Lincolnshire Partnership
NHS Foundation Trust

Healthy Minds Lincolnshire

Grief and Loss support pack for parents / carers

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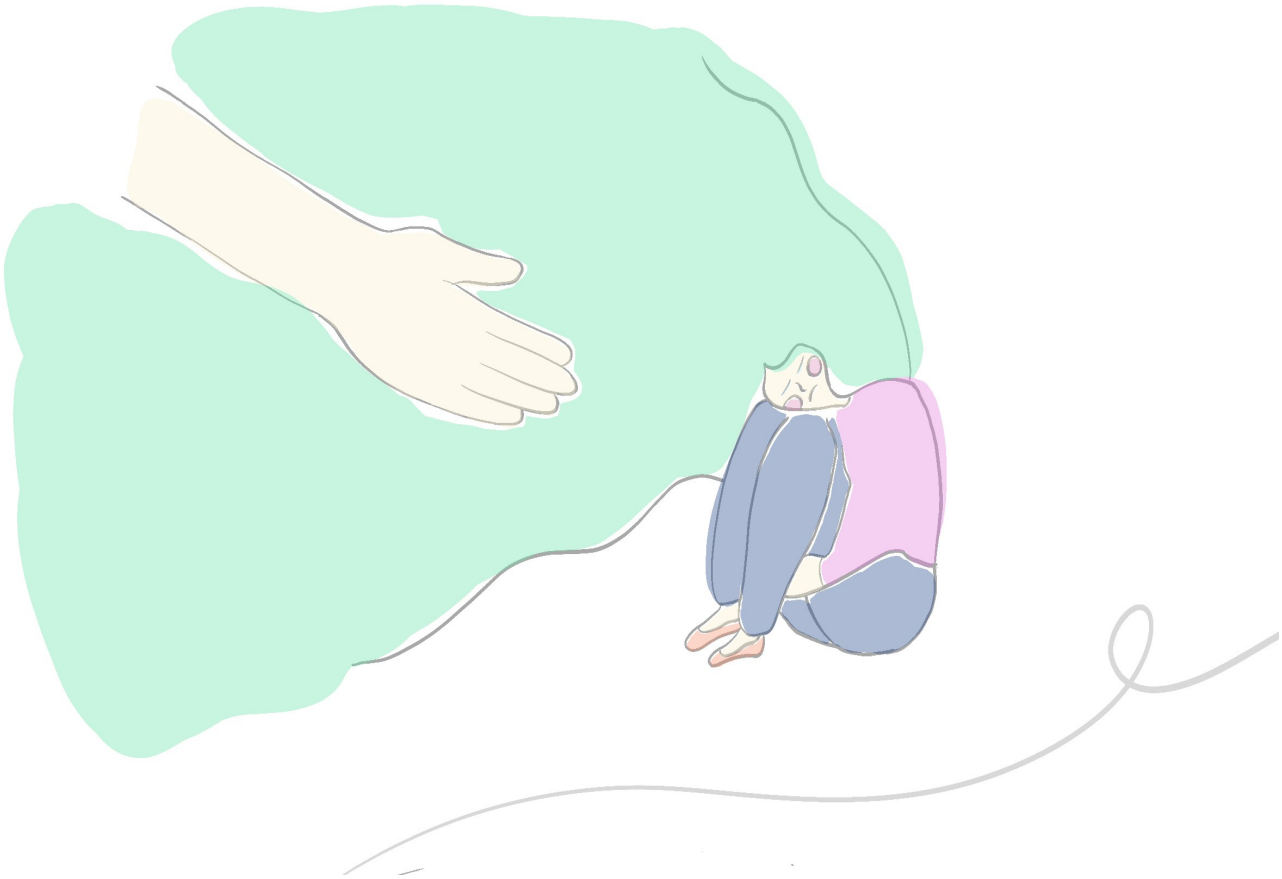
Understanding Grief and Loss



Understanding Grief and Loss

Losing someone that we care about and the change that loss brings to our life can be really difficult. Grief is our individual response to this loss.

