**Lesson 6: Grief**

**Overview:** This lesson will examine grief and help students understand the grieving process. This includes acknowledging and understanding that the emotions and feelings one experiences are a natural and healthy part of the healing process. The lesson shares strategies to recognize and support someone who might be experiencing grief.

National Health Education Standards

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

Standard 4: Students demonstrate effective interpersonal communication skills to enhance health.

Healthy Behavior Outcome (HBO):

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| **HBO 2** | Engage in activities that are mentally and emotionally healthy. |

**Lesson Objectives –** Students will be able to:

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| **Objective** | **Assessments** |
| 1. Summarize feelings and emotions associated with loss and grief. | Attachment 6.1 – Grief and Loss Guided Notes |
| 1. Identify health-enhancing activities and strategies to cope with grief or loss. | Attachment 6.1 – Grief and Loss Guided Notes |
| 1. Summarize the benefits of talking with trusted adults about feelings. | Attachment 6.1 – Grief and Loss Guided Notes |
| 1. Recognize signs that require the support of professional mental and emotional health services | Attachment 6.1 – Grief and Loss Guided Notes |
| 1. Communicate the need for help or support with a resource that supports ME health. | Attachment 6.2 – Coping with Grief and Loss Activity |
| 1. Demonstrate how to communicate empathy and support for others. | Attachment 6.2 – Coping with Grief and Loss Activity |

Additional Information:

This lesson might evoke feelings and emotions about situations where your students have experienced grief and loss. Please provide a safe and supportive environment where you encourage your students to be supportive of each other and seek support if needed. Describe specific procedures and processes if students need to use a strategy or resource during the lesson. Reach out to your school’s support system to be sure they are aware of the lesson topic.

Introduction:

* Share Slide 1 or pictures of someone grieving. Ask students if they can recognize the emotion.
* Grief is the emotional response to any type of loss, not limited to death. Individuals experience a wide range of feelings and reactions when dealing with various forms of loss. Processing grief involves acknowledging and understanding these emotions while recognizing that experiencing them is a natural and healthy part of the healing process.
* Reiterate the classroom expectations for a safe supportive environment. Share the school resources that can support students who experience difficult emotions and feelings during this lesson. Also, share that students can use their strategies and resources during the lesson and throughout the school day.

Teaching Steps:

Activity 1: What are grief and loss? How do we feel when experiencing grief and loss?

* Go to the Feelings Index Choose an emotion that might be connected to grief or loss. Red, blue, and yellow have feelings that could be associated with someone feeling grief or loss.
* Review emotions and feelings (Review Lesson 1.1 or 6.1 to describe feelings.)
* Emotions come and go.
  + Emotions have different levels of intensity – mild, intense, or anywhere in between. We use the scale of 1, 2, or 3 to rate the intensity. Level 3 emotions are big; they require us to reach out and use our resources to think and act in healthy ways.
  + There are no good or bad emotions, but there are healthy and unhealthy ways to express them.
  + Feelings are generated from our thoughts about emotions. Feelings are expressed consciously from our upstairs brain. “I feel sad.” Feelings and emotions are connected; emotions are needed for feelings.
  + We can use our tools in Lesson 1 to describe our feelings. I feel \_\_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
  + Feelings associated with grief and loss can be intense.
* Grief and Loss
  + Ask: “Are grief and loss ONLY associated with death?  What are some other examples of losses?”
    - Loss can apply to many different things. Some examples: loss of a relationship with a significant other in a relationship; loss of a job; loss of game; etc.
    - Explain: “When someone experiences a loss, especially when it involves someone or something they care deeply about, strong emotions and feelings can accompany it.
    - 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.
    - Feelings and emotions associated with the grief or loss change over time; so does the intensity of those feelings. It is important to recognize when these feelings are present or persist.

Activity 2: Coping with grief and loss

* Coping – dealing with difficult changes, concerns, and conflicts in your life in a healthy manner.
* Mourning – the act of showing sorrow or grief. Mourning includes talking about the person, experiencing the pain of the loss, and searching for meaning.
  + What are emotions, feelings, actions, and/or signs associated with grief and loss? Use the Feelings Index.
* Common reactions to death

