARDY” QUIZ SHOW

Y—M—T

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To encourage sharing of experiences and feelings related to grief in a fun and engaging way

Task/Need:

- Group building
- Telling their story
- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Sharing memories and continuing bonds with the person who died

Materials:

- Butterflies or small objects (one per child)
- Whiteboard or large chart paper
- Construction paper or plain white paper for questions
- Age-appropriate Questions (QUESTIONS can be found in the “Questions for Q & A Activities” in the Appendix)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Ask: “How many have seen JEOPARDY on TV?” Explain that you’ll play a similar game with questions related to why they come to the Caring Place.
- Draw a JEOPARDY-style chart on the whiteboard or chart paper.

Activity Description:

1. Prepare the board:

- Place BUTTERFLIES (or objects) across the top of the chart.
- Write the letters of a feeling-related word (ex. HEART) under each BUTTERFLY. Choose a longer word if needed. The letters will be the ‘headers’ for the topics.
- Under each BUTTERFLY/letter, have five questions written on separate papers. Topics could be: “Feelings”—“Friends”—“The Person Who Died”—“About Me”—“Family”. (Keep questions age-appropriate).

2. Play the game:

- Kids pick a BUTTERFLY (or letter) and ask a question.
- They answer the question—**Optional:** The person who answers the last question under a BUTTERFLY wins that BUTTERFLY.
- After each answer, encourage the group to share their thoughts and feelings. You can also allow the group to share their answers in addition to the one person (to help with group connections).

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Acknowledge that everyone is a winner for coming to the Caring Place and for engaging in the game.
- Ask if there were any questions that were difficult or easy to answer.
- Remember to focus on those connection-building opportunities—
 - *“You said that it was hard to answer the question about how things felt after your dad died. Did anyone else feel like it was hard to talk about feelings after your person died?”*
 - *“Someone else said that you liked the question asking you to share your favorite memory. Does anyone else like to think about their favorite memories?”*

Notes:

- You can choose age-appropriate questions from the Appendix. (QUESTIONS can be found in the *“Questions for Q & A Activities”* in the Appendix)
- Ensure questions are varied in difficulty.
- Be flexible. If the group is losing interest, adjust the activity or move on. The kids’ needs come first—it’s OK to end an activity early if they aren’t interested.
- Some sites may have an electronic version of BUTTERFLY JEOPARDY available, or questions already printed out on card stock paper.

For Ongoing Groups

- Choose questions that focus on their grief journey.
- Enlist the help of staff for additional question ideas.

CALMING BOTTLES

Y—M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To create a tangible tool for identifying and managing difficult, overwhelming feelings, and provide a visual metaphor for grief's intensity and eventual settling into their lives

Task/Need:

- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Developing coping skills and supports
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Empty water bottles—one per group member
- Clear liquid hand soap
- Warm water, preferably in a pouring pitcher
- Fine and chunky glitter in various colors
- Embellishments—beads, sequins, small craft gems, tiny plastic animals or objects
- Hot glue gun & glue for sealing



Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Welcome the group and let them know that today you will be talking about the different feelings related to grief.
- Brainstorm and create a list of feelings they have experienced since the death of their person.
 - *“Grief often brings up a lot of really strong feelings. Sometimes they can feel overwhelming, like a big storm inside us. What are some of those big, intense feelings you’ve experienced since your loved one died?”*
 - Use a whiteboard or large paper to write down the feelings the group names so everyone can see.
- Before you make the BOTTLES, have them talk about what coping skills they might already use to manage those feelings.
 - *“What are some things you do right now to try and calm yourselves down when you feel overwhelmed?”* (List these, reinforcing any positive coping strategies they mention. For example, “Listening to music”—“Taking deep breaths”—“Talking to a trusted person”.)
- Introduce the CALMING BOTTLES activity.
 - *“This BOTTLE we’re making is another tool to add to your coping toolbox. It’s a visual way to help our minds and bodies slow down.”*

- *“With this activity, you’ll end up with something that you can use when you’re having those feelings. We’re going to make CALMING BOTTLES—you’ll get to make one like this” (show example).*
- *“Think of it like this: Sometimes our minds feel as cloudy and turbulent as a shaken-up glitter BOTTLE. Our thoughts are flying, feelings are swirling, and it’s hard to see clearly or settle down. Our special BOTTLE will be a reminder and a tool to help those ‘stormy’ moments settle, just like the glitter settles at the bottom of the BOTTLE.”*

Activity Description:

- Fill BOTTLE $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way with warm water.
- Have group members add their glitter and decorations to the BOTTLE. Let them know that they can choose whatever they like. Some things they choose can be meaningful (for example, a specific color bead to match their favorite color or their person’s favorite color).
 - Note: some of the glitter color may run, tinting the water. Make sure group members know this and have them stick to one or two colors so it doesn’t end up brown.
- Once they’re done adding, help them fill the BOTTLE all the way to the top with the clear liquid hand soap. Leave as little air as possible to eliminate bubbles and for better sealing.
- Explain that the soap helps the glitter and decorations float and fall slowly—providing a calming effect.
- Secure lid tightly and let them give it a shake and watch the glitter and objects swirl and fall. If they want to add more (if space), have them do it now before it is permanently sealed.
- Once they are happy with it, a volunteer can secure the lid with glue gun—let them know that they cannot reopen the BOTTLE once it’s sealed.



Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Encourage sharing in the group once everyone is finished.
 - *“Now that everyone’s BOTTLE is made, let’s take a moment. Hold your BOTTLE, give it a shake, and watch as it settles. What do you notice?”*
 - *“Would anyone like to share what they put in their BOTTLE, or perhaps a color you chose, and why it’s meaningful to you?”*

- Process with the group members how they felt after watching the CALMING BOTTLES. Did it slow their mind down at all?
 - *“When we shake our BOTTLES, everything flies around, sometimes making it hard to see. What does that feel like inside your head or heart when your feelings are like that?”*
 - *“But then, what happens? Slowly, steadily, everything begins to settle. The glitter drifts down, and the water becomes clearer. How does that look and feel as you watch it?”*
 - *“This BOTTLE can be a visual reminder that even when feelings are swirling and chaotic, they do eventually settle. We don’t have to feel intense feelings all the time.”*
- Let them know they can take their CALMING BOTTLES home to use as a coping tool. Process how they think they might use it.
 - *“How do you think this BOTTLE could help you when you’re feeling overwhelmed, angry, anxious, or really sad?”*
 - *“How did it feel to create your CALMING BOTTLE?”*

Notes:

- Have all BOTTLES clean, labels removed and organized. Pre-sort glitter/embellishments into small dishes. Have warm water ready.
- Have an example ready to show the group (check with staff—we often have a sample).
- For adult groups, the language can be more sophisticated about stress reduction, mindfulness, and conscious coping strategies. The CALMING BOTTLE is a very accessible tool for self-regulation regardless of age.
- **Variation: FEELINGS TORNADO BOTTLES**
 - This can be adapted slightly to be a FEELINGS TORNADO BOTTLE—to help identify and process strong emotions. Follow directions as above but expand more on the feelings that the group identifies. You can also add food coloring as an option for the BOTTLES.
 - *“Let’s explore what these feelings feel like in our bodies. What does it feel like when you’re angry? Or super frustrated? (for example, tense muscles, fast heartbeat). What color might that feeling be if you could draw it?”*
 - Add food coloring (chosen to represent intense feelings—maybe red for anger, blue for deep sadness, purple for confusion, etc.).
 - Add glitter (different colors can represent different aspects of the feeling).

- Secure the lid with glue.
- Instruct participants to shake the BOTTLE up and down and swirl it vigorously to create the tornado effect.
 - *“Shake your BOTTLE and watch the tornado. What does it feel like to see those intense colors and swirling glitter representing those strong feelings?”*
 - *“Does this swirling remind you of a time when your feelings felt like a tornado inside you? What was happening then?”*
 - *“Now, watch closely as the tornado slows down and the glitter settles. How does that look and feel as you watch it? What might that settling teach us about our feelings?”*
 - *“Just like in our BOTTLE, feelings can get super intense, swirl around, and sometimes feel chaotic. But they don’t last forever. They eventually settle.”*
 - *“When your feelings feel like a tornado, what are some things you could do to help them settle, just like the glitter in the BOTTLE?”* Allow discussion of coping skills and create a list together with the group.
- *“You can use this FEELINGS TORNADO BOTTLE at home as a reminder that intense feelings are OK, they’re temporary, and you have ways to help yourself when they start to swirl.”*

For Ongoing Groups:

- It might be a good idea to gauge how many have already made one and adapt the activity slightly. Below is a suggestion for adaptation to a **CONNECTION SPACE BOTTLE**:
 - Have the group members create a CALMING BOTTLE that acts as a grief garden or safe space where they can feel connected to their person.
 - Instead of the typical glitter/objects, gather some more natural looking elements—small polished stones, tiny faux flowers/leaves, small shells, plastic ocean animals (often can be found in fairy garden sections at stores like Dollar Tree or Dollar General).
 - Have them envision a quiet spot in nature where they might connect to their person—maybe a garden, ocean, the beach, etc.
 - Slightly vary the set-up and wrap-up to focus more about how they can use this CONNECTION SPACE BOTTLE when they want to think about their person and imagine a time together.

CARING PLACE REPORTER

Y—M—T

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To facilitate group building and allow group members to get to know each other. To build a safe environment for processing grief and begin to allow group members to share about the person who died.