Everyone's experience of grief and loss is different; your child/young person might experience lots of different emotions that at times may feel overwhelming – or they may not feel anything at all. These mixed and ever changing emotions are a natural reaction to loss and the grieving process.

One thing to remember is that there is no set pattern when it comes to grieving and there is no right or wrong way to feel.

There are many different reasons that may lead to us feeling grief, such as;

* The death of a member of our family
* The death or loss of a pet
* The death of a friend, a teacher or someone you knew at school
* An illness of someone close to you
* The loss of a relationship or friendship, like someone moving away or no longer being in your life as often as they had been.

Whatever the loss, when we are grieving we need time to accept and come to terms with this.

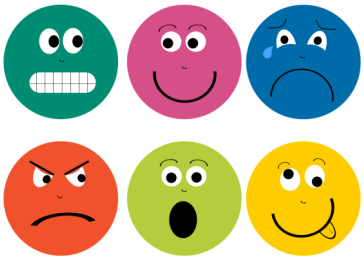
The way that we feel and the way that we cope can vary from person to person. Some people may find it helpful to be around people for example, whilst others may prefer to have some alone time.

Some may not feel any specific emotions for a while, this can be described sometimes as "feeling numb."

Grief can be felt in many different ways and it can impact every part of our lives, such as our thoughts, our physical health, our emotions and our behaviour .

Grief can affect the way we think, we may struggle to concentrate, become forgetful or find it difficult to make decisions.

Grief can affect our physical health – this can lead to us getting headaches, getting aches and pains or feeling sick.



If our emotions are affected, this can impact how we manage the world around us, how we interact with friends, family and manage at school.

Grief can affect our behaviours, so your child/young person may act out or find that they struggle to get to sleep or want to sleep more often.

Things to look out for

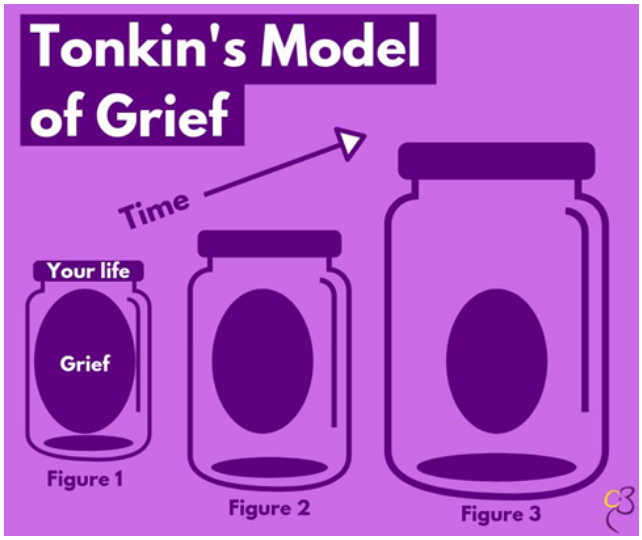
Your child might be having a particularly difficult time with the grieving process if you notice any of these behaviours:

* Changes in sleep or eating patterns
* Regression to younger behaviours, such as struggling with separation from you
* Talk about wanting to be with the deceased person
* A lack of interest in playing with friends
* Changes in grades at school
* A loss of interest in activities that once excited them
* Changes in behaviour, such as acting out.

Seeing these changes in your child/young person can be a challenge and may sometimes feel worrying, or lead you to feeling frustrated with behaviours, such as them acting out. On pages **X** we discuss how you can support and talk to your young person about how they may be feeling and on pages **X** there are activities for you and your child/young person to try.

