**Lesson 9: Coping with Grief and Loss**

**Overview**: The lesson uses recognize, reach out and use resources to understand the feelings associated with grief and loss; strategies to think and act in healthy ways when experiencing grief and loss; and how to reach out, demonstrate empathy and support others.

National Health Education Standards

**Standard 1:** Students comprehend functional health knowledge to enhance health.

**Standard 7:** Students demonstrate observable health and safety practices.

Healthy Behavior Outcome (HBO):

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| Students will practice strategies to help cope with grief in healthy ways. |

**Lesson Objective**- Students will be able to:

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| **Objective** | **Assessment** |
| 1. Define grief and events that can cause grief/loss. | Attachment 9.1 – Grief and Loss Check-in |
| 1. Describe the emotions and feelings associated with grief/loss. | Attachment 9.1 – Grief and Loss Check-in |
| 1. Identify resources to support a person experiencing grief/loss. | Attachment 9.1 – Grief and Loss Check-in |
| 1. Describe strategies to cope with grief/loss. | Attachment 9.1 – Grief and Loss Check-in |
| 1. Demonstrate how to communicate with empathy and support for someone experiencing grief/loss. | Attachment 9.3 – Writing a Condolence Note |

Introduction:

* When we lose something or someone we love, we experience grief and loss. What colors or words from the Feelings Index would be associated with experiencing grief and loss? We can use recognize, reach out and use resources to support our health and wellbeing while experiencing grief and loss. We will also learn how support someone who is experiencing grief and loss.
* (Remind students of your classroom procedures that ensure a safe and supportive environment. Also remind students of the school resources and supports available if there is a need to reach out for support and resources.)

Teaching Steps:

Activity 1: Grief and Loss Notes (Attachment 9.1)