Task/Need:

- Group building
- Telling their story

Materials:

- List of interview questions for each group member (*see the end of this write-up*)
- *Additional questions can be found in QUESTIONS FOR QUESTION & ANSWER ACTIVITIES in the Appendix*
- Pencils, markers, or pens
- Clipboards (optional)
- Toy microphone (optional)
- Cardboard “TV screen” (optional)
- Other props to support the reporter theme (optional)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Ask who has seen the news on TV? Discuss the role of reporters. Explain they will be “CARING PLACE REPORTERS,” and their task will be to get to know something about fellow group members and report back to the group.
- Explain to the group that the questions will help everyone to learn more about the group, their families, and their special people who died. The **I PASS RULE** applies.

Activity Description:

- Have group members pair up, interview each other, and write down the answers on their interview question sheet. Then have them introduce their new friend to the group. Use a pretend microphone or other optional prompts listed above to make it fun.
- Another idea is to have questions written on cue cards and have the interview take place ‘live on TV.’

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Have group members reflect on similarities between group members.
 - “What did you have in common with your partner, or with any other member of the group?”

- *“How many of you discovered surprising similarities or differences?”*
 - *“Tell me more about the surprises.”*
 - *“Tell me more about the similarities and differences you discovered.”*
- *“What was it like to participate in this activity?”*
- *“What do you think was the purpose of this activity?”*

Notes:

- For younger children, you may need a scribe. Consider “REPORTER” props for dress-up (hats, jackets) with younger kids.
- Questions can be modified based on your group members.
- This activity can be modified for Adult groups. Check with staff on how to do this.
- *Check with the staff at your site for additional reporter questions. Or see QUESTIONS FOR QUESTION & ANSWER ACTIVITIES in the Appendix.*
- Some sites may have a list of icebreaker questions written on a ball to incorporate more movement or play.
- Be sensitive when asking questions about siblings and birth order in case a group member has had a sibling die.

For Ongoing Groups:

- Groups can make a video using the iPads
 - Remember the **I PASS RULE** applies.
 - Make sure to include time to re-play the video.
 - *“What was it like to see yourself onscreen?”*
 - Additional processing questions can include:
 - *“How did you feel while filming the video?”*
 - *“How did it feel to be interviewed by your partner?”*

Caring Place Interview Questions

1. What is your name?
2. Tell us about your family. (This could include people who live with you, people you are close to, or people who are important to you.)
3. If you have siblings, where do you fall in age order?)
4. What grade are you in or what is your current learning situation?
5. What is your favorite food?
6. Do you have any pets or animals that you love? What kind? What are their names?
7. If you don't have a pet, or animals you regularly see, would you like to have one? What kind?
8. What is your favorite thing to do?
9. If you could invite any three people (living or not living) to dinner, who would you invite?
10. Tell us about the person (or people) who died who you are thinking about today.
11. What makes you laugh?
12. What kind of music do you enjoy, or are there any favorite artists or groups you like?
13. What do you think you are good at doing? Is there anything new you would like to try, or something you wish you could get better at doing?
14. If you were somewhere remote for a year and could only bring three items, what three things would you like to have with you?

Caring Place Reporter Questions (Teen Edition)

1. What two words best describe you?
2. Thinking back, have you ever had a hairstyle you found really memorable, funny, or maybe a little regrettable? What was it?
3. If someone secretly took a photo or video of you being yourself, what would they most likely capture you doing?
4. What's something you often notice or appreciate about others when you first meet them?
5. What's a book, video, movie, show, game, or podcast you've enjoyed recently and would recommend? Why did you like it?
6. What is an early memory you have from your childhood?
7. Do you have a favorite or funny story from your family or from people you consider family?
8. What kinds of habits or behaviors in other people tend to bother you or make you feel annoyed?
9. What's something you like to do to relax, recharge, or feel calmer?
10. If you knew there were no wrong answers or chances of failing, what's one big thing you would love to try or achieve?
11. What's a powerful piece of advice you've received, or a personal motto you live by? Who or what was the source of that wisdom?
12. What's a song, artist, or type of music that consistently puts you in a good mood or gives you "good vibes"?
13. Who is someone you admire for their wisdom or life insights? And who is someone who always makes you laugh with their quick wit?

Caring Place Interview Questions (Ongoing Group)

1. What is your name? Is there a story behind how you got your name, or a special meaning to it?
2. Tell us about your family. Do you know any special dates for people in your family (like birthdays, anniversaries, or other celebrations)?
3. We all have people who are important to us who have died. Can you tell us about one or more people who died that you're thinking about today?
 - What do you miss about them or about the time you shared together?
 - What has changed in your life or in your family since they've been gone?
 - Who do you feel comfortable talking to when you want to remember or talk about your person who died?
4. What grade are you in, or what is your current learning situation?
5. What is a favorite food? Is that a dish you enjoy making, or that you could try to prepare?
6. Do you have any pets, or animals that you feel close to? What kind? What are their names (or special qualities)?
 - If not, would you like to have a pet, or care for an animal someday? What kind?
7. Do you enjoy playing any sports or watching them? What kind?
8. What is one of your favorite things to do?
 - What was something you liked doing with your person who died?
9. If you could invite any three people (living or not living, real or fictional) to a special meal, who would you invite?
10. What are some things that make you laugh or bring a smile to your face?
 - Were there any specific jokes, stories, or moments about your person who died that made you laugh?
11. What kind of music do you enjoy, or are there any favorite artists or groups you like to listen to?
12. What do you think you are good at doing, or what talents do you have? Is there anything new you're curious to try, or something you'd like to get better at doing?
13. If you were in a remote place for a year and could only bring three items, what three things would you like to have with you?

CARING PLACE SCAVENGER HUNT

Y—M—T

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To build connections within the group, familiarize participants with the Caring Place facility in a fun and interactive way, and help them develop a sense of comfort and belonging in their new support environment

Task/Need:

- Group building

Materials:

- Clipboards
- Paper
- Pens/Pencils
- Pre-prepared SCAVENGER HUNT Worksheets or Clue Envelopes:
 - Questions/worksheets vary by site; volunteers should familiarize themselves with the questions and answers before the group session to effectively assist (*get questions/worksheets from staff*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Welcome group and explain that you will be doing a fun activity today to help them get more familiar with the Caring Place.
 - *“We all come here because someone special in our lives has died, and we’re here to find support and understanding as we navigate our grief. This is a place where you’ll find people who get it, because they’re experiencing something similar.”*
 - *“To help us all feel a little more comfortable and get to know this building and each other, we’re going to go on an adventure today: A CARING PLACE SCAVENGER HUNT! Has anyone done a scavenger hunt before?”*
- Allow discussion and group to explain what a scavenger hunt is. Note that there are different rooms and spaces at the Caring Place used for different things and they will be working in teams to complete the SCAVENGER HUNT.

Activity Description:

- Divide into two or more teams, depending on the group size. Each team should have a volunteer to stay with them during the SCAVENGER HUNT. The volunteer’s role is to guide them and offer hints if needed, as well as make sure all group members are included in the hunt. Each group gets a clipboard with the SCAVENGER HUNT worksheet or clues.
- It may be helpful to have the teams start at different parts of the SCAVENGER HUNT.

- At each location, guide the group to find the answer to the questions about the room, mark it on their worksheet, and then follow the next clue or section of the SCAVENGER HUNT worksheet. Encourage teamwork and problem-solving at each step.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Come back together as a larger group.
- Discuss anything new learned during the SCAVENGER HUNT and how they worked together to answer the clues.
- Questions to guide discussion:
 - *“What was something new or interesting you learned about the Caring Place today?”*
 - *“Which room was your favorite to explore, and why?”*
 - *“What was it like working with your team to find the clues and answer the questions?”* (Encourage them to talk about supporting each other, problem-solving, etc.)
 - *“Did anyone get stuck on a clue? How did your team help you figure it out?”*
 - *“Now that you’ve explored the whole building, does it feel more familiar or comfortable?”*
 - *“What was it like meeting some new people or getting to know someone in your team a little better today?”*
- Thank everyone for their great teamwork and helping to do the SCAVENGER HUNT!

For Ongoing Groups:

- As this is designed for new participants, this may not be a top choice for Ongoing Groups. However, you can check with staff at your site to see if there is an alternative version available for Ongoing Groups or create a different version (*must be approved by staff first*).

CARING PLACE WORD SEARCH

Y—M—T

Suggested Groups(s): Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To engage group members in finding words based on a theme (feelings, Caring Place words, names, etc.)

Task/Need:

- Group building
- Identifying and expressing feelings

Materials:

- Check with staff for current websites to make a customizable WORD SEARCH
 - *Reference the Appendix for two premade WORD SEARCHES*
- Computer with internet and printer access
- WORD SEARCH puzzle copies

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Ask members if they have ever done a WORD SEARCH before.
- Explain they will be searching for words on a paper (show an example of a WORD SEARCH).
- Inform group members of the topic of the WORD SEARCH.
- If using feelings words, discuss positive and difficult feelings; brainstorm a list.
- If this is serving as a back-up activity, use a pre-made CARING PLACE WORD SEARCH (*see Appendix*).

Activity Description:

- Use an online WORD SEARCH generator to create a puzzle as long as you consult with staff first. Print copies to provide each of the group members to complete.
- You can also ask each group member to contribute a word and use their words to create the puzzle.
- Be aware of group members' comfortability with technology.
- Do not make the WORD SEARCH too difficult.
- Make sure you allow enough time for members who may be slower at finding words than others.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- If discussing feelings, ask group members to share examples of when they felt that way themselves.