Tonkin's Model of Grief

One theory of grief, devised by Lois Tonkin, suggests that over time our grief stays the same but that our life begins to grow around it, making it feel more manageable. With new experiences and new relationships, slowly the jar around our grief grows a little bigger, so eventually the grief does not feel as overwhelming and all consuming. The idea of growing around grief accepts that grief doesn't leave us, but at the same time this does not mean that your child/young person will always feel as sad as they do right now.



Picture from Cruse bereavement

How we experience grief

Grief can come up at different times . There may be occasions when we expect to feel sad, such as a loved one's birthday, but at other times grief may catch us when we don't expect it.

The way you or your child/young person may experience grief can be affected by your beliefs, culture or maybe how your family deals with and understands loss. Grief is different for everyone and how you react to loss may be very different to how other people around you react. The way in how you react or cope with a loss can also be different to how your child/young person reacts or prefers to cope.

As they get older, children will gradually come to understand more clearly that death is something that happens to all living things, that it has a cause, and that it means permanent separation. They are likely to know that dead people do not see, hear, speak or feel. Some younger children may make sense of what's happened by thinking they are responsible for it, for example thinking that if they hadn't done a particular thing the person might not have died.

Some children/young people might find it difficult to put their own feelings into words or may not show their feelings in case they upset others. Teenagers in particular are going through a time of great change, often balancing their need for independence with their need for family and security. As mentioned before, the behaviours you may notice are your child/young person becoming withdrawn or maybe acting out.

Kubler-Ross 5 Stages of Grief

The Kubler-Ross Stages of Grief model explains what we may be feeling at different stages.

The different stages are **Denial**, **Anger**, **Bargaining**, **Depression** and finally **Acceptance**.

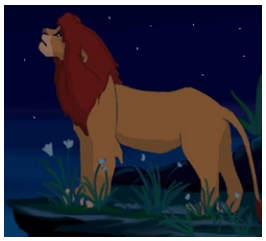
People move through the different stages at different times, so one person may feel acceptance of the loss, while another may still be feeling angry. Remember, we are all different.

One way to understand and explain these stages to a child is by looking at the popular Disney movie The Lion King, where the 5 Stages of Grief and Loss can be seen.

1.Denial – After the stampede Simba finds his dad, Mufasa, lying on the ground not moving. He initially is in denial that his dad has died and says, "Dad, come on, you've got to get up."

2.Anger – When Nala finds Simba as a grown up, she asks him to come back and he becomes angry and defensive with her because he believes it is his fault his dad died (remember Uncle Scar telling Simba it's all his fault?) Simba is angry with his dad for leaving him and shouts at the sky, "You said you would always be there for me, but you're not."

