**Supporting the Grieving Student**

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***“Grief is not a disease, a disorder, or a sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical, and spiritual necessity. It is the price we pay for love.” Rabbi Earl Grollman***

***Imagine, a Center for Coping with Loss*** *provides community education and peer grief support groups for children age 3-18 and young adults 18-30 who are coping with loss due to the death of a parent or sibling and for children and young adults who have a parent or sibling living with illness.   Concurrent support groups are available for parents and guardians in both programs.  For more information contact Imagine at 908-264-3100 or visit us online at* [*www.imaginenj.org*](http://www.imaginenj.org/) *. Imagine is located in Mountainside, NJ.*

Grief Quotes

1. What is the most important thing to teach children? Teach them how to lose. Dr. Henry Cloud
2. The world is driven by unresolved grief. **Rabbi Stuart Gershon**
3. Grief is not a disorder, a disease, or a sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical, and spiritual necessity—the price you pay for love.” **Earl Grollman**
4. We burn out not because we do not care, but because we do not grieve. We burn out because our hearts are so full of loss that we have no room left to care. **Rachel Naomi Remen**
5. Grieving or traumatized youth develop resilience by having positive experiences at school. Most of the good experiences reported to develop resilience were not academic success, but success in sports, achievement in music, getting positions of responsibility in the school or developing a good relationship with a teacher**. Michael Rutter**
6. Anything that’s human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary. The people we trust with that important talk can help us know that we are not alone.” **Fred Rogers**
7. Any child old enough to love, is old enough to grieve. Hurting is part of the journey on the way to healing. Not learning to mourn well results in not living well. **Alan Wolfelt**
8. A child can live with anything as long as he or she is told the truth and is allowed to share with loved ones the natural feelings people have when they are suffering.- **Eda LeShan‎**
9. When we experience the pain and suffering of a fellow human being, we instinctively want to take the pain away. Yet to truly companion another human being requires that we sit with their pain as we overcome our instinct to want to fix. We may discover that we may want to fix another’s pain because it is hurting us too much. **Alan Wolfelt**
10. A grieving child needs the presence of at least one caring, healthy and functional adult so that the child is seen, held and supported during all the times in their life when love is experienced as pain. **Mary Robinson**

***What to Say and Do When Someone is Grieving:***

**“I am sorry” or “I am sad to hear about \_\_\_’s death.”**

***\*\*( For some “I’m sorry” may sound like an apology or a cliché as it is heard over and over.)***

**“How are things today?”  
“I'll call you.” (But only if you will)  
Share stories about the person who died.**

**Realize there is no set time by which they should “doing better” or be able to “move on”.**

**Remember anniversaries, holidays and birthdays of the person who died.**

**Follow the lead of the grieving person. They will let you know what they need.**

**Listen to: their story, their questions, their feelings and their behavior. Listen 90% and talk 10%**

***\*\*(Say things that help the person “feel felt” or things that invite them to talk more.)***

**Ask them what they need from you right now.**

**Just sit with the person.**

**Offer to do tasks: laundry, shopping, childcare, transportation, phone calls etc.**

**Send sympathy cards and attend religious services.**

*Things* ***NOT*** *to Say or Do When Someone is Grieving*

**“Time heals all wounds.”** (Time doesn't heal all wounds. Expressing my grief and getting support is what heals).

**“Call me if you need me.”** (Instead offer to do something specific at a certain time.)

**“Well, at least……” “If you think this is bad, I know a family….”** (Both of these minimize my feelings.)  
  
**“Try to look for the good in the situation.” “Be positive”. “You should be grateful for…..”**

It’s okay to let people have all of their feelings about the death. When we ask them to look for the positive, we are usually minimizing their feelings because we are uncomfortable with their pain.

**“Your loved one is in a better place.” “It was God’s will.” “God needed another angel in heaven.”**

(There is no better place for my loved one than with me).   
 **“The Lord never gives us more than we can handle.”** (That is not how I feel right now).

