



The Association
for Child and Adolescent
Mental Health

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for Child and Adolescent
Mental Health



Unravelling Bereavement, Grief & Loss

31.1.23. 3.45pm-5.00pm

With Dr Tina Rae

Today's learning objectives

- Understand how macro trends and the current context is impacting young people in the short & long-term
- Challenge some of the common myths and grief models, to provide a richer understanding of behaviours linked to bereavement & loss
- Equip teachers with tools & techniques for helping young people navigate the grieving process



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POLL: Which type of school are you representing this evening?



Grief and loss

'loss of a loved person is one of the most intensely painful experiences any human can suffer. And not only is it painful to experience but it is painful to witness.... To the bereaved nothing but the return of the lost person can bring true comfort'. (Bowlby 1988 Loss, Sadness and Depression).



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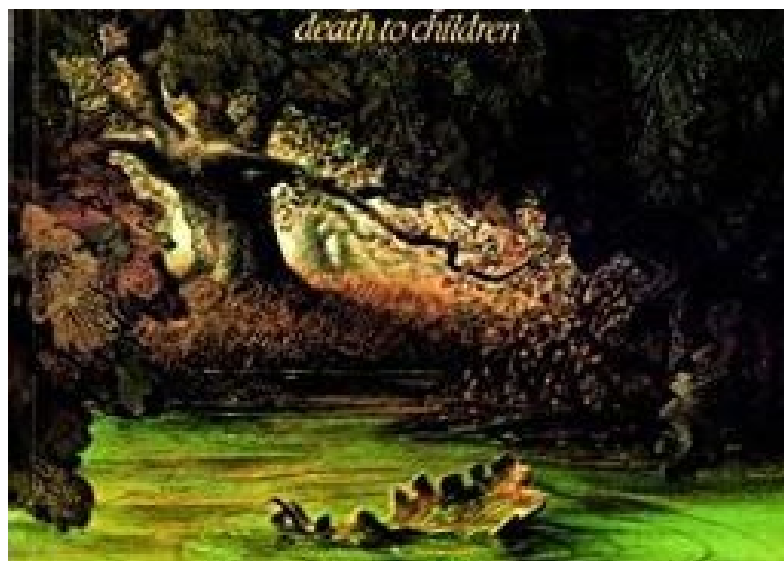
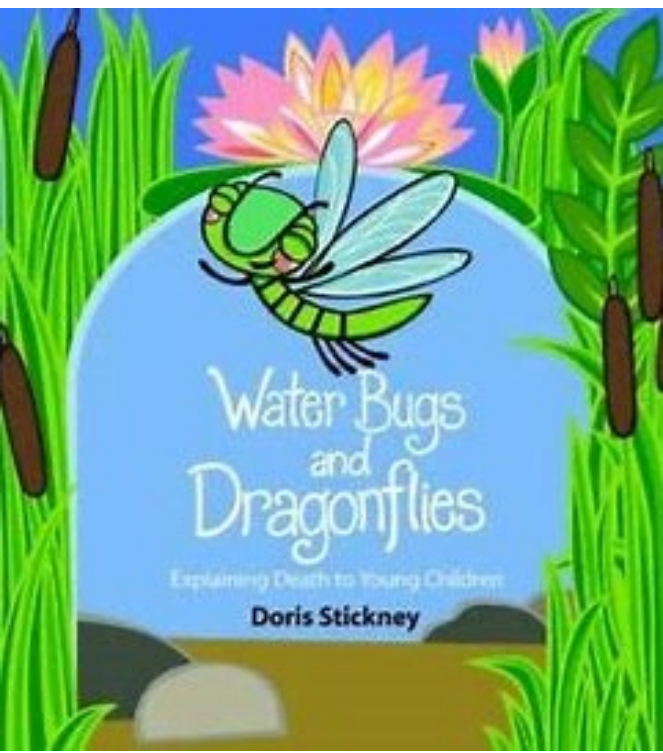
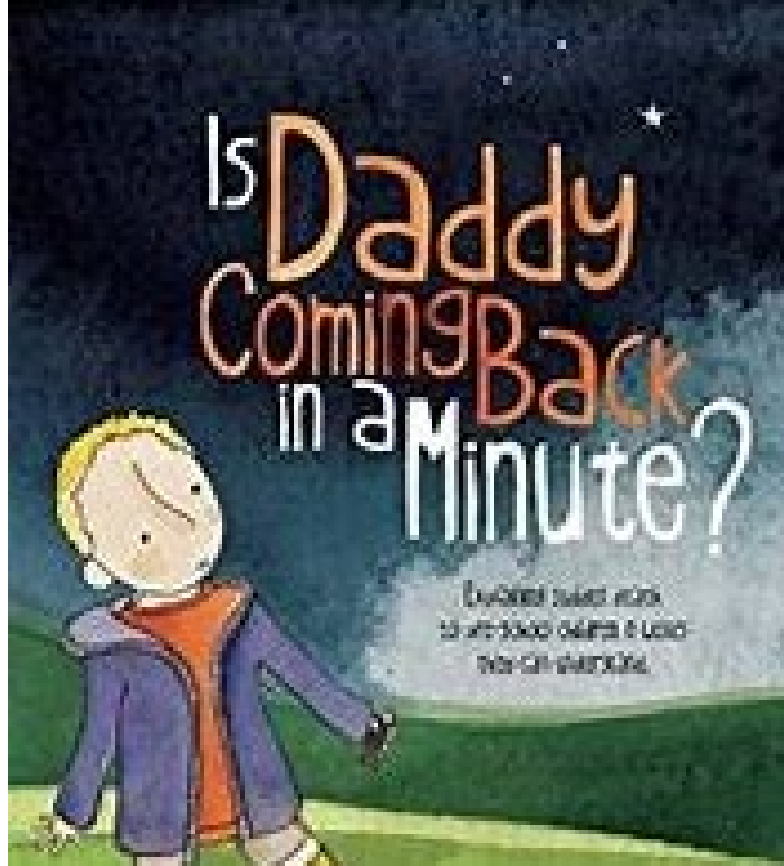
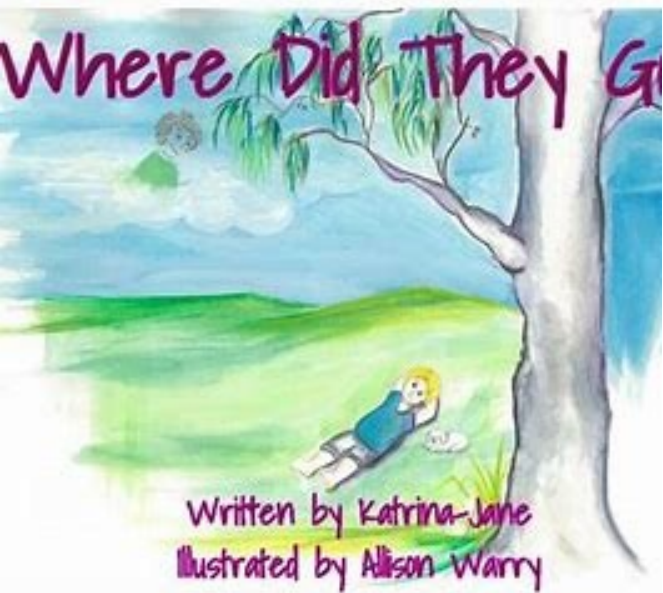
**The current context – COVID is still here -
what have they missed? Beware the catch up narrative?**