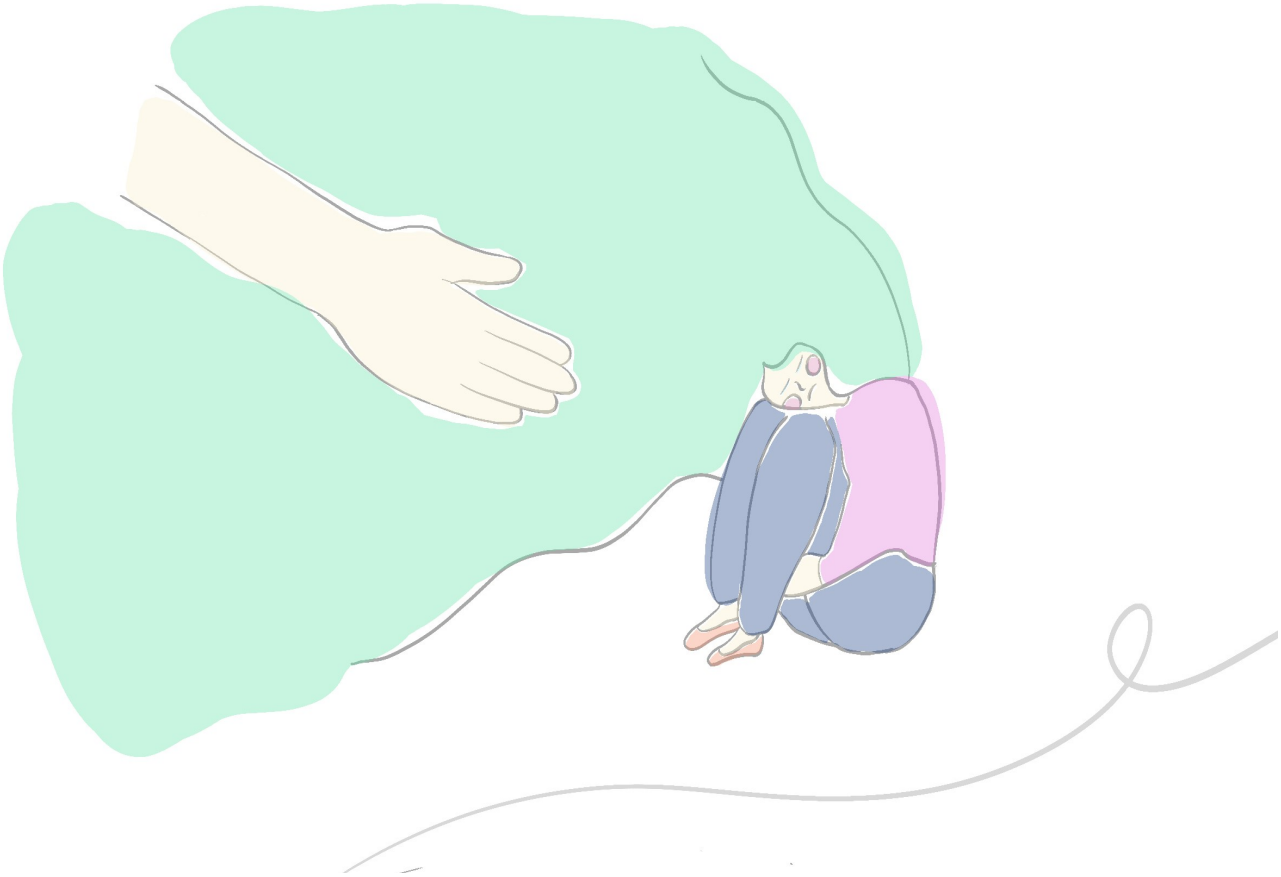
3.Bargaining – Simba sees a figure of his dad in the sky and pleads for his dad to stay.



4.Depression – After Simba moves past bargaining, he looks down and says, "It's me, it's all my fault," believing that he was responsible for the stampede. He feels a great sadness and emptiness from his loss.

5.Acceptance – Simba realises the truth – that his Uncle Scar killed his father. Simba accepts his rightful place as king and his father's death. In the final scene he has moved forward with his grief and stands on the top of Pride Rock with Nala and their new born cub.

Talking to my child/young person about Grief and Loss



Talking to my child/young person about Grief and Loss

Talking to a child or young person about grief and loss may seem tough or daunting. Sometimes those supporting a young person have concerns about saying or doing the right thing and not making the situation worse. The most important thing for your child or young person to know is that you're there for them and want to help.

There may be better times to start a conversation with your child/young person and it's important to remember that they may have different feelings around the loss to you, or different ideas on how they feel they should cope with this.

If you notice changes in your child/young person's behaviours, you could discuss this with them by:

* Speaking to them at a quiet time where there's unlikely to be interruptions from siblings, when they're not doing something they enjoy (like watching their favourite tv programme) and not too close to bed time.
* Explaining to them that you have noticed they may be struggling with the loss and asking what they need from you that may help.
* Giving them time to talk without interrupting them.
* Make eye contact and face them to show that you are listening.
* Respecting that your child/young person may not feel ready to talk, or now might not be a good time in the day for them. If this happens, let them know that you're there for them when they feel ready. Some children may prefer to write down how they're feeling (there is an activity in this booklet where they can do this.)