**“”Try not to cry. He or she wouldn't want you to cry.” “Be strong.” “You are doing so well.”**

(This makes me feel like I have to hide my sadness.) **“I know how you feel.” (**This is one of the **worst** things to say, as we never really know how someone else feels.)

**“You have your whole life ahead of *you. “* You can always remarry, get a new pet, or have another child.”**

(Those we love are not replaceable.)

**“Something good will come of this.” “Everything will be okay.”**

(Your being positive doesn’t make me feel better.)

**“You should (stay busy, keep positive, give away their possessions, start dating etc.)” (**Avoid giving unsolicited advice. With time and support I will figure out what to do and when to do it.)

**“He had a long life.”** (Grief occurs whether you knew the person a short or very long time.)

**“Now you are the man of the house.” “You are going to have to help of the other kids.”**

(This is a heavy burden to place on a grieving child. This tells them to assume adult responsibilities when they are most in need of support themselves. It also tells them not to express their grief.

**“It’s been over a year. Don’t you think you should be moving on with your life?”**

(There is no set timeframe to the process of mourning. People may experience grief for the rest of their lives.)

**\*\*All of us have said the wrong thing to someone who is grieving. Maya Angelou says, “When we know better, we do better.” If you say the wrong thing, apologize and remember that your loving presence is more powerful than any right or wrong thing you might say.**

**What Do I Want When I am Grieving?**

Circle the number of the things you WOULD like someone to do and cross out the numbers of the things you WOULD NOT want someone to do.

1. **To be told how strong I am**
2. **To have someone hold my hand or give me a hug**
3. **To have someone ask me what I need**
4. **To have someone do a task**
5. **To have someone ask me to tell a story about the animal who died.**
6. **To be told that that God never gives you more than you can handle**
7. **To ask me how I am doing**
8. **Not to ask me how I am doing**
9. **To be left alone**
10. **To have a group of friends come over to support you**
11. **To be kept busy**
12. **To be cheered up**
13. **To be reassured**
14. **To receive a sympathy card or flowers**
15. **To have a memorial service or ritual to remember the animal that died**
16. **To be encouraged**
17. **To have someone tell you about their similar experience of loss**
18. **To have one person come over to support you**
19. **To get advice**
20. **To have someone say, “I am here if you need anything.”**
21. **To have someone say, “Try to focus on the positive memories.”**
22. **To have someone spend time listening to you**
23. **To give you information about grief and loss**
24. **To have someone come over and just sit with you without talking**
25. **To have someone say, “You did such a good job taking care of them.”**

***My Grief Rights for KIDS***

1. **I HAVE THE RIGHT TO FEEL: HAPPY, SAD, MAD OR SCARED AND TO TALK ABOUT THOSE FEELINGS WHEN I WANT TO.**
2. **I HAVE THE RIGHT NOT TO TALK ABOUT MY FEELINGS WHEN I DON’T WANT TO.**
3. **I HAVE THE RIGHT TO TALK ABOUT THE PERSON WHO DIED.**
4. **I HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE UPSET OVER LITTLE THINGS.**
5. **I HAVE THE RIGHT TO KNOW WHY SOMEONE DIED AND ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE DEATH.**
6. **I HAVE THE RIGHT TO FEEL LIKE LIFE ISN’T FAIR.**
7. **I HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE A KID AND NOT ACT LIKE AN ADULT.**
8. **I HAVE THE RIGHT TO HAVE FUN WHEN I WANT TO. (IT DOESN’T MEAN I DON’T MISS THE PERSON WHO DIED).**
9. **I HAVE THE RIGHT TO NEED HELP FROM OTHERS.**
10. **I HAVE THE RIGHT TO HAVE MIXED FEELINGS ABOUT THE PERSON WHO DIED.**