- Play
- Socialisation
- Rites of passage
- Learning
- Creativity
- Exercise
- Fun
- Relaxation
- Access to resources
- Relationships with key adults
- Nurture
- Safety
- Self-regulation



Deaths due to COVID & impact upon mental health





How do you explain death to a child?

- **Writing your script**
- How would you explain death as a concept to
 - 1. a pre school child
 - 2. a primary aged child
 - 3. a teenager
- What considerations would you need to take into account?
- Watch your language
- Watch the child's belief system



Any Type of Loss Can Trigger Grief

- Job loss
- Financial anxiety
- Loss of safety
- Worry about loved ones
- Social distancing, and feelings of isolation
- Changes in daily habits and routines
- Cancellations of special plans and events
- Clashes with family members over how to protect yourselves
- Worries about how to pay rent, the mortgage, utilities, and other bills
- Sadness over how the pandemic will affect the world
- Fears for the future
- And now war?



Making room to grieve

- Regardless of how minor or devastating our losses, each loss has a psychological impact. We feel depleted. Our lives are less full. We long for the past—the way things were back when.
- Mourning allows us time:
 - To bear witness to our loss
 - To feel the sadness and, often, anger and guilt
 - To acknowledge that what was lost was loved
 - To share our loss with others





Grief After an Unexpected Death

In addition to the anticipatory grief that people may be experiencing, people may also be struggling with the grief caused by the unexpected death of a loved one.

Under normal circumstances, we turn to others in our lives for support. We might gather with friends and family to cry, share happy memories, and offer care and support to one another. The coronavirus pandemic has wreaked havoc on many of these rituals.

This inability to engage in traditions that support the grieving process can make it that much more difficult to cope

Signs of grief

- Trouble focusing on normal tasks
- Sleeping much more or less than usual
- Feelings of anger and irritability
- Headaches and upset stomach
- Fatigue or low energy
- Re-experiencing feelings of past grief
- Engaging in activities such as eating, drinking, or online shopping to cope with anxiety
- Avoiding thinking or talking about the pandemic/the loss
- The good news is that people tend to be resilient in the face of grief. Once the immediate crisis has passed, people are usually able to reach a place of acceptance where they are able to adapt and find ways to cope with their loss.



Many experiences may not be regarded as grief-worthy, even though they activate emotional responses similar to those who grieve the death of a loved one. Death is a conspicuous loss.

If a loss doesn't involve death, a person may dismiss or judge what they feel, concluding they are not entitled to mourn their misfortune, their sorrow, or the shattering of their illusions.

Yet grief occurs in many forms. We grieve because we remember when things were different; when we perceive our former circumstances were better than they are now.



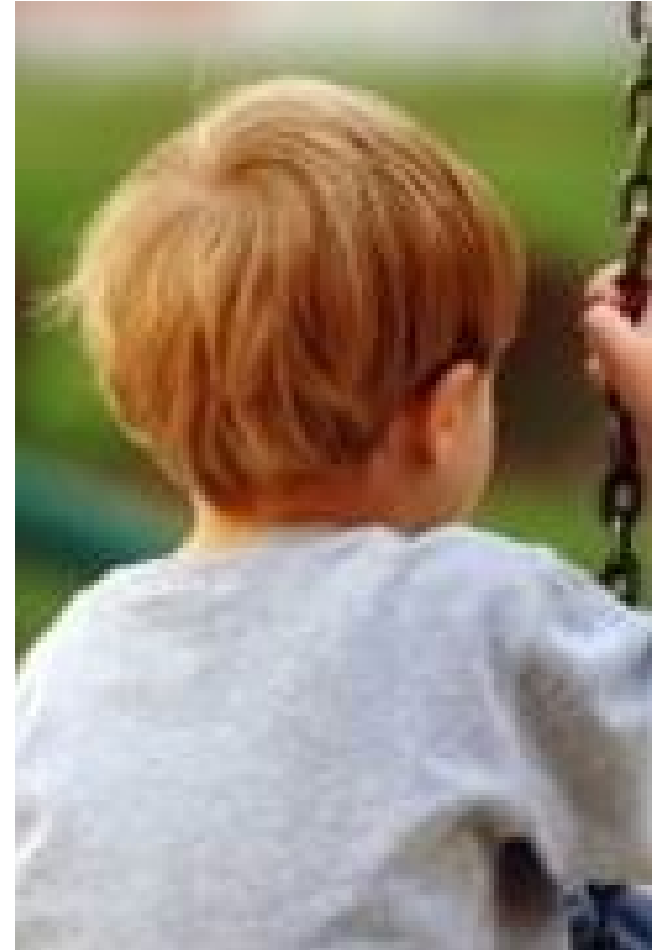
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Do children experience grief?

“Yes, if children are old enough to love, they are old enough to grieve. Many times in our society children are the forgotten grievers. For instance, when a parent dies, whom do we expect to help the child with their grief? The surviving parent. That parent not only has their own grief to deal with but they are learning for the first time how to be a single parent. They, like their child, can use support in their grieving.”