The importance of validation

Validation is the recognition that a person or their feelings or opinions are valid and worthwhile. It's about listening to your child/young person expressing their experience and acknowledging what they have to say without our own emotions, opinions or thoughts compromising their experience and what they are saying to us.

Difficult or challenging situations, stressful events, negative responses, and over reactions can all impact on a child/young person's feelings and therefore it's important to validate your child/young person's experience.

A great example of validation can be found in a video clip of the film Inside Out, which you can watch here: **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QT6FdhKriB8**

Or by typing 'inside out validation clip' into a search engine and finding the YouTube video in the search results.

Using validation

There are a few phrases you can use when speaking with a child/young person about their thoughts and feelings, such as:

* I hear what you're saying
* I have felt the same way before
* It's ok to feel like this
* That must be really difficult for you
* I can see this is really important to you, please come and talk to me again if you need to.

What to do and what to avoid when talking to your child/young person

✓ Listening to your child or young person without interrupting them.

✓ When they have finished speaking, use the above phrases to validate and normalise how they are feeling.

✓ Reflect back to them what they have said or what they are feeling e.g. "It sounds like this is very upsetting for you." "So I understand from what you've said that you're angry that this has happened."

✓ Convey love and acceptance towards your child or young person by giving them a hug or holding their hand if they are ok with this.

✓ Be mindful of your facial expressions and body language. Try to face them and make eye contact to show that you are listening and are interested in what they have to say.

Ask questions and be reasonably inquisitive. Check if there's anything they need from you that may help, however be prepared that they may not know what will help. Let them know that it's ok if they don't know what they need. You can suggest you both look at the activities in this booklet together when they feel ready.

Dismissing any emotions shared or sharing that you don't feel that way, so don't think they should feel the way they do won't be helpful. All emotions are welcome and it's ok to feel differently.

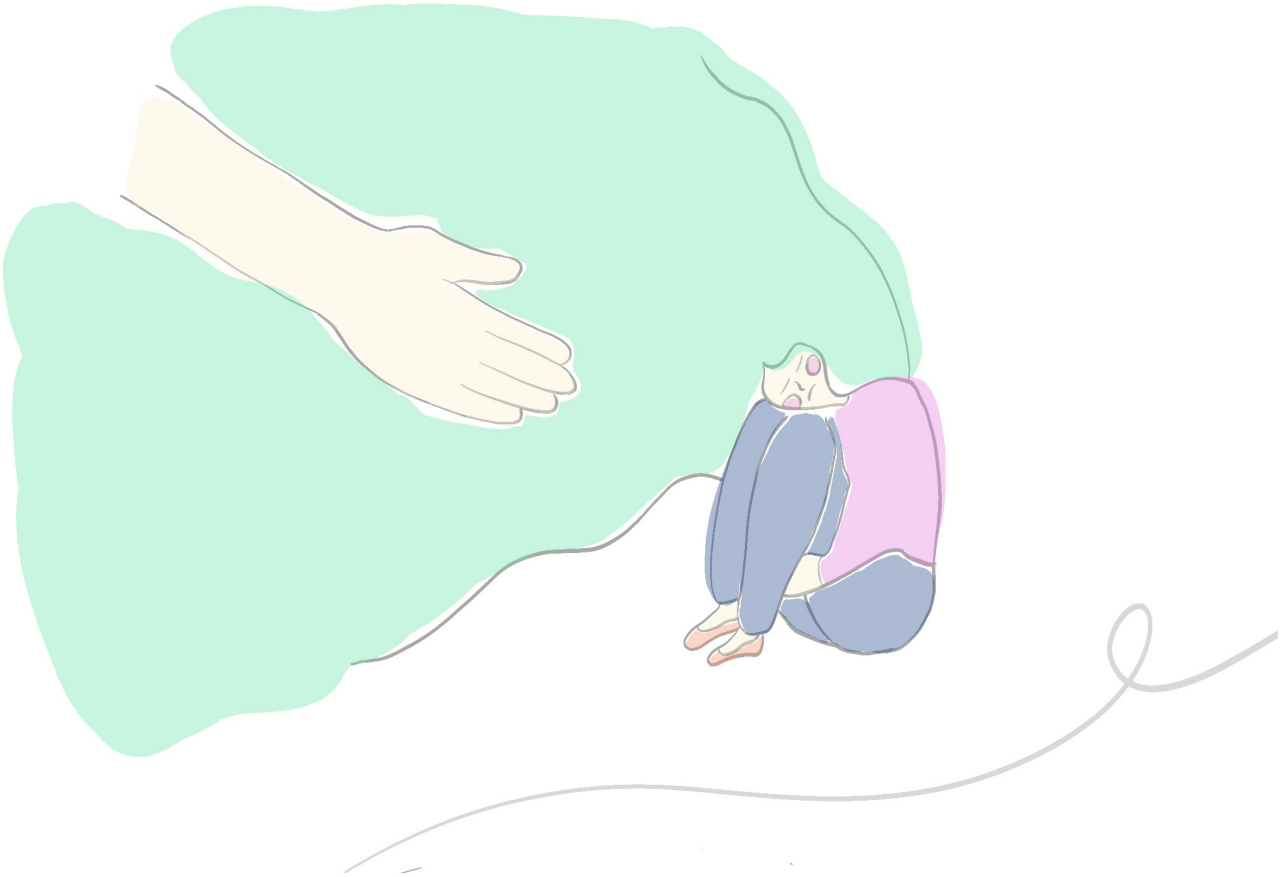
Try to not overreact to emotions or thoughts shared. This can be challenging if you are struggling with the same or a different loss, but try to stay calm and listen to what they are telling you.