- Ask if certain themes made it easier to find words than others.
- Ask if there were words that they were unfamiliar with.
- Have group members discuss the words they found in the puzzle.
- Thank participants for doing the WORD SEARCH.

Notes:

- You can use group member names as an icebreaker. Adjust difficulty as needed.
- Follow up discussion if using feelings or grief words.
- This activity may be used without technology. Volunteers can create their own word search.

For Ongoing Groups:

- Have group members create a WORD SEARCH puzzle around feelings about coming back to the Caring Place for another session.
- Ask group members if they have used a WORD SEARCH puzzle since their last session.
- Develop new methods of creating WORD SEARCH puzzles.

CELEBRITIES WITH A LOSS STORY

M—T

Suggested Group(s): Middle, Teen

Purpose: To normalize the grief experience and let group members know that they are not alone in their grief. To possibly find role models who have had loss experiences, possibly similar losses, and who have transformed their grief.

Task/Need:

- Making meaning of the loss
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Pictures of CELEBRITIES (pre-selected): Have 4–6 different hard copy pictures (or ready-to-display online links) of famous people who have faced a significant loss (either as a child or adult).
 - *Ensure you have reliable background information about each person's loss and how they've spoken about it or how it has impacted their public life.*
- Computer or iPad with Internet Access (if research phase is included).
- Optional: Whiteboard or large paper for writing down ideas/findings; markers.

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Start a general conversation about CELEBRITIES with the group and note that they will be playing a game today to learn things about various CELEBRITIES. Explain that the idea is to explore how different life experiences shape people, and that they will use some famous faces to talk about that more.
- Let the group know that before they came to group, we identified a few famous individuals—trying to pick a range of people who might appeal to different interests (sports, music, acting, science, etc.).
 - *“For each CELEBRITY, we have some basic background information about their career, and other facts about them—but maybe you know some things about them you can share with us too.”*

Activity Description:

- Present the CELEBRITIES and start the conversation about what they might know about them.
 - *“Let's start with our first CELEBRITY. I'm going to show you a picture of [CELEBRITY Name]. Take a moment to look at them.”*
 - *“Without learning anything else about them, think about you might have in common with this person. Maybe you like their music, or a movie they*

were in, or a sport they play. Or maybe you just like their outfit. There are no wrong answers. Let's just spend a few minutes brainstorming."

- After they have given a few suggestions, help them make the connection to grief:
 - *"Those are some interesting ideas. Thank you for sharing. Now, I'm going to share one other thing that this CELEBRITY, [CELEBRITIES Name], and many of you in this room have in common. And that is... **they have experienced a significant loss in their life.**"*
 - *"It might be surprising to hear that someone famous, who seems to have it all, has also been through something as difficult as losing someone important to them or losing a significant part of their life. Grief touches everyone, even those we admire."*
- Sharing the CELEBRITY'S Story:
 - *"Let me share a little bit about [CELEBRITY Name's] specific experience."*
 - Share the pre-prepared background information on their loss. Be factual, brief, and avoid sensationalizing or sharing details.
 - For example: *"When [CELEBRITY Name] was [age], they lost their [family member/close person] due to [cause, if appropriate and known, otherwise simply "unexpectedly"]. This was a really challenging time for them."*
- Open the discussion to talk about similarities and coping:
 - *"Hearing about [CELEBRITY Name's] loss, what are your initial thoughts?"*
 - *"Even though their life might look very different from yours, are there any feelings or experiences they might have had that you can relate to?"*
 - *"How do you imagine something like that might have affected their life or their work?"*
 - *"From what we know about them, do you think they've found ways to live with their grief, or even integrate it into who they are now?"*
- Additional Option: Internet Research Exploration (Guided & Supervised):
 - *"Now it's your turn to do a bit of detective work. We're going to look at other famous people across different fields."*
 - *"Let's divide into small groups to explore and a volunteer will work with you."*
 - Give instructions on what to keep in mind as they search:
 - *"Can you find any of your own role models (in sports, music, art, gaming, etc.) who have experienced a significant loss in their life?"*

(Use terms like “loss of parent”—“death of sibling”—“bereavement”—etc. in your search if you’re comfortable.)

- *“Once you find someone, see if you can discover if they ever talk about how this loss might have influenced who they became, or if it led them to support certain causes or movements.”*
- *“For artists (musicians, painters, writers), can you find any of their songs, artworks, or books that seem to have been inspired by a loss?”*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Allow time to process if they did research:
 - *“Let’s come back together as a larger group. Who would like to share some of what they found or an interesting CELEBRITY story they discovered?”*
- Lead discussion about how the CELEBRITY’S grief/loss might have impacted them.
 - *“Based on what you’ve learned about these CELEBRITIES and their work, or the causes they support, what can you understand about how their grief might have influenced their creations, accomplishments, or who they became?”*
 - *“Thinking about how these people lived their lives and achieved what they did, do you think that having experienced a loss had a lasting impact on how they approached life or what they valued?”*
 - *“How might that be similar or different to how you imagine your loss impacting you?”*
- Ask if there are any final thoughts on how this activity felt.
 - *“Does anyone want to share a final thought about what surprised them or what they might take away from seeing these CELEBRITY examples?”*
 - *“One of the key takeaways from this activity is that grief is a human experience. It touches people from all walks of life—those you might see on video, listen to, or admire for their talents. How did this activity feel for you to do?”*
- Thank the group for sharing their thoughts and feelings.

Notes:

- This activity encourages group members to identify with others and see how loss can shape a person's life and work.
- Important considerations for CELEBRITY selection:
 - **Age appropriateness:** Ensure the CELEBRITY and the nature of their loss is something a middle/teen group can relate to and process.
 - **Public information:** Choose CELEBRITIES whose experiences are openly discussed and verifiable, avoiding speculative or overly sensationalized accounts.
 - **Diversity:** Select a diverse range of CELEBRITIES in terms of their background, type of loss, and how they channeled their experience.
 - **Relevance to group interests:** Consider what CELEBRITIES might resonate most with your specific group. Draw on past discussions to help choose CELEBRITIES that they may be familiar with.
- Prior to using with a group, it can be helpful to check with staff on the CELEBRITIES you plan to use to ensure that they are appropriate.

For Ongoing Groups:

- This activity is appropriate for Introductory or Ongoing Groups. If done in an Ongoing Group, consider these suggestions below:
 - Ask if anyone in the group has done this activity in their Introductory Group and if so, if they remember the CELEBRITIES they discussed—that can be a helpful starting point.
 - Encourage them to search (with volunteer supervision) to find additional CELEBRITIES that have had an important person in their life die.

CLAY POT

M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To create a tangible representation of the impact of loss on our lives—how lives can feel “broken,” and the process of rebuilding and putting lives back together.

Task/Need:

- Helping them understand who they are after the loss
- Making meaning of the loss
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Terra cotta planting POTS: appropriate size for your group, one for each person
(see Notes for variation with ONE LARGE POT for collective work)
- Elmer’s glue/Tacky glue
- Hot glue gun & glue (Adult use only)
- Scotch tape
- Masking tape
- Hammer or mallet (to be used under supervision)
- Old pillowcase or other fabric to contain POTS safely during breaking process
- Permanent markers for writing/drawing on POTS

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Welcome the group members and explain the activity.
 - *“Today we’re going to do an activity that focuses on how our losses have impacted our lives. For a moment, let’s think about this POT as representing our lives before our loss, before someone important to us died. Life might have felt mostly whole or smooth, like this POT.”*
 - *“But sometimes, in life, something really big and sudden happens that feels like it breaks our world or breaks something important inside us. When someone we love dies, it’s one of those big, impactful things that can make our lives feel really shattered and different.”*
 - *“Our activity today is going to focus on that, but before we start, let’s talk a little bit about some of the changes you have noticed...”*
- Invite the kids to talk about their life and how it has changed since their person died.
 - *“How has life felt different for you lately, since your special person died?”*
 - *“What’s one thing about your life that feels changed or just not the same since your special person isn’t here anymore?”*

- *“Sometimes, when someone important dies, it can feel like certain parts of our world have shifted. What are some of those shifts you’ve noticed in your own life?”*
- *“Think about your days, your routines, or even your feelings. What are some ways you’ve had to adapt or learn new ways of doing things?”*
- Thank them for sharing; show the unbroken POT, and then the sample finished POT that was broken and put back together.
 - *“For our activity today, you’re going to have the opportunity to break your POT safely and then put it back together. It will look different than the POT before it was broken, and you can determine how to put it back together. Here is an example of one put back together—still beautiful and unique in a different way.”*

Activity Description:

- Allow option to decorate their POT before or after they break it. There is no right or wrong way. They can also decorate before and after they break it.
 - *“On your POT, you can draw what you like—maybe think about your life before and after. You can use the markers to write or draw. Here are some ideas:”*
 - A feeling you’ve had since your person died (sad, miss you, confused, strong, etc.).
 - A memory you have of your special person.
 - Something new you’ve learned about yourself.
 - How your family or friendships feel different now.
 - A question you have about grief or loss.
 - A word or image that describes the person who died.
- Each participant will need to break their POT with volunteer assistance. However—do not force them to break it if they don’t want to (*see note below*).
 - Cover the POT with the fabric and gently break it with a hammer/mallet. Keep the pieces rather large and don’t break the entire POT into tiny pieces.
 - **NOTE:** *“If breaking your POT doesn’t feel right for you, or if you prefer a different way to think about how your life has changed, that’s perfectly OK! Your other option is to use your POT just as it is—whole. Even though it’s whole, we know life still changes. You might draw or write on the outside of your POT to show those changes, feelings, or how you’re adapting to a ‘new whole’ that still includes your memories.”*