* *Word association – When I say grief, what do you think?* 
  + Key words or short phrases might include loss, death, sadness, anger and other feelings.
* So, what type of events can trigger feelings of grief?
  + Grief is the emotional suffering you feel when something or someone you love is taken away.
  + Grief can be triggered by the loss of a loved one and other life events such as, divorce, loss of a championship, loss of a job, a breakup, feeling left out, bullying and cyberbullying, moving, changing schools, etc.
* How would you describe the feelings a person experiences while grieving?
  + Possible Students Answers - Sadness, disbelief, shock, anger, frustration, etc.
  + Use the Feelings Index for additional support.
* Experiencing grief and loss is usually accompanied with strong feelings. Strong feelings (Level 3) or feelings are when we have difficulty controlling or regulating the emotion. *Small feelings* (Level 1) are still important feelings, but we still feel in control of our thoughts and actions.
* **Overwhelming Feelings** - hang around for a long time, change the way we feel and behave, and may stop us from doing what we enjoy.
  + You might notice some of these signs in yourself or other people: Withdrawing from friends, feeling depressed, not able to concentrate, lashing out at people, having anxiety, doing poorly in school, not feeling yourself, giving possessions away, not caring about their appearance, posting concerning statements on social media platforms, etc.
  + We always reach out to a trusted adult when you recognize overwhelming feelings in yourself or others, threats or actions that could hurt or injure themselves or someone else. You should also reach out to a trusted adult if your everyday feelings or big emotions need help or support.
  + **Remember - URGENT warning signs that are observable changes, behaviors or statements that directly or indirectly signal an individual is contemplating suicide or violence towards others (**[**Wisconsin, Lesson 2**](https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sspw/pdf/spcurriculumgrades7-12.pdf)**). If notice, see, hear, or recognize these URGENT warning signs you must talk with a trusted adult right away, call 911, and seek immediate help from a mental health provider:**
    - Someone is threatening to hurt or kill themselves.
    - Someone is looking for ways to kill themselves: seeking access to pills, weapons, or other means.
    - Someone is talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide in a way that is not “typical” for them.
* FACTS
  + Feelings, actions, changes, threats mean you should ACT
  + Acknowledge the concern
  + Care – show the person you care about them.
  + Tell a mental health resource including 911, 988, 741741 and/or mental health professionals.
    - Remember urgent signs means reach out to 911 or 988 or 741741
* Discussion – Recognizing feelings: Sadness and depression.
  + There is a difference between sadness and depression. If a person is experiencing overwhelming feelings, you might recognize their behavior has changed. They are not bouncing back and resuming their daily routines within a short time after a difficult event.
  + Sadness is usually triggered by a difficult, stressful, hurtful, challenging, or disappointing event, experience, or situation.
  + Depression does not necessarily require a stressful event or situation, a loss, or a change of circumstance as a trigger.
  + Someone who is feeling sad might cry for a while, spend some time alone, then get back to their routine lives within a short time. Someone diagnosed with clinical depression will have symptoms like loss of interest in activities, withdrawal from others, difficulty sleeping, or a drastic change in appetite that lasts for two weeks or more.
  + Any time you recognize overwhelming feelings you should reach out to a trusted adult and a health professional. Your role is to recognize the signs. You are not expected to diagnose or determine if it is sadness or depression. Do your part to support mental health by recognizing, reaching out and using resources.
    - Possible Video Resource: [6 Differences Between Sadness and Depression](https://youtu.be/tNwRNmFT7-4)
* Additional information on grief and loss (if needed)
  + There are 5 categories of feelings associated with grief that have been identified by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross ([NIH, 2023](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK507885/)) that we will be learning. It is important to know these stages because they are common reactions to grief. Knowing these types of feelings associated with grief can support a person when they are experiencing grief and prepare them for these common feelings associated with grief. These feelings are normal and common reactions to loss. The intensity, duration, and swiftly changing feelings and moods might be a surprise or give you concern, but these feelings are appropriate and will help you come to terms with the loss. It takes time to fully absorb the impact of a major loss. You never stop missing someone you love, but the pain eases over time and allows you to keep going.
  + Denial is a common defense mechanism used to protect oneself from the initial shock. An example of a denial statement is:
  + “This can’t be happening to me!”
  + Anger is a common emotion associated with grief. An example of an anger statement is:
  + “*Why* is this happening? Who is to blame?”
  + Bargaining typically happens as the person experiencing grief is seeking some measure of control over the loss. An example of a bargaining statement is:
  + “Make this not happen, and in return I will \_\_\_\_.”
  + Depression is perhaps the most immediately understandable of Kubler-Ross's stages, and people going through grief experience it with unsurprising symptoms such as sadness and fatigue. An example of a depression statement is:
  + “I'm too sad to do anything.”
  + Acceptance describes recognizing the reality of the difficult situation while no longer protesting or struggling against it. An example of an acceptance statement is:
  + “I'm at peace with what happened.”

Activity 2: How Can I Help?

* How would you help if you recognized someone experiencing grief or loss?
  + We can recognize, reach out and use our resources when experiencing grief/loss. We can also use the same steps to support those around us.
* What are other ways I could help someone living with grief?
  + Be supportive and help express their feelings if they would like.
* Take care of all aspects of your health and wellness by using activities that support ME.
  + Acceptance & patience
  + Seek outside help if needed from a trusted adult or mental health resource.
  + Remember when we notice FACTs we need to ACT. Stigma about behavioral health (mental health and substance use) is a barrier that prevents someone from taking action to seek help or help others.
* What are resources and trusted adults you can turn to when needed? Guide students to write the names of those people in Attachment 9.1.
  + Possible answers:
    - SAMHSA’s National Helpline, 1-800-662-HELP (4357)
    - Send your zip code via text message: 435748 (HELP4U)
    - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255)
    - 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
    - School Counselor
    - Therapist
    - Psychiatrist
    - Psychologist
* To learn more about grief:
  + <https://good-grief.org/resources/>
  + [*https://www.michigan.gov/mdcs/-/media/Project/Websites/mdcs/ESP/griefloss.pdf*](https://www.michigan.gov/mdcs/-/media/Project/Websites/mdcs/ESP/griefloss.pdf)
* Complete Attachment 9.2 – How Can I Help? Sharing a Condolence Message
  + Directions: Read the scenario below then create a message of condolence to show empathy and support. Your message must be at least 3 sentences long.
  + Share Table 1 in Attachment 9.2 for tips showing care and empathy. Remind students they can provide support in messages that might be sent via text, a card or a note. They can also help out with responsibilities like a meal or helping with chores. Follow up and reach out in a couple of weeks just to say hello and check in. Remember an act of kindness and caring is helpful and appreciated.