Don't try and predict how they feel. It's ok to feedback and repeat what they've told you, but don't try to guess at what they may be feeling.

Don't interrupt them, let them speak freely. This can be tricky if you hear something you think you can help with and want to dive in to offer advice or support. Listen to everything they have to say and ask further questions, if you need to clarify anything, before considering your response.

Try to not avoid the conversation. Sometimes children/young people will start a discussion with you at an unexpected time, like when you're driving in the car or about to start dinner. They have chosen that place and time to speak with you because they feel comfortable, so try to avoid putting the conversation off to speak later or somewhere else. If you have to delay the conversation though, explain to them that you can see this is important to them and that you want to be able to listen to what they have to say. Arrange a time when you can both do this where you're both able to talk.

Activities to support Grief & Loss

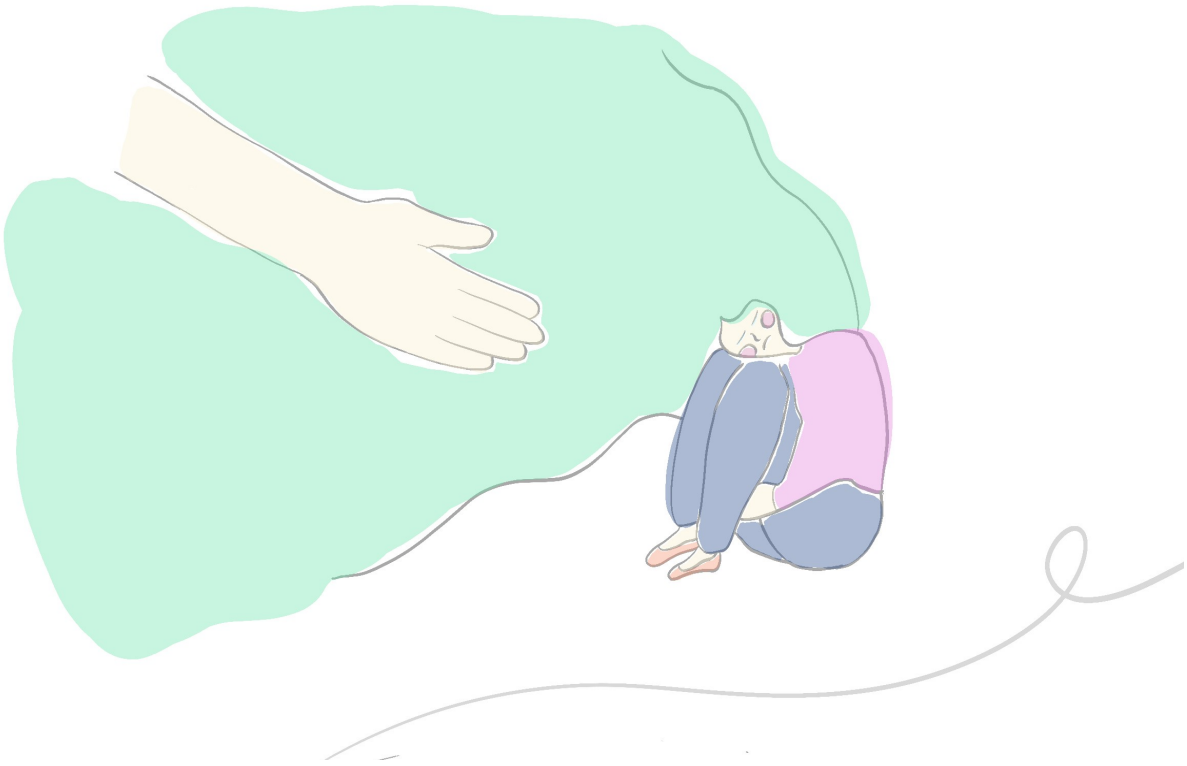


Activities to support Grief and Loss

These activities can support a child or young person with their loss, however if they have recently experienced the loss, it is likely that they will not feel ready to explore activities just yet and will need time to come to terms with their grief and how they are feeling.

Different children and young people are likely to feel ready to look at these at different times, so if you have more than one child/young person you may find one of them is keen to try some of these ideas, but another child/young person isn't. Let them know that's ok and you can look at this together when they feel ready. If your child/young person wishes to try the activities alone, that's ok too. Check in with them afterwards and ask how they found this.

Children/Young people do not need to complete all of the activities, but choose one or more that they are interested in and feel would benefit them.