- Let them know that they can draw on the individual pieces after it's broken as well, prior to putting it back together.
- Next, give the group the task of putting the POT back together, like a puzzle. (This is where it gets very difficult.)
 - *"Now, the really challenging part of our activity begins for each of us. We're going to try to put our own POT back together. Just like our lives after loss, it's not going to go back exactly the way it was before. It's often hard work, and it takes time and effort to figure out how to live with these changes and put ourselves back together. And remember, each POT broke differently, so each POT will go back together differently too, making a totally unique new POT!"*
 - *"This is going to be like a puzzle, a very difficult personal puzzle. The challenge and the process of figuring it out is a big part of what we're exploring today."*
 - *"For those whose POTS are whole, you can continue to decorate and draw on your POT, showing how life keeps changing, or adding more symbols of strength and memory. You might even use the glue to add textures or other embellishments to symbolize different feelings or aspects of your grief."*
- Offer Elmer's glue, glue stick, hot glue (supervised by an adult), tape, and masking tape. Let the group members take the lead in reassembling the POT.
 - *"We have different kinds of glue and tape here. You can use anything you think might help you put your POT back together. Feel free to try different things. You might notice some pieces are easier to connect than others. You might also notice gaps where tiny pieces broke away, or parts don't perfectly align. That's all part of the process, just like in life."*
 - *"For some tricky parts, if a piece won't stay with the regular glue or tape, we can help, using the hot glue gun to hold it in place."*
- Assist as needed, as it's very difficult to keep the pieces in place as they're being taped or glued together.
- As you assist group members, engage in curious questions about what they put on their POT and how they are putting it back together.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Lead discussion after the group seems to be finished. Remember to include variations if some members of the group have decided to keep their POT whole.
 - *"What do you notice about your POT now that you've put it back together? Has it changed as you decorated it more?"*

- *“How do you think your POT might resemble your own life, or your own feelings, after someone important died?”*
- *“What about the cracks in your POT? What do those cracks make you think of in terms of your own life or your grief? For those with whole POTS, what about the new decorations or words? What do those symbolize about your journey?”*
(For example: scars—changes—reminders of what happened—places where things aren’t “perfect” but are still there.)
- *“And what about the spots where perhaps a tiny piece of your POT broke off and isn’t there anymore, or a space where pieces don’t perfectly fit? What might those holes or gaps symbolize in your life or your memories?”*
(For example: things you miss—parts of life that are gone forever—an emptiness—something you’re still figuring out.)
- *“How did it feel for you when you were trying to put your pieces back together? Was it easy or hard? What does that say about what it feels like for you to rebuild your life after a big change?”*
(For example: frustrating—takes effort—takes time—I can do it even if it’s hard—people helping makes it easier.)
- *“Even with all these changes and cracks, what do you notice about your pot as a whole? Does it still seem strong? Does it still hold meaning or beauty? What does that say about you?”*
(For example: I’m strong—I’m unique—I’m different but still good—it shows I kept trying.)
- Note the challenges of putting the POT back together or not wanting to put it back together at all.
- Thank the group for sharing and for their creativity and openness.
 - *“This POT you’ve created is your personal symbol. It shows us that even when big, difficult things happen in our lives, and even when we feel broken or shattered, we can put ourselves back together. It won’t be exactly the same as before, and we’ll carry the cracks—the memories and the changes—with us.”*
 - *“But those cracks can also show your strength, your unique journey, and the incredible work you’ve done to heal and rebuild. This is your story. Remember, it’s OK to feel different, and it’s OK for your life to look different now. What matters is that you keep finding ways to put things together, step by step, and that you’re not alone on this journey.”*

Notes:

- This activity is very impactful. Before starting, review the activity and instructions carefully. Consider demonstrating the POT-breaking before the group arrives so you are comfortable and know what to expect. Ask staff to provide sample of finished POT if one is available. Prepare the space to be safe—clear any clutter. Have all materials ready and organized. This may take more than one session so ensure you plan enough time.
- It will take time for the glue to set and hold the POT securely. Avoid moving the POT while it sets. Emphasize this several times. Encourage participants to label their POTS and designate a safe spot for them to dry between sessions.
- Do not force group members to break the POT if they do not want to. See notes on variations included throughout for how to adapt if some choose not to break it.
- Variation—**ONE LARGE GROUP POT:**
 - If using one large POT for the whole group: The framing and sharing should emphasize a shared experience.
 - *“This POT represents your life. Let’s think of this POT as representing our group, or perhaps our community, before some of the big changes and losses we’ve experienced.”*
 - *“Sometimes, in a group like ours, we all experience big changes. Today we’re exploring how those changes can feel like a break, not just for one person, but for all of us.”*
 - Each participant would write/draw on a piece, contributing to the GROUP POT.
 - When asking them to write or draw on their piece, you could frame it like this: *“On your piece from our GROUP POT, you can write or draw something that you’ve experienced, or a feeling you’ve had, or a memory of your person, that has contributed to how things are now. Your piece will be an important part of our shared story.”*
 - The rebuilding process—this is where the group works together to rebuild it, with their shared pieces.
 - *“Now, as a group, our task is to put this POT back together. This won’t be easy, and it won’t be perfect, but by working together, just like we do in our group, we can make something new and strong. Each of your pieces is essential for our POT to come together.”*

- The COLLECTIVE POT approach can foster a strong sense of community and shared effort, demonstrating that even when individuals are impacted, the community can collectively work towards healing and rebuilding.
- For wrap-up—include a group discussion.
 - *“What do we notice about our mended POT now that we’ve worked together to put it back together?”*
 - *“How does this GROUP POT resemble our group’s journey or how our lives have changed, and how we’re mending together?”*
 - *“What do the cracks in our POT represent about our shared experience?”*
 - *“What was it like to work with everyone to put this pot back together? Was it easy? Was it challenging? How did we help each other?”*
 - *“Does this POT look exactly as it did before it broke? No. But does it still feel strong? Does it show our resilience as a group? What does it say about us that we can mend things and support each other?”*

For Ongoing Groups:

- Consider the variation above (**ONE LARGE GROUP POT**) if doing it in an Ongoing Group.
 - If using the individual POTs again, ask those group members if they still have their POT they created before.
 - Ask about differences in the POT they created before versus the POT they create now.

CLOTHESPIN HEART ACTIVITY

P—Y

Suggested Group(s): Preschool, Young

Purpose: To remind children that we can keep people close to us—in our hearts—even if they are not physically present

Task/Need

- Telling their story
- Living on the grief spiral
- Sharing memories and continuing bonds with the person who died

Materials

- Clip-type clothespins
- Markers
- Glue
- Paper hearts
- Ribbon

Framing and Activity Set-Up

- Consider reading the book *In My Heart* by Jo Witek.
- Invite group members to share some of the things they love that they hold inside their heart.
 - Start by asking the kids, *“What are some things or people you love that you keep close in your heart?”* You can share an example of your own to get them started.
- Talk about the importance of honoring and remembering our loved ones who have died along with everyone we love.
 - *“Today, we’re going to make something special to help us remember the person or people we love. Even if those people aren’t here with us anymore, we can always keep them in our hearts. This activity will help us think about them and the things they did to help us.”*
- Let the group know that they’re going to decorate paper hearts. They can put anything on their heart that makes them think of someone special. Maybe their favorite color, or something they liked to do.
 - *“Today we’re going to decorate some paper hearts to celebrate and remember someone special in our lives—it could be someone who has died, or anyone you love very much. You can decorate it however you want.”*
 - Some children may want to decorate more than one clothespin if they have had multiple people die, or they may choose to put more than one heart on

a clothespin. Make sure clothespins are large enough to hold more than one heart if you have group members who have experienced multiple deaths.

Activity Description:

- Hand out the paper hearts and markers. Encourage the children to decorate their heart. They can draw pictures, write a name (of a loved one, or someone else special), or just color it beautifully. Remind them there's no right or wrong way to decorate it.
- Once their heart is decorated, help them glue it onto one side of a clothespin.
- They can then color the clothespin itself with markers and choose some ribbons to tie onto the clothespin or glue around it to make it even more special.
- Explain that they can take their "MY HEART KEEPSAKE CLOTHESPIN" home and hang it up somewhere special, like on a picture, a curtain, or even on their clothes. You can suggest using it as an ornament, especially if the activity is done near a holiday season.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Invite the children to share who is on their heart if they would like to do so. Allow them to share about multiple people, if they have had more than one person die.
- Ask where they plan to hang it or keep it.
- Talk about how the person or people who are drawn on their hearts are the same people who they can carry around in their hearts every day.

For Ongoing Groups:

- Allow group members to bring in their CLOTHESPIN HEART from a previous session.
- Create a Memory Tree that all group members can put their CLOTHESPIN HEARTS on and keep it as part of their session. The Group Memory Tree can serve as a visual reminder that they are not alone and other members in their group have had people die also. Remember to give CLOTHESPINS back to group members after the session ends.

COLLAGES

Y—M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To help kids share about themselves or the person who died through easy art. It's a chance to use pictures instead of just words! This activity could relate to any of the tasks/needs below based on the theme chosen by the group.