**The Bill of Rights for Grieving Teens**

**A grieving teen has the right . . .**

1. **to have my own unique feelings about the death.**  No one will feel exactly like I do. My feelings don’t need to make sense to anyone else.
2. **to know that grief is like the weather.** It is not something I can control. I may have grief bursts that come out of nowhere.
3. **to know the truth about the death, the deceased, and the circumstances of the death.**
4. **to have my questions answered honestly.**
5. **to be silent and not tell anyone what I am feeling or thinking.**
6. **to have people listen to me without giving advice or trying to cheer me up.**
7. **to come to my own understanding about the death.**
8. **to see the person who died and the place of the death.**
9. **to grieve any way I want as long as I don’t hurt myself or others.**
10. **to be angry at death, at the person who died, at God, at self, and at others.**
11. **to have my own beliefs about life and death.**
12. **to be involved in the planning of rituals (funeral, memorials, viewings) and to participate in them if I choose to.**
13. **to not have to act like an adult or take on adult responsibilities.**
14. **to have irrational guilt about how I could have prevented the death.** To have regrets about things I wish I had said or done.
15. **to know that grief affects me emotionally, cognitively, and physically.** I may be irritable and easily upset. Things that used to be easy for me to accomplish may be more difficult now. I may be forgetful, have trouble concentrating or paying attention. My body may ache, feel heavy or feel like it is going to burst.
16. **I have the right to mourn or express my grief in my own timing.** My grief is not a problem to be solved or something to get over. I don’t know how long it will take for me to feel better. Please let me grieve at my own pace.
17. **I have the right to not feel ashamed about my feelings and needs.** My feelings of grief and my need for support are normal.
18. **I have the right to think about my memories of the person who died. I have the right to talk about the person who died.** Sometimes those memories will be happy and sometimes they may be sad. Either way, these memories help me stay connected to the person who died. The person died, not the relationship.
19. **I have the right to have mixed feelings about the person who died.** There may be qualities of the person who died that I miss terribly. There may also be things about them that I don’t miss. I have the right to feel both ways about the person who died. I may be upset with the person who died for things they did to hurt me or I may be angry at them for dying.

\*\* adapted from the Grief Bill of Rights created by the teen support group at the Dougy Center in Portland, Oregon

**I Have the Right to Grieve**

**1. I have the right to have my own unique feelings about the death.** I may feel mad, sad or lonely. I may feel scared, relieved, resentful or guilty. I may feel numb or at times feel nothing at all. No one will feel exactly like I do. My feelings don’t need to make sense to anyone else. These are just feelings and having them is normal.

**2. I have the right to express my grief.** When I need to talk, I will find someone who will listen to me. There will also be times when I won’t feel like talking or when I need to be alone. I may express my grief through journaling, art, music or exercise.

**3. I have the right to show my feelings of grief in my own way.**  Even though I am hurting, I may want to have fun or laugh for a while. I might also get mad and scream. I might feel sad and cry or I might not be able to cry at all.

**4. I have the right to need other people to support me as I mourn.** I need people to pay attention to what I need and to be compassionate witnesses to my experience of loss. While I understand that some people will not be able to support me, I have a right to be upset when the people I depend on for support are not able to be there for me.

**5. I have the right to know that grief affects me emotionally, cognitively, and physically.** I may be irritable and easily upset. Things that used to be easy for me to accomplish may be more difficult now. I may be forgetful, have trouble concentrating or paying attention. My body may ache or feel heavy. I may feel a buildup of the kinetic energy that grief creates in the body.

**6. I have the right to have "griefbursts".** Griefbursts are sudden, unexpected feelings of sadness that hit me out of the blue-even long after the death. These feelings can be very strong and scary.

**7. I have the right to mourn or express my grief in my own timing.** My grief is not a problem to be solved or something to get over. I don’t know how long it will take for me to feel better. Please let me grieve at my own pace.

**8**. **I have the right to not feel ashamed about my feelings and needs.** My feelings of grief and my need for support are normal.

**9. I have the right to ask questions about the death.** I may want to figure out why the person died. Even if there is no answer that will satisfy me, I may need to try to understand why it happened. I may need to ask if there is something I could have done to prevent the death. The death may cause me to question my beliefs. If I believe in God, that belief may bring me comfort or I may be angry at God.