Excerpt from David Kessler’s website “On Grief & Grieving”

By Elisabeth Kübler-Ross & David Kessler

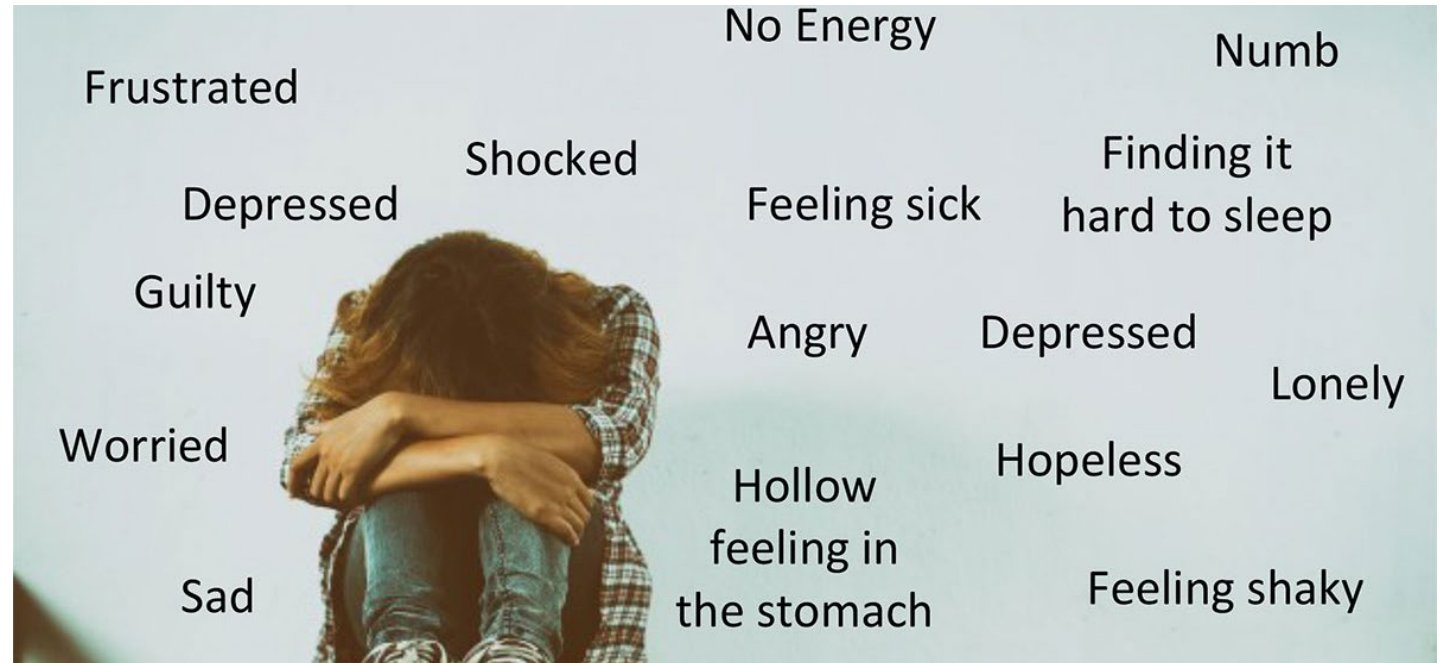


Focus on the child

- ***What might you see if a child is experiencing grief?***
- Social isolation and/or separation anxiety
- Friendship difficulties
- Physical symptoms (e.g. headaches, stomach aches)
- Fluctuation of mood/'puddle jumping'
- Sleep problems
- Reduced concentration
- Developmental regression (e.g. bed wetting)



TO START-
Normalise
the feelings
for the child





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UNDERSTAND The Grieving Process

Linear model with successive
stages:

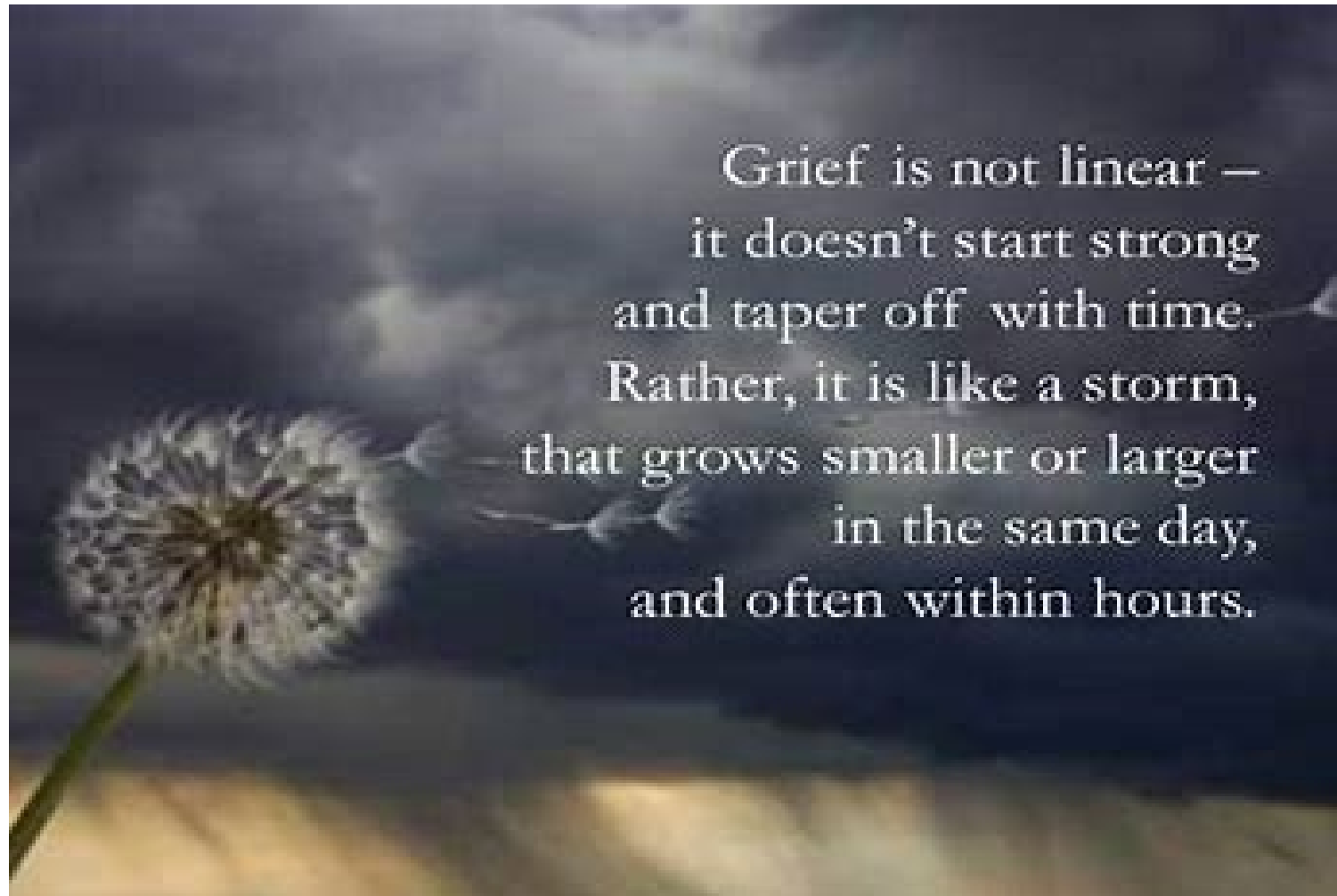
Shock (disbelief/denial)