Task/Need:

- Telling their story
- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Living on the grief spiral
- Sharing memories and continuing bonds with the person who died
- Helping them understand who they are after their loss
- Making meaning of the loss
- Developing coping skills and supports

Materials:

- Magazines (*volunteers can also pre-cut images/words/phrases from magazines in advance*)
- Construction paper
- Markers/colored pencils
- Glue
- Scissors

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Have group members consider how they want to represent themselves, their families, the person who died, or other topics (*see Notes*).
- When focusing on a person or person, focus on hobbies/activities/interests, feelings, personalities, and memories.
- If focusing on the person who died, have the group members think about how they would like to represent the person who died, what they miss most, and times they had together.

Activity Description:

- After brainstorming how they might represent the topic in a COLLAGE, invite group members to create a COLLAGE using magazines and markers. Allow for great latitude to represent the topic or subject in a way that is meaningful to them.
- Assist the group in finding any picture to represent what they would like in their COLLAGE. Encourage group members to help each other find pictures as well.

- Encourage group to also look for WORDS to combine with their images. They can use words as they are found in phrases or take words out of context. They may even combine them with images to come up with original expressions of the theme/topic.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Invite group members to share their COLLAGES. Remember, the **I PASS RULE** is always OK.
- If someone shares, ask them simple questions:
 - “Tell me about your *COLLAGE*.”
 - “Why did you choose this picture?”
 - “What does this [color, person, etc.] represent?”

Notes:

Suggested topics:

- ***The New You:*** How have you changed since your person died? How has your life changed since your person died?
- ***Feelings:*** Pictures that show different feelings.
- ***Self-Collage:*** How do you see yourself?
- ***Person Who Died:*** How do you see the person who died?
- ***Their Family:*** How do you see your family now?
- ***Coping:*** What helps you cope with your feelings?
- ***You in the Future:*** How do you see your life when you’re an adult?
- COLLAGES can be used for group building simply by having each child create a COLLAGE about himself/herself and posting it on a large piece of butcher paper with the title “Our Group.”
- Alternatively, the group can work on one COLLAGE together to represent the topic desired, such as their family members who died, themselves or their feelings. Also, COLLAGES can be combined with interviewing activities to attempt to learn about and portray a group member.
- This activity can be done by using the iPads as well. Group members can also use drawings or other materials (stickers, pom poms, etc.).

For Ongoing Groups:

- How does your COLLAGE today look different from the last time you made a COLLAGE?
- Consider some of the different themes suggested above.

COMFORT KIT

Y—M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To acknowledge that big feelings come up when grieving. To give group members items and ideas to help them feel comforted when big feelings arise.

Task/Need:

- Developing coping skills and supports
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials: These are suggested items—they can be tailored to each group

- **Something to Squeeze:** Stress ball, Play-Doh, or Model Magic (great for releasing tension)
- **Something Soft:** Tissues (for tears, or just for comfort)
- **A Sweet Treat:** Hershey’s Kisses or Hugs (a small moment of comfort)
- **Calm Breathing Tool:** Bubbles (to encourage slow, deep “bubble breathing”—*see BUBBLE BREATHING Activity for more details about how this is done*)
- **Message of Love:** A small paper heart (to write a comforting word, thought, or name)
- **Something for Reflection:** (*Middle/Teen/Adult*) A small journal with a few simple prompt ideas (“What made me smile today?”—“One thing I’m grateful for”—etc.)
- **Something to Hold:** A smooth gemstone or seashell (can be grounding to hold)
- **Guide Card:** A simple “Key Card” that explains how each item can be used. (*A version for kids and one for adults can be found at the end of this activity.*)
- **Carry-All:** A small bag or pouch to put all the items in

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Talk with group members about all the different feelings they’ve had since their special person died.
- Talk with group members about the importance of taking care of themselves.
- Let group members know that we will share with them some items and ideas that may help comfort them when having those big feelings.
 - *“Today, we’re going to put together a COMFORT KIT. This KIT will have a few special items that you can use to help you through those big feelings. Think of it as a little toolkit for your heart.”*

Activity Description:

- **(OPTION 1: over several sessions):** You can introduce one or two items each week. As you give out each item, talk about it and practice using it together. This allows for more discussion over time.
- **(OPTION 2: all in one session):** You can give out all the items during one meeting.

When presenting each item:

- Hand out one item at a time.
- For each item, clearly explain how it might help. For example:
 - **Stress Ball/Play-Doh:** *“When you feel really frustrated or have lots of energy, squeezing this can help you let some of it out.”*
 - **Tissues:** *“These are here for tears, of course, but sometimes just having something soft to hold can be comforting.”*
 - **Hershey’s Kiss/Hug:** *“This is a little sweet treat to remind you to be kind to yourself and maybe offer a moment of quiet comfort.”*
 - **Bubbles:** *“When your feelings feel too big, try taking a deep breath and blowing bubbles. Watch them float and imagine your worries floating away with them.”*
 - **Paper Heart:** *“You can write a special message here, or the name of someone you love, or a comforting word. You can keep it close.”*
 - **Gemstone/Seashell:** *“This is something smooth and calming to hold in your hand. Sometimes just focusing on how something feels can help when your mind is racing.”*
 - **Journal** (for older groups): *“This journal is a safe place for your thoughts and feelings. No one else has to read it. There are a few ideas inside to get you started, but you can write whatever comes to mind.”*
 - **Keychain:** *“You can add a photo of your person who died, or the adult who takes care of you—or both. This can remind you that even when we’re separated from someone physically, we can stay connected in our hearts.”*
 - **Key Card** (provided by staff): *“This card will be in your KIT to remind you about how you can use everything in it.”*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Invite group members to share how they might use the items given.
 - *“Looking at your KIT, how do you think you might use some of these items when you have big feelings?”*

- *“How is your KIT alike or different from the other group members’ KITS?”*
- Invite members to share other ways they take care of themselves when big feelings come up.
 - *“Beyond what’s in the KIT, what are some other things you already do that help you feel better when big feelings come up?”* (Listening to music—Talking to a friend—Going for a walk—Drawing.)
- As always, thank the group for their hard work and sharing.

Notes:

- Please ask staff if there are any allergies in the group room before adding a sweet treat.
- Group members do not have to take every item offered. They can choose the items that will work best for them. Every KIT can be unique.
- This activity can be done in one group meeting or presented at the beginning of the Session, adding an item each meeting while bringing up ways to cope.
- Caring Place staff will give you everything you need, including a Key Card for either the kids’ room or the adults’ room.

For Ongoing Groups:

- Ask group members to bring in items that bring them comfort.
- Do they have the KITS they made before?
- What new items would they add to their existing COMFORT KIT?

NOTE: The Guide Cards for kids and for adults are on the following two pages, to be added to the Kits that are being made.



Comfort Kit

You may have had many different feelings since your special person died. This kit is filled with reminders of things that might help comfort you. This special bag belongs to you and you can use it in whatever way helps you most.



Play-doh~ has many uses like helping you play and have fun, rolling it in a ball, squeezing your anger out, reminding you of happy times.



Kleenex~ to wipe away the tears and a reminder to let you know it's okay to cry.



Hugs & Kisses chocolate~ it can help to get a hug or a kiss from someone you care about, or to give yourself a hug. After eating your chocolate, leave the wrapper in the bag as a reminder that hugs can be comforting.



Bubbles~ helpful in teaching you to breathe calmly. Breathe in while counting to 4, breathe out for 4. The slower you breathe out, the more bubbles you'll blow. Have an adult help you practice.



Gemstone~ a reminder that gemstones are unique and no two are alike just like grief is unique and there is no right or wrong way to grieve.



Paper Heart~ draw or place a picture of your special person and decorate the heart. Let it remind you that your special person who died is always in your heart.



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Comfort Kit

It's important to find a few minutes each day to take care of yourself. This bag is filled with reminders of things that may help comfort you along your grief journeys; helping you recharge and manage life on the spiral.



Stress ball~ Squeezing can help with feeling stressed, frustrated or overwhelmed. Fidgets offer a nice distraction even for adults!



Kleenex~ A reminder that it's okay to cry. If you feel like crying, don't hold back. It's a great physical release.



Hershey Hugs & Kisses~ it can help to get a hug from someone you care about, or to give yourself a hug. A reminder that hugs (and chocolate) can be comforting.



Journal~ journaling for self care is about taking the time to connect, pause and listen to what your own needs, thoughts, ideas & feelings are. A handout is included with ideas.



Breathe deeply~ Deep breathing can be done anytime, anywhere to help relax your mind and body, making it easier to cope with stress & anxiety.



Heart Gemstone~ may this heart be a reminder that your loved one is still in your heart and your memories.



Seashells~ outside is rough; inside is smooth to represent days that may be rough & bumpy while some smooth & shiny. Let them symbolize the strength, hope, friendship & support you found at the Caring Place.



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COPING KITS

Y—M—T

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To promote a variety of healthy coping skills. Allow group members to make their own COPING KIT with one or more tangible items.

Task/Need:

- Developing coping skills and supports
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials (for one or more activities):

- ***Stress Balls:***
 - Balloons
 - Sand
 - Funnel
- ***Worry Stones:***
 - Stones
 - Small bags
- ***Mood Door Hangers:***
 - Foam door hangers
 - Markers
 - Glitter
 - Glue
 - Feelings word stickers
 - Other decorations as needed (foam shapes)
- ***Punching Balloons:***
 - Punching Balloons
 - Sharpies
- ***Feelings Recipe Boxes:***
 - Small box/recipe box
 - Index Cards
 - Markers/crayons/colored pencils
 - Other items to decorate their box

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- The COPING KIT is made up of several activities. One or all of these activities can be used. These can be completed over multiple group nights if needed.
- Setting up stations in the room may be helpful in facilitating this activity.