Padded Hearts

If you have an item of your loved one's clothing you could cut out and sew a simple padded heart as a reminder of them. You could hang it by your bed on your bag – or wherever you would find it helpful.

Making a padded heart

1. To make a heart you will need a piece of fabric such as a top or a shirt.

2. Cut out a heart from paper to use as a template. Fold your fabric in two and cut out a square of fabric that is a bit bigger than your heart template. Put the heart template on your fabric and draw around it, you can use a pen or a pencil.

3. Using a simple running stitch, stitch around the heart, leaving a gap so you can stuff it. You could use cotton wool, the insides of an old pillow or even an old odd sock.

4. After you have stuffed it, finish sewing it up, you can then carefully cut around the padded heart, taking care not to snip the stitches. Sew a piece of ribbon at the top of the heart to make a loop.

Idea - You could spray a little of your loved one's perfume/aftershave or a scent that you find comforting to the heart.

Memory Jar

Memory jars are a nice way to remember someone. They are made using natural materials, such as chalk. Chalk has been found to contain negative ions, which also provide soothing sensations. Follow the steps below to create your memory jar.

You will need:

A small jar (try not to pick one too big as you need to fill it!)

Table salt

Coloured chalk (powder paint works well if there is an allergy to chalk)

2x pieces of paper

Optional: Glitter and Cotton wool

Steps:

1. Write down some memories or words that remind you of the person/place you are creating your jar about.

2. Choose a colour to represent that memory/word from your chalks/paints/glitter available.

3. Take the plain piece of paper, and in the centre pour some salt (think about how much you may need for the jar, and how you wish to divide this between your chosen colours.)