Protest (at pain of separation)

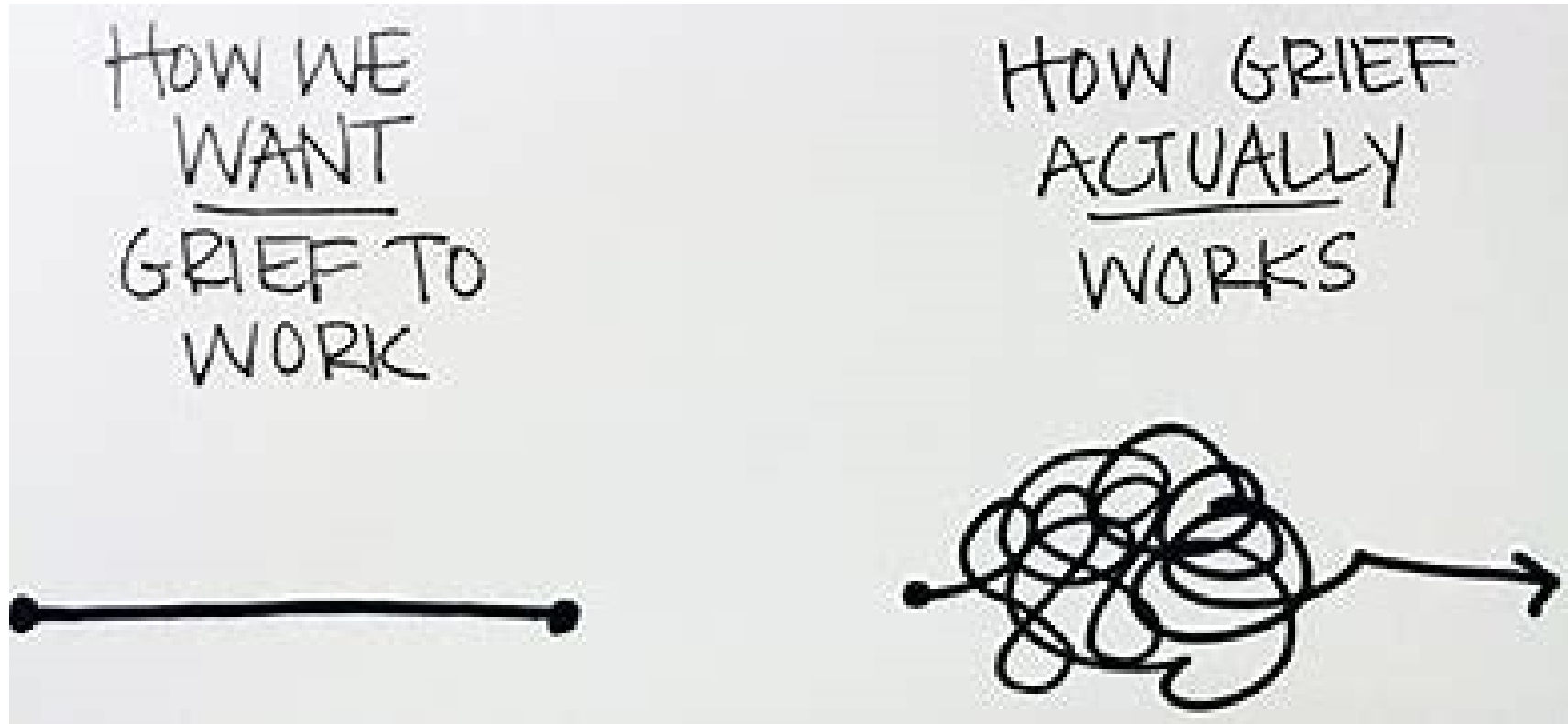
Despair (guilt, anger, depression)

Acceptance (adjustment to new
life)





Grief is not linear –
it doesn't start strong
and taper off with time.
Rather, it is like a storm,
that grows smaller or larger
in the same day,
and often within hours.