- To begin, start a discussion with the group about the different types of feelings we have. Explain that they will be creating a COPING KIT with various items that will help them deal with different types of feelings.
- Determine which activities interest your group the most.

Activity Descriptions:

- **Stress Balls**

- Facilitate a discussion related to stressful times that the children have experienced and the feelings and actions associated with stress, anger, fear, etc.
- Explain to the children that the group is going to make Stress Balls. They could keep their Stress Ball at home, school, in their book bag, wherever they need it most.
- They can use the Stress Ball anytime they have the feelings that were discussed.
- Pour an appropriate amount of sand through a funnel into a balloon and tie off the balloon. Do not overfill the balloon or the Stress Ball will not be pliable.

- **Worry Stones**

- Worry Stones are smooth, polished gemstones usually in the shape of an oval with thumb-sized indentation. They are also known as thumb stones or palm stones. They originated in Ancient Greece.
 - Held between the index finger and thumb, rubbing them is believed to lessen one's worries.
- Facilitate discussion related to worry by asking: *“Have you ever worried about something?”—“What worries do you have since your family member died?”—“What do you do with that worry?”* Allow the children time to share and discuss.
- Explain that we are providing each child with a Worry Stone and explain its purpose from the background section above.

- **Mood Door Hangers**

- Facilitate a discussion about feelings and how they can change every day or even within one day.
- Discuss with the children how it might be helpful for their family members to have an awareness of their mood at that particular time.

- Explain that the kids will be making door hangers so they can share their feelings without verbal expression.
- Suggest that they hang it on the door of their room.
- Have children write various feelings on each side of the foam Door Hanger and decorate as desired.
- Provide a way for children to indicate their current mood on the Door Hanger (for example, a paper clip can be used to indicate/point to their current mood).
- Can also make Feelings Wheels to hang on doorknobs with an arrow pointing to their current feeling. (*See FEELINGS BAROMETER activity*)
- **Punching Balloons**
 - Facilitate a discussion about angry feelings and how group members have dealt with those feelings in the past.
 - Follow up by discussing what has been helpful and what has been hurtful to others and themselves.
 - Offer an anger Punching Balloon as an option.
 - Make sure the children write their names on the Balloons (they will be blown up ahead of time).
 - Have the children write things on the Balloons that make them angry.
 - Allow them a chance to try them out.
- **Feelings Recipe Boxes** (*see FAMILY MEMORY “RECIPE” BOX Activity*)
 - Start a discussion with the children about the different types of feelings we have.
 - Explain to the children that holding our feelings in may ultimately make us feel worse rather than better because they may build up and come out stronger.
 - Sometimes we express our feelings in unhealthy ways like hitting someone, putting someone down, lying around the house or sleeping all of the time.
 - Explain that we are going to talk about ways in which we can cope with all the different feelings that we may have since our loved one has died.
 - Have the children brainstorm a list of different feelings they have had since their loved one has died.
 - Write these words on a large sheet of paper or the board.

- Give each child a file or Recipe Box, marker, and index cards.
- Have the children take an index card and write one of the feelings that were discussed (*“SAD,” for example*).
- Let the children draw a picture if they like on the front of the index card of someone with that feeling (*looking sad*).
- As a group, discuss safe ways children can express that feeling.
- After the group makes suggestions, have them write on the back of their card suggestions that they would use.
- Continue to do this for each feeling they would like to use.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Allow the children the opportunity to share their COPING KIT.
 - *“What coping activity do you think will be most helpful for you when you are having a hard day?”*
 - *“What other things or activities help you cope?”*
 - *“What did you like about the items you chose for your KIT?”*
 - *“What was it like to complete the KITS?”*
 - *“What parts of making the KIT were easy? Which ones were hard?”*
- Encourage them to take their KITS home and use them whenever feelings start to feel too big or overwhelming.

Notes:

- This activity can be done on more than one night to allow the group to process each COPING KIT item. Don't rush through!
- Based upon the ages of the group, you may want to narrow the choices for their COPING KITS.

For Ongoing Groups:

- If someone did this activity during their Introductory Group, you could ask the questions below:
 - *“What coping activity did you find most helpful? Why?”*
 - *“Was there an activity you did not find helpful? Why?”*
 - *“Do you find yourself using different coping activities for different feelings?”*
- Invite group members to bring in their previous KITS if they still have them.
- What other coping tools would they add to their KITS now?

COPING SKILLS GAME

M—T

Suggested Group(s): Middle, Teen

Purpose: To identify and reinforce a variety of COPING SKILLS

Task/Need:

- Developing COPING SKILLS and supports
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Cards with COPING SKILLS questions (*listed below*)
- COPING KIT prizes (*examples include Worry Stones, Stress Balls, Feelings Door Hangers, Song Lists, Bubble Wrap*)

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Start by talking about COPING SKILLS:
 - What are they?
 - How do they help?
 - Why are they important?
 - What are some COPING SKILLS they have used?
 - Make a list of COPING SKILLS identified by group members.
 - Volunteers can add to list by making suggestions and asking group members about the COPING SKILLS they suggested.
 - Write the COPING SKILLS identified by group members on the board.
- Questions are written on cards that are placed face-down so group members don't know which question they're choosing.

Activity Description:

- Kids take turns picking numbered cards.
- They answer the question on the card they selected.
- The facilitator points out similarities in answers and helps the kids learn from one another by pointing out unique answers.
- Everyone wins and gets a COPING KIT as a prize.
- Make the activity conversational, not competitive.
- Group members may choose COPING SKILLS written on the board to answer questions.

COPING SKILL QUESTIONS:

1. Name a COPING SKILL you can use when it's nice outside.
2. Name a COPING SKILL you can use on a rainy day.
3. Identify 3 COPING SKILLS to use when you're sad.
4. Name 2 people you can talk to when you feel lonely or need help.
5. Name a COPING SKILL you can do with your family.
6. Name a COPING SKILL you can teach someone.
7. List 2 COPING SKILLS to use when you want to be alone.
8. Identify 3 COPING SKILLS you can use at school if you're having a hard day.
9. Name a song that makes you happy.
10. Name 2 COPING SKILLS to use when you want to be around other people.
11. Identify 3 COPING SKILLS to use when you're angry.
12. Name a COPING SKILL that uses art.
13. Name 2 COPING SKILLS that use physical movement.
14. Identify 2 COPING SKILLS to use when you don't feel like talking.
15. Identify 2 COPING SKILLS you can use when there's no one to talk to.
16. When it's hard to remember or even try COPING SKILLS, who are some people you could go to if you needed help?

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Be sure to point out similarities and help the kids learn from one another by pointing out unique answers.
- Give the list of the COPING SKILLS on the board to group members
- Ask members which of the COPING SKILLS they feel they will use on a regular basis
- Have the group members talk about COPING SKILLS they learned about as part of the activity that they hadn't previously thought about.

For Ongoing Groups:

- COPING SKILLS often change as grief changes, so in an Ongoing Group, additional COPING SKILLS may be identified.
 - What COPING SKILLS are most helpful now?
 - How are your COPING SKILLS now different from your first time at the Caring Place?
 - Ask group members if they remember some of the COPING SKILLS they talked about from their last Session. Have them share those COPING SKILLS with the group.
 - Have group members create a new list of COPING SKILLS for group members to use. Allow group members to add to the list as part of the Session. Have group members talk about the new COPING SKILLS that are added to the list during group meetings.

COPING SKILLS PAPER CHATTERBOX

Y—M

Suggested Group(s): Young, Middle

Purpose: To help group members identify COPING SKILLS that can help them feel better when they're sad, or suggest activities to help them feel more connected to their loved one who has died

Task/Need:

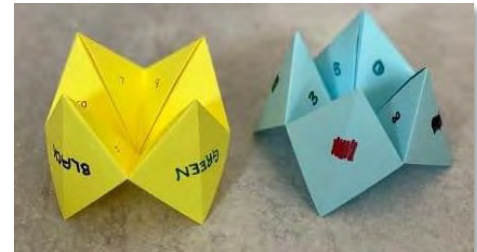
- Developing COPING SKILLS and supports
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- A square piece of paper
- Scissors (in case you have to cut your paper into a square)
- Markers, colored pencils, or crayons
- A pen

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Ask the group to brainstorm different things that help them feel better when they're sad, mad, etc.
- Explain to the group they're going to make paper CHATTERBOXES (or "FORTUNE TELLERS") for Coping Skills. It will be helpful to have an example to show them.



Activity Description:

- This is a take on the paper FORTUNE TELLERS some of us probably made as kids, but instead of writing things on the inside like "You will live in a mansion with four dogs," we're going to write COPING SKILLS. The idea is that when someone feels sad, stressed, worried, anxious, etc., they can play the FORTUNE TELLER game to reveal a COPING SKILL they can practice to help themselves feel better.
- **PART ONE: HOW TO MAKE A PAPER CHATTERBOX**
"You may already know how to make a paper CHATTERBOX or FORTUNE TELLER. If so, great, go ahead and make one, but don't write or draw on it yet."
 - Consider showing [a video with step-by-step instructions](#) on how to make the FORTUNE TELLER.
 - Or follow these directions:
 - **Step One:** Fold a square piece of paper in half.
 - **Step Two:** Open the paper back up and fold in half the other way.