**10. I have the right to think about my memories of the person who died. I have the right to talk about the person who died.** Sometimes those memories will be happy and sometimes they may be sad. Either way, these memories help me stay connected to the person who died; the person died, not the relationship.

**11**. **I have the right to have mixed feelings about the person who died.** There may be qualities of the person who died that I miss terribly. There may also be things about them that I don’t miss. I have the right to feel both ways about the person who died. I may be upset with the person who died for things they did to hurt me or I may be angry at them for dying.

**12. I have the right to feel my grief, express my grief and, over time, to heal.** I'll go on to live a happy life, but the life and death of the person who died will always be a part of me.

Adapted from the Grief Bill of Rights written by Alan Wolfelt

**Grief/Shame Iceberg**

Love

Empathy

Support

Belonging

S

H

A

M

E

* Weak
* Needs
* Out of control
* Powerless
* Vulnerable
* Feelings(sad, mad, scared)
* Imperfect
* Self-Sufficient
* Happy
* Powerful
* In control
* Successful
* Strong
* Problem Solver

**Losses**

**Illness**

**Injuries Trauma**

**Divorce**

**Differences**

**Injustice**

**Abuse**

**Violence**

**Mistakes**

**Love**

**Creativity**

**Needing help**

**Taking risks**

**Being cared for**

**Relaxation**

**Play**

**Being yourself**

**Positive changes**

**Armor/Defenses**

***Anger/Fight/Move Against***

**\*bullying**

**\*gossiping or spreading rumors**

**\*sarcasm**

**\*picking fights with others**

**\*put downs to yourself or others**

***Isolate/Flight/Move Away***

**\*addictions/numbing**

**\*self-destructive behavior**

**\*underachieving**

**\*“I’m fine”**

**\* Keeping busy**

**\*Crack jokes**

**\*Monopolizing about non- emotional topics**

***People Please/Move Toward***

**\*Overachieving**

**\*Perfectionist**

**\*Feel responsible for solving other peoples’ problems**

**\*Offer unsolicited advice**

Based on shame research of Brene Brown

***\*\*Shame is the painful experience of believing that there is something wrong with you. Shame makes us hide who we really are. As you find safe people with whom you can share who you really are (the top and bottom parts) your need for your armor decreases.***

**When people share their stories what stance do we take as we listen? Companion or expert?**

**Alan Wolfelt’s**

**Companioning Model vs. Treatment Model**

[](http://www.google.com/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&docid=WdTtg-VFY8wz3M&tbnid=SVZ12W8kkcTDbM:&ved=0CAUQjRw&url=http://www.dontaskthefish.com/2012/07/19/are-you-listening-with-all-six-ears/listen-chinese-character/&ei=kheSU8vZE_LesASIloLQCw&psig=AFQjCNH8tLew5CLN4HG0XO1OKgwxKG3g4w&ust=1402169600053298)

**>Companioning is about honoring the spirit;**

it is not about focusing on the intellect.

**>Companioning is about curiosity**;

it is not about expertise**.**

**>Companioning is about learning from others**;

it is not about teaching them.

**>Companioning is about walking alongside**;

it is not about leading.

**>Companioning is about being still**;

it is not about frantic movement forward.

**>Companioning is about discovering the gifts of sacred silence**;

It is not about filling every painful moment with words.

**>Companioning is about listening with the heart;**

it is not about analyzing with the head.

**>Companioning is about bearing witness to the struggles of others**;

it is not about directing those struggles.

**>Companioning is about being present to another person's pain;**

it is not about taking away the pain.

**>Companioning is about respecting disorder and confusion**;

it is not about imposing order and logic.

**>Companioning is about going to the wilderness of the soul with another human being**;

it is not about thinking you are responsible for finding the way out.