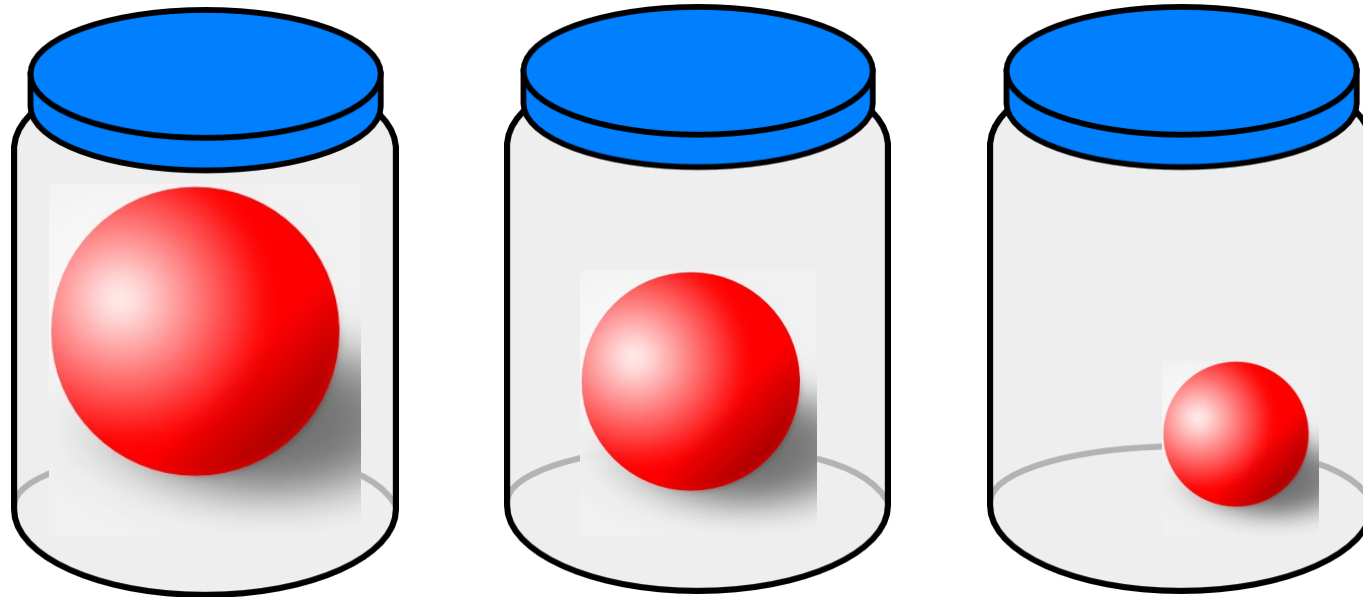




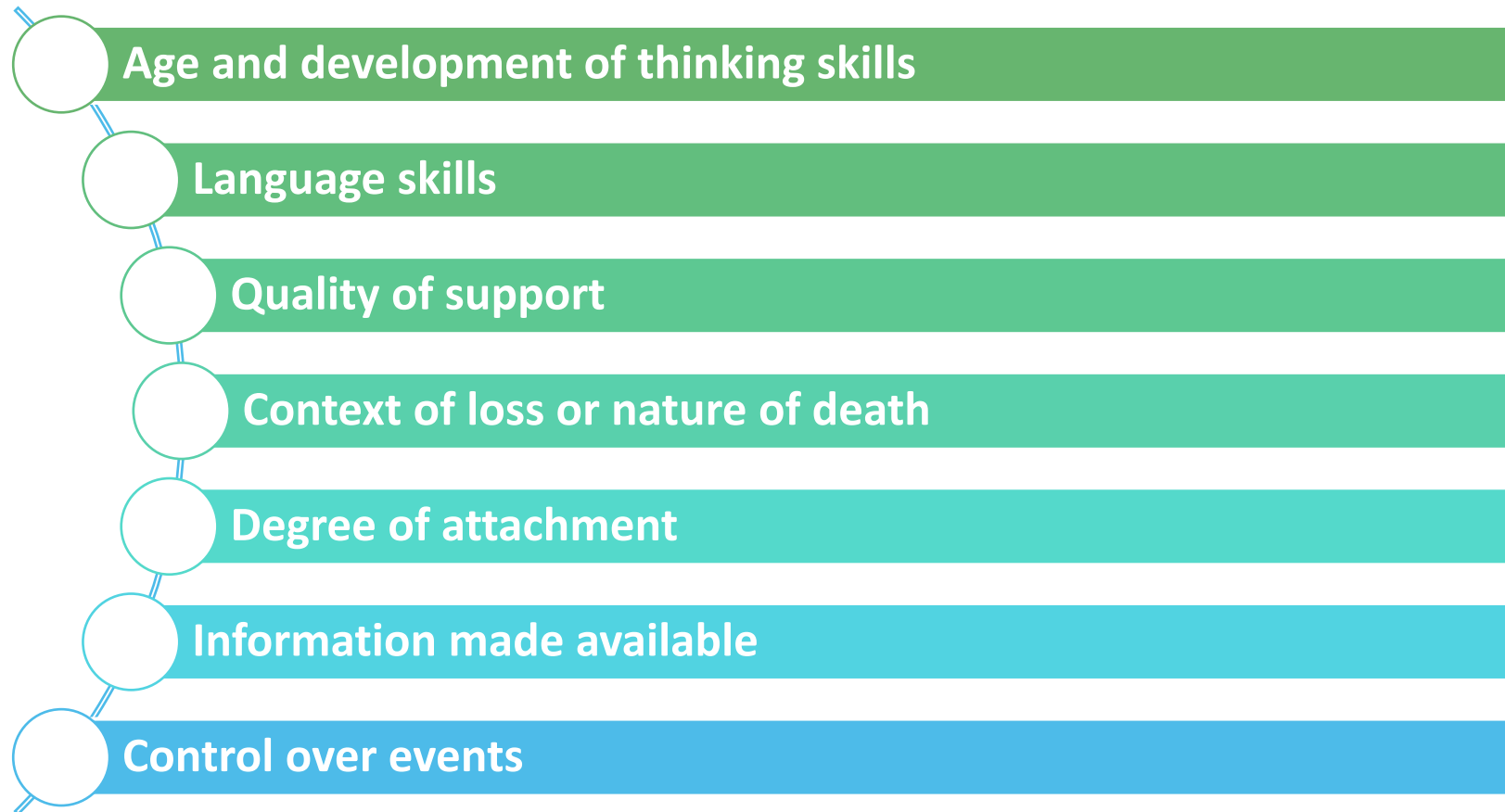
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Factors Affecting Children's Grief



Responding to Questions

- Don't brush them aside
- Use language the child can understand and be literal avoiding terms like 'he passed away'
- Avoid being shocked by blunt enquiry
- Avoid being surprised by 'puddle jumping'
- Be sensitive to differing spiritual beliefs



- **Help children express their feelings**
- **Share your feelings – normalise**
- **Be honest**
- **Provide routine and support**
- **Involve children in funerals and ceremonies**
- **Provide opportunities to remember and celebrate**
- **Be patient – time**
- **Involve family and friends**



Memory boxes and Books

- Memory Boxes and Books - A special box/book can be made or bought in which to put precious possessions such as letters or cards from friends, dried flowers from the funeral, photographs or treasured possessions of the person who has died – for example a piece of jewellery, their glasses, a diary or letter.