- **Step Three:** Open the paper back up again—your folds should have divided the paper into four squares.
- **Step Four:** Now, fold the corner of each square into the center of the paper.
- **Step Five:** Leaving the paper folded, flip it over.
- **Step Six:** Once again, fold the four corners into the center of the paper.
- **Step Seven:** Leaving the paper folded, fold it in half again. Your paper should now look like a rectangle with four square flaps on the outside.
- **Step Eight:** Using both hands, slip your thumb and index finger under the flaps.
- **Step Nine:** Create the FORTUNE TELLER shape by pushing up and in at the same time. You may need to fiddle with the center a little as well. Ultimately, the FORTUNE TELLER should look something like the image above.



- **PART TWO: ADDING COPING SKILLS TO YOUR CHATTERBOX**

- When we talk about COPING SKILLS, we mean any big or small thing a person can do to make themselves feel better. These will be unique to the person completing this activity because we all find comfort in different things.
- Revisit the group's previous brainstorming discussion about COPING SKILLS. For this activity, the simpler the COPING SKILL, the better (i.e. pet your dog, listen to music, talk to a friend, color, etc.). Ultimately, they will need to think of 8 COPING SKILLS to fill each of the spaces on the CHATTERBOX.
- If you are an adult completing this activity with a child, encourage them to include at least one COPING SKILL that helps connect them with their person who died. For example, they might include things like looking at pictures of their loved one, thinking about a good memory with their loved one, or doing something that they and their loved one used to do together.
- Emphasize that the COPING SKILLS cannot be harmful or destructive to the person completing the activity or to anyone else. We have to clarify this because some COPING SKILLS fall under the heading of "negative coping." These are things people do to feel better, but which cause more pain in the long run (like hitting their sibling or quitting all their school activities).

- The COPING SKILLS will be written on the inside of the CHATTERBOX, but first, you also need to put colors and numbers on the outside flaps. When playing the game, these will help determine what COPING SKILLS the person lands on. Here's what you need to do:
 - **Step One:** Flatten out your CHATTERBOX. When flat, it should be square. On one side of the square, you will see four smaller squares and on the other, there are triangles.
 - **Step Two:** On the side with the four smaller squares, you are going to put colors. You can either color the whole square, a part of the square, or write the name of the color. It's up to you.
 - **Step Three:** Flip the CHATTERBOX over to the side with the triangles. On this side, there are 8 small triangles (within four larger triangles). Within the small triangles, write the numbers 1 through 8.
 - **Step Four:** Finally, flip over the four larger triangles. In each of the smaller triangles, write one COPING SKILL. You will write down 8 total COPING SKILLS.
- **PLAYING THE GAME:**

If you don't know how to play the game, we recommend watching the [video above](#) around the 9-minute mark. It's kind of hard to explain in writing, but basically, it goes like this:

 - The person playing the game will pick a color.
 - The person moving the PAPER CHATTERBOX or FORTUNE TELLER (which can be yourself) will spell out the color while pinching and pulling the FORTUNE TELLER.
 - Next, the person playing looks inside the PAPER CHATTERBOX and picks a number.
 - The person moving the PAPER CHATTERBOX repeats the pinching and pulling while counting to the selected number.
 - Finally, the person playing will look inside the PAPER CHATTERBOX and select another number.
 - Now the person moving the PAPER CHATTERBOX will lift up the flap corresponding to that number and whatever COPING SKILL is written underneath is the COPING SKILL the person should do.

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Ask the group what COPING SKILLS would be most helpful to them.
- Process if any group members have used the COPING SKILLS suggested on the FORTUNE TELLERS.
 - *“Did it help you feel better?”*
 - *“What helps you the most?”*
 - *“Which COPING SKILLS would you like to try?”*
- Ask:
 - *“What was it like to make the PAPER CHATTERBOXES?”*
 - *“How could you use the PAPER CHATTERBOXES?”*

For Ongoing Groups:

- If group members made a CHATTERBOX in the past:
 - *“What COPING SKILLS did you use?”*
 - *“What new COPING SKILLS would you add now?”*
 - *“Which ones have been most helpful?”*
 - *“Which ones are no longer helpful?”*
 - *“Who do you turn to when you need help?”*

CREATING A SAFE SPACE

P—Y—M—T

Suggested Group(s): Preschool, Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To help group members clarify for themselves what SAFE looks like, feels like, and think of times that they might need that kind of place. To explore how group members manage intense feelings of sadness and fear and what a SAFE SPACE to take these feelings might look and/or feel like.

For preschoolers, the focus will be simpler: introducing the concept of a SAFE and calm feeling, identifying familiar SAFE places or people, and providing a concrete way to create their own ‘calm-down’ or SAFE SPOT.

Task/Need:

- Telling their story
- Identifying and expressing feelings
- Living on the grief spiral

Materials:

- Large cardboard box (can create pre-cut door & window flaps) or smaller individual boxes
 - This activity can be used as a group activity, or each member can be given their individual box.
 - Individual shoeboxes or smaller delivery boxes might be more appropriate if storage is a concern or if fine motor skills for decorating larger surfaces are limited.
 - Make sure that you let group members know in the beginning whether this activity is going to be done as a group or individually.
- Washable paints and paintbrushes
- Water and paper towels to rinse brushes
- Smocks or T-shirts to cover clothing
- Crayons, markers, colored pencils
- Stickers, yarn, fabric scraps, felt, glitter glue, and adhesive foam shapes
- Long roll of paper or tarp if needed

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Welcome the group and note that they will be working on an art project today that will focus on feelings and things that help them feel SAFE. Begin the discussion of sad and scared feelings.
 - *“Since your person has died, has anyone had feelings of being sad or scared? Does anyone want to share a little bit about what that feels like?”*

- Lead a brief discussion on what things they might do when they feel sad or scared. *“When you have those feelings, is there anything you do that helps?”* Allow time for group to list those and jot on the board.
- For preschoolers or younger groups, simplify the language:
 - *“Sometimes when someone we love goes away, our hearts can feel big and bouncy like this [gesture] or quiet and sad like this [gesture]. Has anyone felt sad today? Or a little bit scared?”*
 - *“When you feel sad or scared, what helps you feel a little better? Does a grown-up hug help? Do you like to listen to quiet music? Or maybe look at a special book?”* (Offer choices and encourage simple responses. Acknowledge all feelings as valid.)
- Lead discussion on the idea of feeling SAFE and wanting a QUIET SPACE.
 - *“Thanks for sharing those ideas about what you do when you feel sad. I wonder when you hear the word SAFE, what comes to mind? What does it feel like to be SAFE? What does it look like?”* (Allow for diverse answers—a warm hug, being in nature, quiet, being with family, etc. List a few key words on the board/paper.)
 - *“Sometimes, when these big feelings come up, we might wish we had a special quiet place just for ourselves, where we could take those feelings to think, or just be. Have any of you ever felt that way?”*
 - For preschoolers or younger groups—focus on tangible and immediate experiences of safety.
 - *“When you hear the word SAFE, what makes you feel warm and cozy inside? Is it a hug from your mom/dad? Being under your favorite blanket? Holding a special toy?”* (Provide concrete examples. Use sensory descriptions: “Warm”—“Cozy”—“Soft”.)
 - *“When you feel too wiggly or too sad, do you ever wish you had a special little spot just for you to feel calm? A place where you could cuddle a teddy bear or look at pictures?”*
- Ask what their quiet place might look like. Encourage imagination: a treehouse, a fort, a cozy corner, a special room, etc. List some suggestions on the board.
- Ask what some items/things they would put in their SAFE PLACE.
- Introduce the idea of variations if they would like them:
 - *“As you’re working, you might find your SAFE SPACE starts to look like something else entirely. We’ve seen other groups where their SAFE HOUSE became a spaceship to travel to a new world, or a time capsule to*

remember good memories. Sometimes people even wish their SAFE SPACE could take them back to a time before their family member died, and that's OK too. This box can be whatever it needs to be for you."

- For preschoolers, simplify the variation. *"Your box can be anything you want! Maybe it's a cozy house, or a sparkly cave, or even a fast train to go to a happy place!"* Focus on positive, imaginative transformations rather than past events or complex concepts like time capsules.

Activity Description:

- Explain that they are going to create a SAFE SPACE using these cardboard boxes and lots of different art supplies.
 - If it's a group box: *"We'll work together on this one big SAFE SPACE."*
 - If individual: *"Each of you will get your own box to create your own SAFE SPACE."*
- Ensure their clothes are covered (if painting) and cover the floor under the box with long roll paper to protect them from paint.
- Allow the group members to decorate the box with paint and other decorations.
- They can use whatever colors feel right to them. They can put any pictures or words on the outside or inside of their box.
- Encourage the group members to discuss the activity as they are decorating the box and ask open-ended questions.
 - *"Tell me about the colors you're choosing. What makes them feel right for your safe space?"*
 - *"I see you've drawn a big window—what might you see out of that window from your SAFE SPACE?"*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Allow the group members to talk about their box.
 - *"I'd love for anyone who feels comfortable to share a little bit about their SAFE SPACE. You don't have to talk about everything, just one or two things you'd like to share."*
 - *"Would anyone like to tell us about a favorite color or design they used on their SAFE SPACE, and why it felt right?"*
 - *"What is one thing about your SAFE SPACE that makes it feel calm or special to you?"*
 - For a group box, *"What part of our group SAFE SPACE do you find most comforting?"*

- Lead a discussion on how the group might use their box moving forward. Is it a place group members can use during group meetings?
- Thank the group for sharing their creativity and thoughts.