**Companioning Skills**

**1. Help the person “feel felt”**

**2. Let the person have all their feelings**

**3. See behavior as information**

**4. Set compassionate limits and boundaries**

**5. Follow the grieving person’s lead**

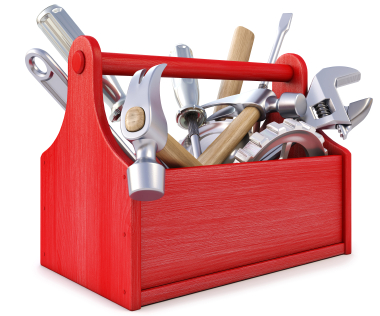
**6. Avoid problem solving and gathering information**

**7. Avoid clichés and advice**

**8. Get support for yourself**

**9. No rewards for speed**

**10. Don’t be attached to outcome**

**Resilience Tool Box**

**1. Supportive relationships**

**2. Identify and express feelings**

**3. Healthy self-soothing (emotional regulation)**

**4. Recreation/Fun: do things you enjoy**

**5. Physical activity, nutrition, sleep**

**6. Ability to problem solve, weigh pros and cons, know what you can and can’t control (Internal locus of control)**

**7. Experience of mastery or success**

**8. Ask for/accept help**

**9. Assertiveness (ability to set boundaries/limits)**

**10. Ability to be aware of and challenge shame**

**11. Experience and express gratitude**

**12. Sense of humor (ability to laugh at self)**

**Listening to Behavior**

**Behavior is information. It is part of every person’s story. The only question is, “Do we listen to what the behavior of others might tell us?”**

**People who have had losses often develop ways to protect themselves from feeling their pain and as a way to prevent others from seeing their grief. Sometimes when we are hurting, letting others get close can be scary. The behaviors that keep us safe are called defenses. These behaviors (tantrums, perfectionism, cracking jokes, being overly responsible for friends and family, defiance, etc) may cause others to pull away and cause problems in my relationships.**

**If they could, a grieving child or adult would tell us:**

**My behavior may get me in trouble or annoy you, but it keeps me safe. These behaviors may not make sense to you, but they keep me from feeling powerless and vulnerable. The way I am acting keeps me from experiencing and expressing my pain. I need a lot of safety and support from others in order to express the feelings that are hidden underneath my behavior.**

**Please see that my behavior is there for a very good reason. If I had another way to cope, I wouldn’t be doing what I’m doing. So please listen to how I am acting. It will tell you something about me that I can’t tell you any other way.**

**If I am feeling powerless I may act angry. If I am feeling out of control and anxious, I may try to dominate the conversation. If I feel responsible for the death, I may be overly helpful. If I am feeling hopeless, I may withdraw from the conversation. I may not even know that I am doing this, but trust me; there is a really good reason. I sense your judgment and impatience. That makes me feel even more unsafe. So please, listen to my behavior.**

**By the way, you do the same thing. We all have our defenses. Be just as gentle and patient with yourself as I hope you will be with me.**

**You don’t have to figure it out for me. When I feel safe enough,**

**I will figure it out on my own.**

**So, even if I try to push you away,**

**please, listen.**

**DOs and DON’Ts with Grieving Students**

1. **DO** listen. Grieving students need adults who are listening and paying attention.
2. **DO** normalize grief and the fact that each student will cope in their own way. There is no right or wrong way to grieve.
3. **DO** let them have all their feelings. Often people will try to cheer up someone who is sad or upset. It is hard but very helpful to listen and respond empathically.
4. **DO** realize that some students may not have liked the person who died or may not have felt close to the person who died. This too should be normalized.
5. **DO** follow their lead. If students want to talk, your role is create safe space and ask open ended questions that elicit discussion, questions, memories and expression of feelings. Students should be given permission not to share if they don’t choose to.
6. **DO** offer various ways for students to express their grief: small groups, art or writing projects, memory books or videos.
7. **DO** follow routines. Routines provide a sense of safety which is very comforting to the grieving student.
8. **DO** be aware of your own feelings and reactions.Often because we are uncomfortable expressing our own feelings of grief, we will try to limit the expression of feelings in others.
9. **DO** encourage the sharing of memories and the impact the person had on their lives.
10. **DO** set limits. Just because students are grieving, doesn’t mean that the rules do not apply. When grieving, students may exhibit acting out or risk taking behavior. Setting clear limits provides a more secure and safe environment.
11. **DO** expect that grieving students may have difficulty completing assignments and paying attention. The more children feel safe to express their internal experience, the more they are able to attend to school work. Repressed emotions require a lot of psychic energy that limits the ability to learn.
12. **DO** allow students to leave the class if needed without explanation. A plan for where they will go (the bathroom, nurse, counselor) can be discussed with the student.
13. **DO** be aware that holidays, birthdays, the anniversary of the death, Mother’s Day and Father’s Day may be particularly difficult for a grieving student. Be thoughtful about assignments you give in light of this.
14. **DON’T** suggest that the student has grieved long enough, that they should get over it or move on. The student will grieve for the person who died for the rest of their lives.
15. **DON’T** talk students out of their regrets or guilt. These are normal and need to be expressed.
16. **DON’T** offer clichés like, “He’s in a better place.” or “She wouldn’t want you to be sad.”
17. **DON’T** act as if nothing has happened.
18. **DON’T** offer advice. When students ask for advice, invite them to explore their own thoughts or ideas. What would work for you may not work for them.