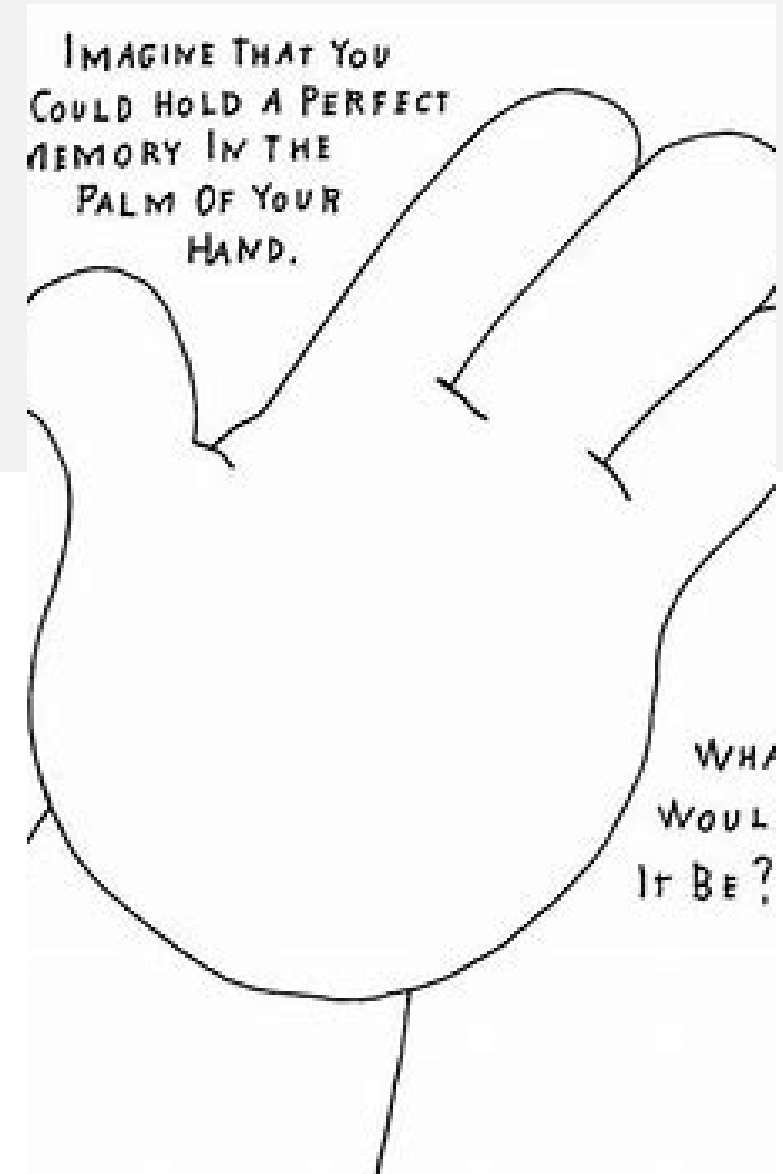
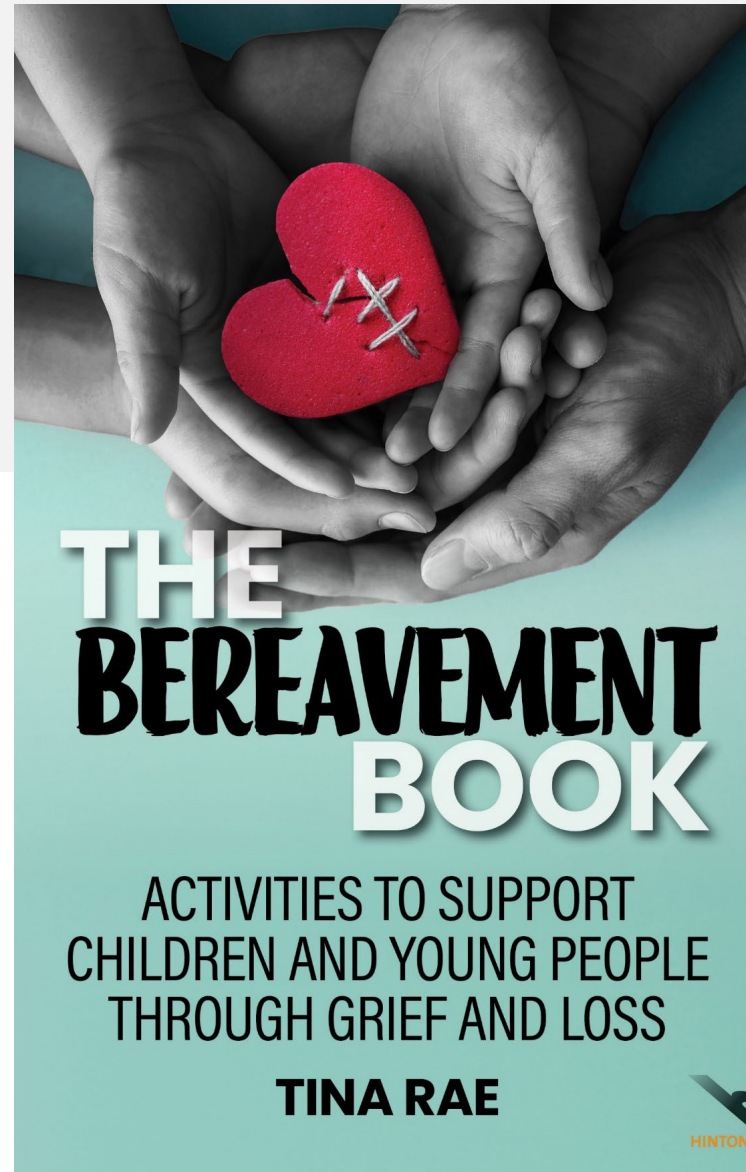
Activity 35