Notes:

- Have a safe place to keep boxes if they are remaining in the room or allow them to take home individual boxes.
- If using with Preschoolers, consider the following:
 - **Attention Span:** Preschoolers have short attention spans. Break the activity into smaller, manageable chunks if necessary (decorate one session, discuss another, etc.) Keep the entire activity under 30–45 minutes.
 - **Concrete Thinking:** Preschoolers are very concrete thinkers. Abstract concepts like “*grief spiral*” or “*time before their family member died*” are too complex. Focus on simple feelings (happy, sad, scared) and tangible solutions (hug, quiet space, special object).
 - **Vocabulary:** Use simple, direct language. Avoid jargon. Repeat key terms like “safe,” “calm,” “cozy.”
 - **Individualized Support:** Some Preschoolers may need more hands-on help than others with cutting, gluing, or even verbalizing their ideas. Have enough adult support.
 - **Flexibility:** Be prepared to adapt. If a child is more interested in tearing paper than gluing, allow it within safe boundaries. Their creative expression is key.
 - **Pre-made elements:** Consider having some pre-cut shapes or a base design for group members to build upon, which can help those with developing fine motor skills or who struggle with starting.
- For use with teens, consider the following:
 - Adapt language when introducing and wrapping up the activity—focus more on a metaphor—the “Box” is a metaphor for a mental, emotional, or even physical space they can create or turn to. Instead of just sadness and fear, broaden the emotional scope to include stress, overwhelm, anger, loneliness, or pressure, as these are often highly relevant for teens.
 - Use of individual boxes can be helpful, as often their SAFE SPACES may look different.

- Ensure that while introducing the activity, you explain the materials (boxes, paint) might seem reminiscent of childhood activities, the *purpose* is profound and geared toward understanding complex emotions. Frame it as a reflective, expressive art project rather than a “craft.”
- Discuss external and internal pressures teens face: stress from school, future plans, social anxieties, peer pressure, or the complexities of grieving while navigating these challenges. *“Think about how much you’re dealing with—where do you find moments of calm or safety amidst it all?”*
- Consider doing a “Gallery Walk” when done—allow them to walk silently and look at their boxes, while still offering optional share time.
- **Connect to Action:** Discuss how they can integrate the concept of THEIR SAFE SPACE into daily life—whether it’s through actual physical objects they add to their room, or mental techniques.
- Use of the campfire variation below can also work well with teens.
- **Variation:** This activity can be paired with a “Campfire” or quiet sharing circle.
 - **Set-up:** Once the SAFE SPACES are created (and allowed to dry if paint was used), arrange them in a circle with the openings of the boxes facing the center of the circle. Group members can sit in front of their safe boxes or in the ‘doorway’ of their box. If possible, turn down the main lights and use a string of fairy lights or a battery-operated candle in the center to create a warm, inviting glow, similar to a “Campfire.”

For Ongoing Groups:

- This can be used in Introductory or Ongoing Sessions; below are suggestions for using it in an Ongoing Session:
 - Allow members to create new boxes. Continue discussions about creating SAFE SPACES and how their previous SAFE SPACE compares to the new one they created. What is different or the same?
 - Consider using the variation above with the Campfire to add to the experience.
 - Allow time for more discussion about SAFE SPACES: *“Beyond our boxes, where are other SAFE SPACES in your life? It could be a cozy corner at home, a favorite tree outside, a special person, or even a book you love. What makes those places or people feel SAFE?”*

CREATIVE COLORING

P—Y—M—T—A

Suggested Group(s): Preschool, Young, Middle, Teen, Adult

Purpose: To allow each person to contribute to a group project while the group works together as a team

Task/Need:

- Group building

Materials:

- Markers
- Crayons
- Colored pencils
- A large sheet of paper

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Discuss the fact that every member of a group has unique gifts, interests, talents, personality, and even losses and struggles.
 - Start by talking about how everyone in our group is special and unique. We all have different feelings, ideas, talents, and experiences, especially with our grief. You could say, *“Just like a puzzle, every piece is different, but they all fit together to make a complete picture.”*
- Explain that the group is going to work together to create a piece of art.
 - *“Today, we’re going to create a piece of art together as a team. Each of us will have a special color, and we’ll see how all our colors come together to make one amazing picture.”*
- Each person will use a single color that represents them.
- For preschoolers, consider having the group color in a page from a coloring book, rather than creating their own picture.
- For younger children, it may be a good idea to tell them or brainstorm the type of picture they will be drawing.
- For added teamwork, ask the group to decide how to determine which color each person will use and what the picture should represent.
 - **Choosing Colors (Optional Teamwork Step):**
 - You can ask the group, *“How should we decide who gets which color?”* (It could be drawing straws, picking their favorite, you assign them, etc.) This adds a layer of teamwork.

- Deciding What to Draw (*Optional Teamwork Step, especially for younger kids*):
 - For younger children, or if you want more teamwork, ask the group, *“What kind of picture should we draw together today?”* (Maybe a garden, or a happy place, a memory, or an abstract design, etc.)
 - For preschoolers, you can use a large coloring book page or have a simple outline already drawn on the paper.

Activity Description:

- Give each member of the group a different colored writing utensil and inform them that this will be the only color they can use for this project.
- Each person uses their color to work on a drawing that the group creates together.
- If each person uses only the color they began with, it will be easy to see how each group member contributed to the whole piece.
- As they work, notice how everyone contributes. If someone seems hesitant, you can gently encourage them: *“What would you like to add with your color?”* Or *“It’s wonderful to see how everyone’s different colors are coming together!”*

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Ask the group to share the picture, what it represents, and why they drew/colored what they did.
- *“Was this a difficult task for the group? Why or why not?”*
- *“How did you work as a group to complete the picture?”* Did some group members feel more comfortable “making their mark” while others held back? Discuss this as a natural part of the way groups work.
- *“How does everyone in the group feel about the picture that was created?”*
 - Invite everyone to share what they drew/colored and what they think the picture represents. *“Who added this part? What does it mean to you?”*
- *“Is it easier to do things by yourself or with others?”*
- *“Why is it important to be able to work with other members of a team?”*
 - *“Was it easy or tricky to work on one picture with everyone using a different color? Why?”*
 - *“How did we work together to make this picture happen? Did anyone notice that some people were really bold with their color, while others*

were more careful? That's a lot like how groups work in real life—everyone has their own style!”

- *“How does everyone feel about the picture we created as a group?”*

For Ongoing Groups:

- If group members have done this before in an Introductory Group, ask them if they remember the picture their group created last time.
- Did they have the same feelings this time when they created the picture, or something different?
- Ask them which group picture they liked better.

CRITTERS

P—Y—M—T

Suggested Group(s): Preschool, Young, Middle, Teen

Purpose: To engage group members in making a CRITTER out of Model Magic and sharing information about it.

Task/Need:

- Group building
- Telling their Story
- Identifying and expressing feelings

Materials:

- Model Magic
- Markers
- Beads, eyes, or other embellishments

Framing and Activity Set-Up:

- Ask group members to make a CRITTER out of Model Magic. The CRITTER can be a real creature or something imaginary.

Activity Description:

- Group members are given Model Magic to make a CRITTER.
- They can use beads, eyes, jewels, or other embellishments to create their creature.
- When everyone is done, each is given the opportunity to share this information about their CRITTER:
 - What is your CRITTER's name?
 - Where does your CRITTER live?
 - What characteristic(s) does your CRITTER have?
 - What does your CRITTER eat?
 - What does your CRITTER like to do for fun?
 - In what way is your CRITTER like you?
 - How is your CRITTER feeling today?
 - Has your CRITTER ever had someone in its family die?

Processing and Activity Wrap-Up:

- Invite each group member to share their CRITTER and their answers to the questions. Encourage them to hold up their CRITTER as they speak.

- After each person shares, offer a moment for one or two positive observations or questions from others.
- Identify commonalities and differences:
 - *“We have so many unique and wonderful CRITTERS here! What’s something you noticed that was similar between your CRITTER and someone else’s?”* (For example, *“Both our CRITTERS love to play outside,”* or *“Both our CRITTERS felt sad when someone important left.”*)
 - *“What was something very different or surprising about someone else’s CRITTER compared to your own?”*
 - *“Did anyone’s CRITTER mention a way they cope with feeling sad or missing someone? What was that like?”*
- Reflecting on the Experience:
 - *“How did it feel to create your CRITTER and share about it today?”*
 - *“Did you learn anything new about yourself or about others in the group by creating these CRITTERS?”*
 - *“Is there anything your CRITTER wants to tell us about how it feels to be part of our group today?”* (This can be a more playful way to gauge comfort levels.)
- Closing & Appreciation:
 - *“Thank you all so much for sharing your amazing CRITTERS and your thoughtful answers. It takes courage to create and share, and we really appreciate you being here and being yourselves.”*
 - *“Remember, we all have different characteristics, just like our CRITTERS, and we’re here to support each other.”*

Notes:

- This activity works exceptionally well for new groups or as an orientation activity, as it allows for gentle self-expression and observation of others in a non-threatening way.
- For Preschool, make sure the questions about the CRITTER are concrete and easy to understand.

For Ongoing Groups:

- Since it is a group building activity, it is appropriate for Ongoing Groups.
- Ask staff for additional questions to ask about the CRITTER.
 - Ask if group members have a CRITTER from a previous group.
 - *“Does your new CRITTER get along with your other CRITTER(s)?”*

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CARING PLACE 

finding hope in grief

COMPASSION IN ACTION

Activities for Finding Hope in Grief

