

Supporting a child after traumatic loss: Classroom and individual therapeutic activities

Key areas addressed:

1. Understanding: Developmentally appropriate **understanding of loss** event/general loss/grief
2. Expressions of Emotions: Opportunity for **expression of emotions** re: loss/grief
3. Support: Offering/receiving **support**
4. Empathy: Developing a sensitivity, caring and **empathy** in classmates
5. Safe Zone: Making **space** (literally and figuratively) and **time** for the ebb and flow of the child's grief needs

Activity	Age group	Individual or Classroom Activity	Areas addressed	Notes
Comfort corner in the classroom or the home	Elementary	Individual	--Expression of emotions --Support --Safe Zone	Set up a space specifically for comfort and work-free. Fill the space with comfort objects (pillows, stuffed animals, and a writing pad/pencil) to allow the child to express him/herself or just to be still. If creating this space in a classroom, be sure that other children do not have a direct view of the child in the comfort corner to avoid staring. Inviting the child to add to the space or have input provides a sense of control.
Bibliotherapy and related activity, craft, etc. Examples: --The Tenth Good Thing About Barney (Judith Viorst) --Sad Hug, Mad Hug, Happy Hug (Channing Bete Co.)	Elementary	Individual or Classroom	--Understanding of loss --Expression of emotions --Support --Empathy --Safe Zone	See resources at the end of this supplement for additional book ideas and stores
Rain clouds and umbrellas drawings (rain clouds = difficulties, umbrellas = comforts) –younger children	Elementary	Individual or Classroom	--Understanding of loss --Expression of emotions --Safe Zone	Have child/children label things that cause/bring rain clouds (i.e., things that make them sad, angry, etc.) as well as umbrellas (things that help them cope)
Caterpillar to butterfly kits (release butterflies when transformation is complete)	Elementary	Individual or Classroom	--Understanding of loss --Expression of emotions --Safe Zone	<u>Book suggestions:</u> From Caterpillar to Butterfly (Deborah Hiligman) A Very Magical Caterpillar Tale: The Story of the Butterfly Life cycle (Audrey M. Roy) Where Butterflies Grow (Joanne Ryder) Discussion: Include caterpillar to butterfly metamorphosis, how things can change form and seem “gone” (as when the butterfly flies away, but the caterpillar is still present in the butterfly himself)

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Butterfly activities (coffee filter butterflies, or any butterfly craft)	Elementary	Individual or Classroom	-Understanding of loss -Expression of emotions -Safe Zone	See above for book and discussion suggestions -Example: Use watercolors to paint coffee filters; create a body using a clothespin or wrapped pipe cleaner; antennae with pipe cleaners
What we miss about (Johnny) (insert student's name)	Elementary	Classroom	-Understanding of loss -Empathy -Understanding of loss -Expression of emotions -Support -Empathy -Safe Zone	-Prior to student starting back in classroom. -Explain that this will help the returning child to feel welcomed, cared for, and valued for who he/she is. -Have classmates write a page in a journal, scrapbook page, on a list, etc. detailing the things they enjoy about the child. Note: Be sure to have students include things they are looking forward to doing with the child again...
Tree photos or drawings	Elementary Middle	Individual	-Understanding of loss -Expression of emotions -Support -Safe Zone	<u>Discussion</u> (before and afterward): All branches are important, even if one breaks off or dies—it was still an important part of that tree's growth. If you look closely you can see where branches were ("aren't visible anymore but are still part of the tree because they helped to shape it") -Older children could purposefully represent changes or losses in their lives on the tree
Box of memories	Elementary Middle High School	Individual	-Understanding of loss -Expression of emotions -Support -Empathy -Safe Zone	-Creation of the box can serve as one stage of remembering (collage style, paint or draw memories, etc.); -Child can fill with mementos, comforting objects, write notes, journal, etc.
Modified hand over hand drawings (representing the child's hand and deceased's hand)	Elementary Middle High School	Individual	-Expression of emotions -Support -Safe Zone	-Draw an estimate/representation of the hand of deceased person, then tracing child's inside it) -Writing or drawing gifts/legacy that the child/family received from that person inside or around the hands

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Hand project of all family members' hands traced around photo or drawing of the deceased	Elementary Middle High School	Individual	-Expression of emotions -Support -Safe Zone	-Around a photo or child's drawing of the deceased, trace all family members' hands (in a wreath/circle or other desired pattern) -Family members can write favorite memories, gifts/legacy left by the deceased, favorite quotes, etc. -Providing scanned copies of this project to all involved will help share this memory
"Time out" symbol and plan	Elementary Middle High School	Individual	-Understanding of loss -Expression of emotions -Support -Empathy -Safe Zone	-Make plans for when a child (or possibly a classmate who is emotionally impacted) needs a "break" to help manage (or release) emotions; -This can be especially helpful for children who sit at a desk for class instruction time. -Collaborate with the child to choose a symbol (such as a small statue) that the child places on his/her desk to tell the teacher he needs to go to the counselor's or nurse's office for a break will help the child do so without drawing attention to him/herself
Collages of comforting images	Mid Elementary Middle High School	Individual	-Expression of emotions -Safe Zone	-Facilitate a basic collage of memory or comfort-based images on desired canvas, box, scrapbook page, etc. to serve as discussion regarding coping tools and plans
Balloon release (recommend biodegradable balloons)	Elementary Middle High School	Individual or Classroom	-Understanding of loss -Expression of emotions -Safe Zone	-Participating individuals can write a favorite memory, a wish for the deceased person or child/classmate, a note to the deceased person, etc. -Making a basic speech, reading, or ritual surrounding the release can help provide unity in feelings of sadness
Make sailboats, leave a note/message, release on lake/river/harbor	Elementary Middle High School	Individual or Classroom	-Understanding of loss -Expression of emotions -Safe Zone	-Construct small sailboats, using materials such as popsicle sticks, glue, and Styrofoam (many options can be found on the internet) -attach notes (see balloon release above) and create ceremony or ritual surrounding release of

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I wish for you	Elementary Middle High School	Classroom	-Support -empathy	Prior to child's return to classroom, or on a significant date (anniversary of death, deceased person's birthday, holidays, etc.) -On individual cards or one card/list, have students complete a sentence such as "On this day, I am thinking of you. I wish for you..." with strong encouragement toward students writing supportive words and healing images (preview this prior to giving to the child)
Journal time in the classroom; suggested topics but freedom to write about anything. (Not for a grade).	Late Elementary Middle High School	Classroom	-Understanding of loss -Expression of emotions -Safe Zone	<u>Topic suggestions:</u> -One year from today, I will be... -Today, I learned... -The day I got the news about (the deceased), I was... -I feel _____, and I think I need to... -I miss (the deceased) most when... -I'm most sad that I'll never... -I never got to tell (the deceased)... -Things you are thankful for about the person who -Memory snapshots -Unsent letters -Lists of things you remember, liked, etc. -Dreams you have had (about the deceased or wish you could tell them about)
	Elementary Middle High School	Individual	-Understanding of loss -Expression of emotions -Safe Zone	-Allow students freedom to write about anything related to topic -Emphasize that this writing will not be graded -As appropriate, could give students the option whether or not their journal entries are shared or read by teacher
For more rituals and activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.compassionatefriends.org – Compassionate Friends (resources, etc.) • http://www.channing-bete.com/(books, pamphlets, etc. on dealing with grief) 				