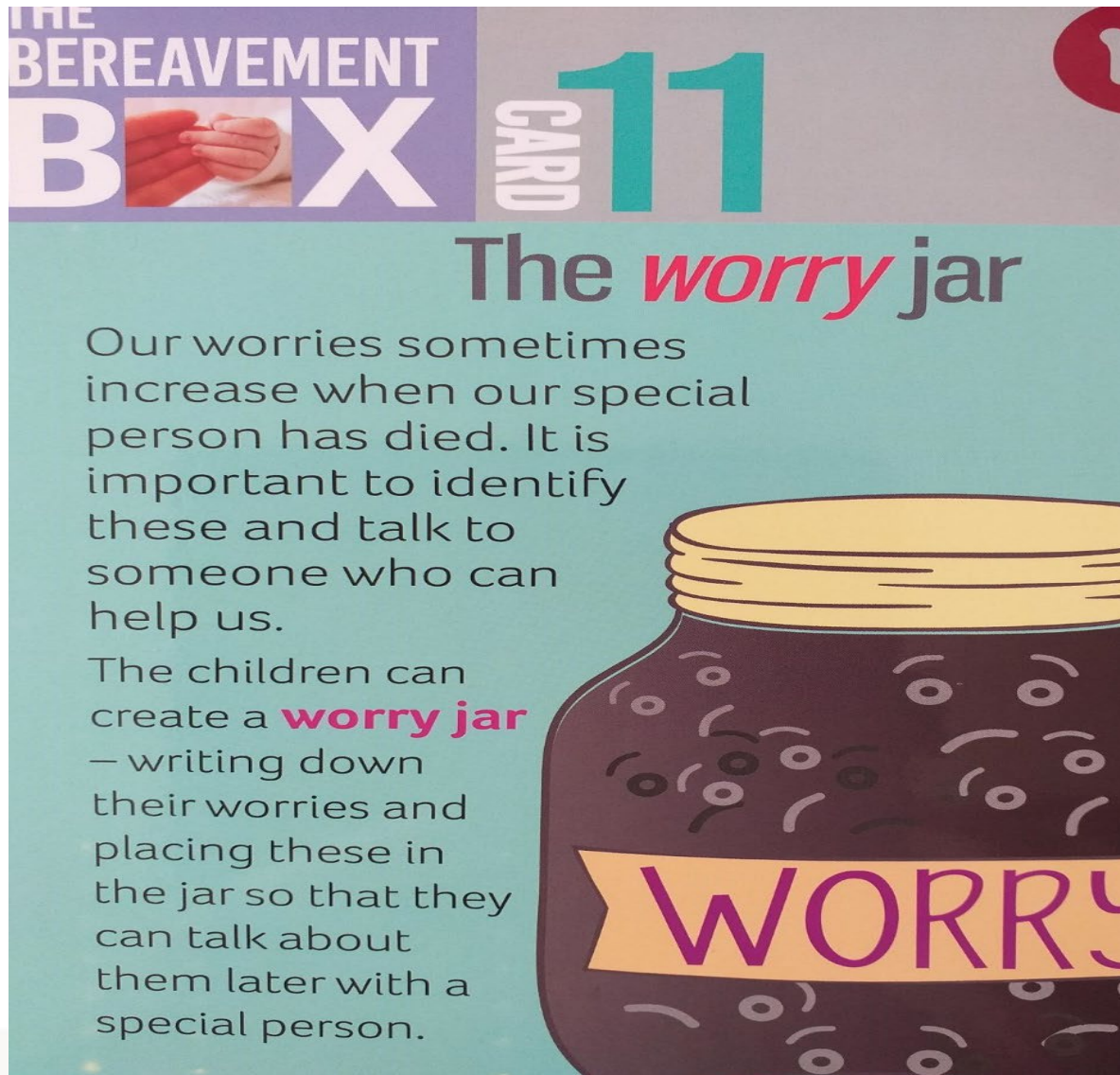
A memory in my palm

Take some time to stop think and reflect.

Imagine that you could hold a perfect memory in the palm of your hand.

What would it be? Complete the format below, drawing or describing this perfect memory.





Understanding

- It's ok to worry
- Recording worries
- Seeking help

Visiting the Grave

- Visiting the Grave - For some people this is an integral part of their mourning for the person who has died. Often it is their way of maintaining a connection with the person, putting the rest of the world aside and communicating with them; telling their news, expressing their sadness, and often showing their love through flowers and other gifts.



Planting Trees or Shrubs

- Planting Trees or Shrubs - Some people like to plant a tree or a shrub as a way of remembering, perhaps commemorating it with a plaque. It is important to make sure that a hardy plant tree or shrub is planted to reduce the risk of it dying. It is also important that it is planted in a place where the family are always able to visit – if they don't have a place of their own in which to plant the tree, parks and other public areas may give permission.





Artwork

- Artwork - Making something in memory of someone special who has died helps connect to them in the making of it, and gives the bereaved person something to treasure in the future.

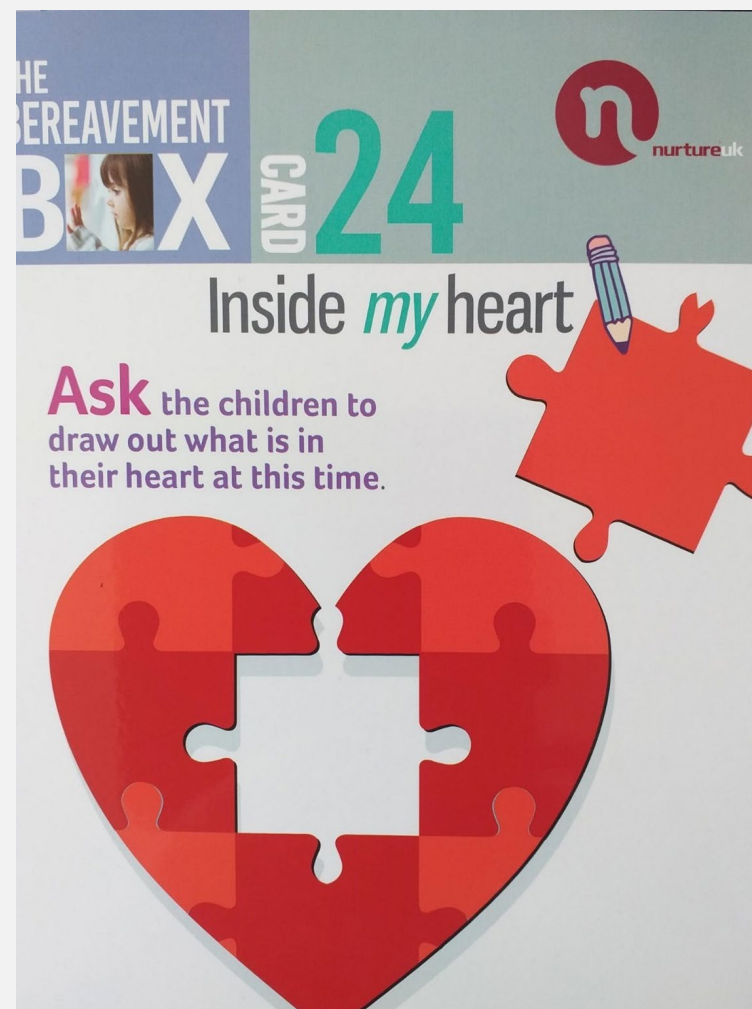


Candles

- Candles - Lighting a candle and perhaps reading a special prayer or poem can be a simple and yet powerful way of commemorating an anniversary or other special time.

Remembering

- What feelings and memories are inside my heart
- Which hurt and which make me happy?
- Which are the most special?
- Which will I relive again and again when I am feeling sad?
- All are OK!
- HAVE A GO YOURSELF!