4. Rub the salt with the coloured chalk. If using powder paint, mix this in well with the salt. While doing so, think about why this memory or word is special to you. You may wish to add some glitter.

5. Pour the salt/chalk/paint mix into your memory jar.

6. Repeat steps 3-5 for each of your memories/words until your jar is full!

7. If you have cotton wool, you can place this on top of your chalk/salt mix in the jar to hold firmly in place.

8. Place the lid on your jar. Don't shake it if you do not want the colours to mix!

9. If you are making this with another person, talk about what memories/word each coloured layer represents.

Keep this somewhere you can see and use this to remind yourself of the happy memories/ words within the jar.

Memory Box

What is a memory box?

A memory box is a container that holds special things that belong to you and your loved one. The things in your memory box can help to remind you of happy times and nice memories.

Finding ways to remember the person who has died can be helpful in the grieving process. Some of the memories might make you laugh or cry but that's ok, it is all part of the process of remembering the person who has died. Creating a memory box can make you feel emotional, sad or overwhelmed so you might find it useful to have a relative or friend help you.

Making the box

A memory box can be as simple or elaborate as you like. You could use an old shoe box, a biscuit or sweets tin or a gift box. You could cover it with wallpaper or decorate the box with photos, stickers, pictures or drawings.

What goes into a memory box?

Before you decide what to put in your box, you may find it helpful to think about your different types of memories. For example:

* A special time you shared together
* Something you both enjoyed or laughed about
* A memory that gives you some comfort

Some ideas

* Spray some of a loved one's perfume or aftershave onto a tissue or small toy
* Include photographs of you and your loved one together
* Add your favourite music onto a USB memory stick so you can listen to this
* Anything that has a personal story attached to it, such as jewellery, birthday cards you received from your loved one, or tickets from places you visited together that hold special memories.

Writing a letter

Sometimes it can feel hard talking to others about how we feel, or we may not feel comfortable sharing our feelings out loud. Writing down our thoughts and feelings when we feel sad, ripping this up and throwing it away and then focussing on something that makes us feel happy can help to feel better.

You may also wish to use this space to write a letter to the person you have lost, or to those closest to you to explain your feelings if you do not feel able to say this out loud.

Comic Strip

Drawing a comic strip is another way to help you relax and remember happy times with your loved one.

Show off your art skills and have a go at making one below.

Other resources

Books

Crossley, D. Illustrated by Sheppard, K. (2000) Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine: your activity book to help when someone has died.

Rosen, M. & Blake, Q. (2004) Michael Rosen's Sad Book (Understanding deep sorrow after Loss)

Dr Coombes, Sharie. (2020) Letting Go! Mindful Kids: An activity book for children who need support through experiences of loss, change, disappointment and grief - Mindful Kids

Websites

www.cruse.org.uk Helpline, online chat and information about bereavement.

www.hopeagain.org.uk The support service for young people offered by Cruse.

www.childbereavementuk.org Helpline, online chat, email and information around loss.

www.winstonswish.org Support for bereaved children, young people, their families, and the professionals who support them.

www.themix.org.uk Support for under 25s with a range of challenging issues.

www.lcgl.org.uk Lincolnshire Centre for Grief and Loss. Website with further support guides and advice.

YoungMinds Crisis Messenger provides free, 24/7 crisis support across the UK if you are experiencing a mental health crisis. If you need urgent help text YM to 85258.

www.kooth.com Counselling forum, online information where young people can speak also with trained counsellor.

Lincolnshire Here4You 01522 309120

Joint Healthy Minds Lincolnshire and CAMHS advice line. – available Mon- Fri 09.30 – 16.30

Alternatively, please visit our website www.lpft.nhs.uk/young-people where you can find useful information and self-help advice.