Closure:

* Today we’ve learned about grief and loss. Remember if you recognize someone who needs support and assistance you can reach out and show you care. You can also reach out and use resource to support ME health.
* **Lesson Resources:** *These are additional materials outside of the Behavioral HELP Mental Emotional Health (MEH) Curriculum that provide information that supports the development or implementation of the lesson.* 
  + [*https://www.durhamtech.edu/sites/default/files/media-files/sigs/difference-between-depression-sadness.pdf*](https://www.durhamtech.edu/sites/default/files/media-files/sigs/difference-between-depression-sadness.pdf)
  + [*https://www.helpguide.org/articles/grief/coping-with-grief-and-loss.htm#:~:text=It's%20the%20emotional%20suffering%20you,%2C%20guilt%2C%20and%20profound%20sadness*](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/grief/coping-with-grief-and-loss.htm#:~:text=It's%20the%20emotional%20suffering%20you,%2C%20guilt%2C%20and%20profound%20sadness)*.*
  + [*https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK507885/*](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK507885/)
  + [*https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/docs/Script-Mindful-Breathing.pdf*](https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/docs/Script-Mindful-Breathing.pdf)
  + [*https://www.everplans.com/articles/how-to-express-sympathy-what-to-say-and-what-not-to-say*](https://www.everplans.com/articles/how-to-express-sympathy-what-to-say-and-what-not-to-say)

Attachment 9.1: Guided Notes for Grief

1. How would you define grief or loss?
2. List three examples of events could prompt feelings of grief or loss?
3. List or describe three feelings a person goes through when they experience grief or loss.
4. Describe the signs that grief/loss are becoming overwhelming feelings.
5. Describe how is grief different from depression.
6. List resources you can reach out to when experiencing grief or loss.

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| **Trusted Adults** | **Mental Health Professionals or Resources** |
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1. How could you support someone experiencing grief or loss?

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Attachment 9.2: How Can I Help? Writing a Condolence Note

**Directions:** Read the scenario below then create a message of condolence to show empathy and support. Your message must be at least 3 sentences long.

*Scenario.* Your friend just found out that their grandparent passed away. Your friend was very close with them and is devastated by this news. What will you say and/or do to support Jessica during this difficult time?

* Remember your note should include:
  + Reach out and share how you are feeling
  + Tell them you care
  + Offer to help and support

*Resource: What should I say?*

We may not know what to say or worry about saying the wrong thing when someone we care about has just suffered a loss. It is better to say something, than nothing at all. Here is a list that could be helpful guide to show empathy with words that are caring and supportive.

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| **What NOT to say:** | **What you SHOULD say:** |
| “I know how you feel.” | “I’m so sorry to hear that…” |
| “They are in a better place.” | “You are in my thoughts….” |
| “They are at peace now.” | “We will miss them because they touched so many lives.” |
| “Put this behind you and hurry up to put this behind you.” | “What I am feeling right now is hard to put into words.” |
| “Call if you need anything.” | “They were such a (good, creative, fun) person, and I’m so sorry.” |
| Any statements with “You should” or “You will” |  |
| “It’s not a big deal, you’re fine.” |  |

\*You can also provide support in messages that might be sent via text, a card or a note. You can also help out with responsibilities like a meal or helping with chores.

\*You can also reach out in a couple of weeks just to say hello and check in.

\*An act of kindness and caring is appreciated.

**My Message**