

## NAVIGATING GRIEF AND LOSS

Helping children navigate through grief and loss can be a difficult task for a parent. The grief process can be like riding a roller coaster, filled with hills, valleys and a few straightaways. Everyone grieves differently and there can be feelings of shock and denial, pain, guilt, anger, depression, reflections, tears, and finally acceptance. All of these emotions are completely normal to experience, and little things can trigger tears on a completely normal day. People, especially children, can grieve for someone they don't even know that well. For example, a death might bring up previous losses from which they may not have fully healed.

### What to say and do:

- Encourage conversation and/or expression; some children may feel more comfortable journaling or drawing rather than speaking.
- Understand that tears can come at any time, seemingly random. These can be caused by places, events, occasions, smells, foods, and other sensory events.
- Listen to them and validate their feelings; it is okay to cry with them (but don't make it about yourself).
- Allow children to start grieving on their own time frame, every person is different.
- Answer their questions about death.
- Share your memories and stories of the person who died.
- Do something in memory of the person.
- Watch for signs of depression that last for more than three weeks. If this occurs, seek counseling.
- Symptoms of depression include, but are not limited to: not sleeping, sleeping too much, not eating, overeating, withdrawal, extreme sadness, self-harm, mood swings.
- Seek additional resources when needed (mentor, counselor, youth leader, pastor, etc.).

### What not to say and do (many of us have grown up hearing/doing these):

- **“The person went to sleep or passed away.”** *It is best to use the word died or death, so children aren't confused, or even concerned, about sleeping.*
- **“God needed another angel.”** *No, He didn't. God does not NEED anything or anyone. Also, people do not become angels in Heaven. Angels are beings created by God and designed to help carry out His work, but they are not human.*
- **“It was God's plan.”** *No, death was not part of God's original plan for humanity. We can indicate that this is His timing, but God's ultimate plan is for redemption.*
- **Allow self-assignment of guilt/blame.** *Many people will try to blame themselves, or feel guilty for surviving. Stop this with truth from scripture:*

***Scripture tells us that every person will die and that our days are numbered (all references NLT):***

Psalm 39:4

<sup>4</sup>“LORD, remind me how brief my time on earth will be.

Remind me that my days are numbered— how fleeting my life is.

<sup>5</sup>You have made my life no longer than the width of my hand.

My entire lifetime is just a moment to you; at best, each of us is but a breath.”

Psalm 139:16

<sup>16</sup>You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book.

Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.



Hebrews 9:27-28

“And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment,<sup>28</sup> so also Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him.”

***Scripture also speaks of God’s great love for us and how nothing in all creation can separate us from God’s love for us in Jesus.***

Matthew 10:29-31

<sup>29</sup>What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. <sup>30</sup>And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup>So don’t be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.

Romans 8:35-39

<sup>35</sup>Can anything ever separate us from Christ’s love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death?... <sup>37</sup>No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

<sup>38</sup>And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. <sup>39</sup>No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1 John 4:10

<sup>10</sup>This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

## **Suggested Grief and Loss Resources**

### **Children’s Books**

*Grief is a Mess* by Jackie Schuld

*The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst

### **Books for Parents**

*Heaven* by Randy Alcorn

*Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* by Timothy Keller

### **Podcasts for Parents**

*Nothing is Wasted* by Davey Blackburn

*Grief Out Loud* by The Dougy Center

*Information & resources recommended by Kelly Myers – school counselor trained to help children with grief and loss*