**General Resources for Teachers and School Staff**

1. **Imagine, A Center for Coping with Loss** Local grief resources and information at imaginenj.org
2. Other Peer Support Groups for Grieving Families in New Jersey:

Common Ground located in Manasquan: [commongroundgriefcenter.org/](http://www.commongroundgriefcenter.org/)

The Alcove located in Northfield: <http://www.thealcove.org/>

Good Grief located in Morristown and Princeton: <http://www.good-grief.org/>

1. Center for Life Transition located in Chatham, provides a free, bi-weekly, year-round support groups for adults led by nationally recognized bereavement experts. **Contact Doreen Hall at (973) 665-1782, ext. 3**
2. Dougy Center –First grief support center for grieving families, click on grief resources tab for national list of grief support resources: dougycenter.org
3. National Alliance for Grieving Children: Great website. Has a national listing of peer support for families, offers great webinars about grief counseling: childrengrieve.org
4. Rainbows: National grief support group for children who have experienced death, incarceration, divorce or abandonment: rainbows.org
5. Comfort Zone Camps: Provides free weekend camps for grieving children ages 7-17: Comfortzonecamp.org
6. Camp Clover: Bereavement camp held in Warren, NJ for kids age 7-15: [atlantichealth.org/overlook/our+services/hospice/camp+clover](http://www.atlantichealth.org/overlook/our+services/hospice/camp+clover)
7. Students of AMF: Provides peer support groups for college students on college campuses around the country: studentsofamf.org

Websites

1. [**Guidelines for Responding to the Death of a Student or School Staff**](javascript:checkExtLink('http://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/assets/0/78/1067/4357/4389/2fa07dc5-0e85-4495-aa9c-2b31fd837ba1.pdf','');)**:** Designed to help school administrators, teachers and crisis team members respond to the needs of students and staff after a loss has impacted the school environment such as after the death of a student or staff member or when deaths occur that affect many people in the community. http://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/assets/0/78/1067/4357/4389/2fa07dc5-0e85-4495-aa9c-2b31fd837ba1.pdf
2. <https://sowkweb.usc.edu/about/centers-affiliations/national-center-school-crisis-and-bereavement-Sample> letters templates for staff, parents and students as well as other information about grief in the schools.
3. <http://grievingstudents.scholastic.com/> Website about supporting grieving students
4. <http://www.childrensgriefawarenessday.org/cgad2/index.shtml> Children’s Grief Awareness Day is the third Thursday of November. This site provides activities and information on how to have a Grief Awareness Day in your school.
5. [**https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/Crisis/crisisbook.pdf**](https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/Crisis/crisisbook.pdf)Provides guidance on the specific roles of school staff and gives guidelines for response.
6. [**http://rems.ed.gov/docs/copingw\_death\_studentorstaff.pdf**](http://rems.ed.gov/docs/copingw_death_studentorstaff.pdf) Coping with the death of a student or staff member.