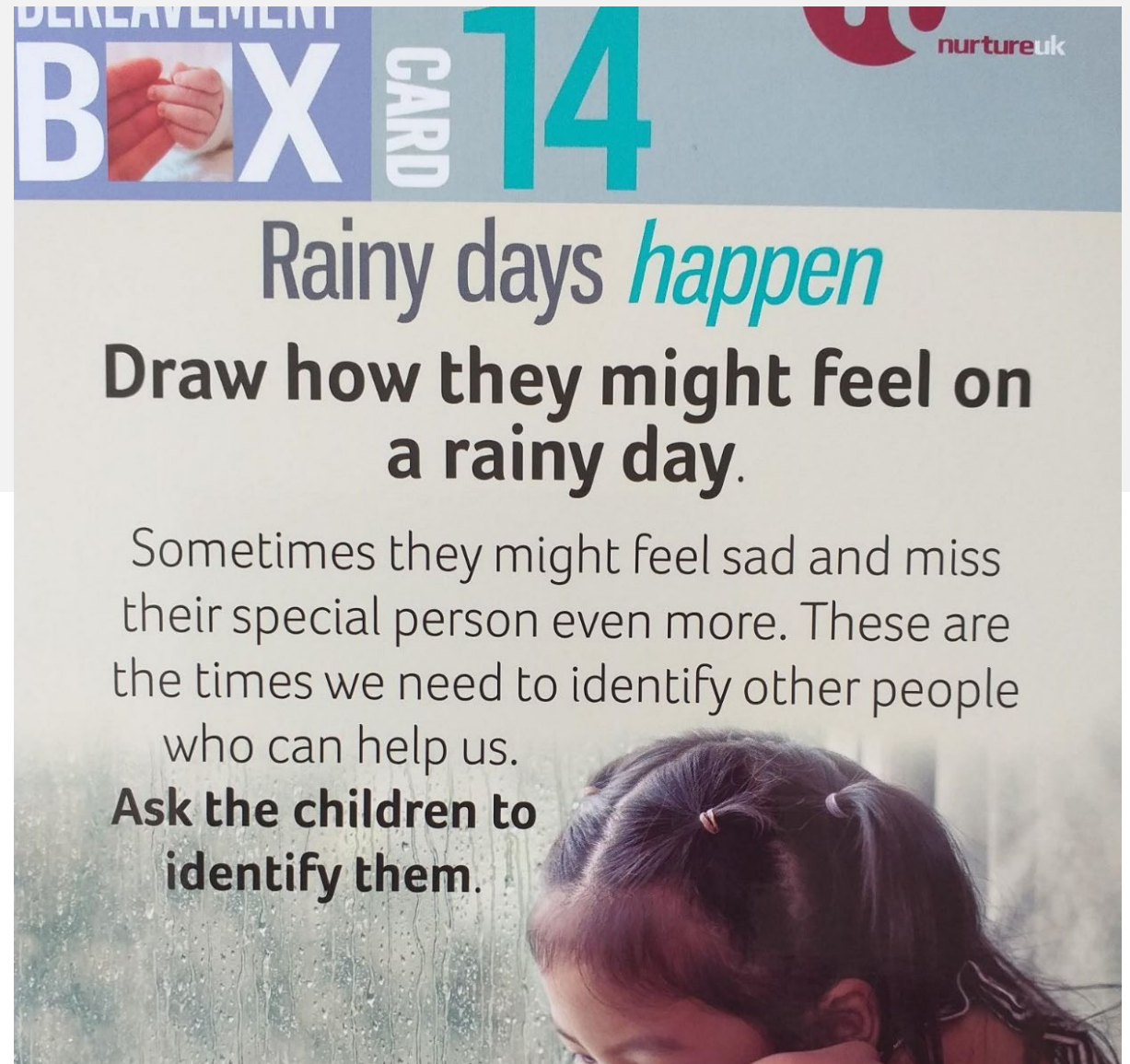
Keeping a Diary

- Keeping a Diary - Writing a diary of their journey through grief can be helpful for bereaved people for a number of reasons. Putting into words what they feel can help release some of the pain. It is helpful as a reference point to look back on how they felt before, and to realise however bad that was, they survived. It also allows them to look back on what they have been through and what it was like. How people use such a journal is, of course, very individual – some people sketch, others write down memories, some pour out feelings, or a combination of all of these, or they can do something entirely original to them.

Understanding

33

- Normalising sadness
- Normalising bad days
- Identifying sources of support



BEREAVEMENT BOX CARD 14

Rainy days *happen*

Draw how they might feel on a rainy day.

Sometimes they might feel sad and miss their special person even more. These are the times we need to identify other people who can help us.

Ask the children to identify them.

The card features a header with the text 'BEREAVEMENT BOX CARD 14' and the NurtureUK logo. The main text is in a large, bold font. Below the text is a photograph of a young girl with dark hair in pigtails, looking out of a window with raindrops on the glass.

THE BEREAVEMENT



60 cards in 3 sections:

- **Understanding** – this includes understanding the nature of death and the fact that it is permanent, the grief process, life cycles and the feelings and behaviours we may have as a result of the death of a loved one and how to manage these using support systems and developing stress and anger management skills
- **Remembering** – this includes a range of activities such as journaling, making memory books and mobiles, writing letters, recalling good and sad times, special times collage, memory chains and candles
- **Celebrating** – this includes designing memorial gardens, the balloon ceremony, portraits, poems and pictures.

Hot off the press

Part 1 Introduction

Part 2 Activities for understanding, expressing, and processing grief and loss

Part 3 Activities for remembering and celebrating loved ones

Part 4 Appendices



THE BEREAVEMENT BOOK

ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
THROUGH GRIEF AND LOSS

TINA RAE

HINTON HOUSE PRACTICAL THERAPEUTIC RESOURCES



Complex Grief

- Suicide, murder, COVID, accidental death and War.
- Symptoms of post-trauma stress:
 - re-experiencing
 - avoidance
 - arousal

- The need for outside support

If a young person
pretends that
absolutely nothing
has happened

If school work takes a
dramatic decline or
the student develops
a school phobia

If a young person
threatens suicide

If a young person
panics frequently

If a young person
becomes involved
with alcohol or drugs

If a young person
begins committing
serious crime



If news of a death or other significant loss was kept from the young person for a long time or if the young person was told lies about the death

If a young person frequently physically assaults others or is cruel to animals

If a young person had a difficult relationship with the deceased or behaves poorly with family members

If the young person is unwilling or unable to socialize with other young people



The role of the Counsellor/Empathic adult

- The counselling allows and helps a child or young person's feelings to be processed and digested so that they can move on. If these painful and difficult feelings aren't explored and made sense of, over time a bereaved child or young person is likely to become depressed, or stuck with angry feelings, or display neurotic behaviours. He/she may find any future bereavement particularly traumatic and difficult to manage. He/she may also find it hard to trust loving feelings again, he/she may link loving someone with losing them; the child/young person may then attempt to cut off from his loving feelings in an attempt to prevent more pain.
- A warm and empathic relationship with a counsellor can help a child to dare to feel love again so it is essential to carefully observe the child so as to be able to decide when or if a referral to such a specialist needs to be made.



Individual – mentor/quiet space etc

Small group

Whole school curriculum/resources

Protocols for reintegration

Bereavement Policy/Critical Incident Policy

KEY ISSUES:

Training and support for staff

Appropriate use of external support agencies



Support for YOU as the adults involved – creating a Support plan



- Working through and acknowledging your own losses
- Re-experiencing sad memories and responses
- Time and space to talk and validate feelings
- Time and space to engage in appropriate self care
- Time and space to grieve
- Being observant of others in the team
- Talking partners/allocated external resources as necessary
- Time to develop coping techniques and a support network
- Memorials to be agreed and shared

Final questions for you to reflect upon

- What has been helpful?
- What do you need now in terms of support? – for yourself and your CYP?
- What can you take back to your context?
- What can you use as a result of today's session?
- How might you specifically make use of the resources/advice identified in this session?
- How will you develop your systems to support the school community at the individual, group and whole school context?





References and Resources

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