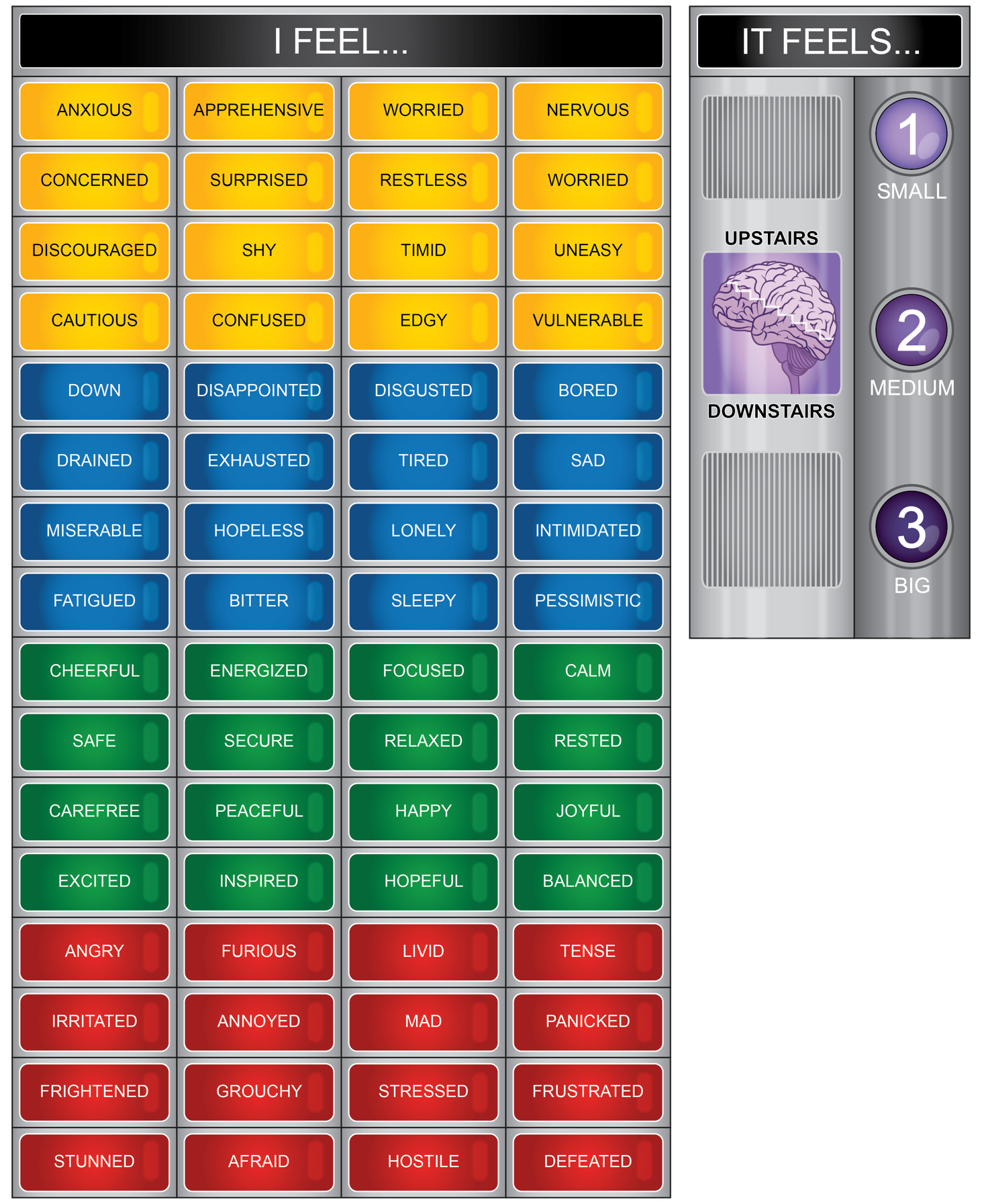
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| Emotional | Physical | Behavioral |
| * Shock and numbness * Sadness * Anger * Depression * Guilt * Fear * Special emotional days | * Fatigue or weakness * Trouble breathing * Dry mouth * Hallucinations * Physical signs of grief: * Crying and sighing * Aches and pains * Sleep disturbances * Headaches * Lethargy * Reduced appetite * Stomach upset | * Crying at random and unexpected times * Withdrawing from others * Treasuring or avoiding mementos of the deceased * Acting like a younger age * Hostility and aggression, especially in children who do not have other means of expressing their anger and frustration * Loss of appetite * Insomnia * Dreams or nightmares |

* Grieving is a common and natural reaction to any loss that brings on strong emotions. Acknowledging a loss is one way to help begin the healing process.
* Expressing grief:
  + The grieving process can help people accept the loss and start to heal.
* The Grieving Process (Kübler-Ross)
  + Not everyone goes through each stage, and the order may be different for each person.Denial and isolation: It may be difficult to believe the loss has occurred.
  + Anger: The person uses anger because they feel powerless and unfairly deprived.
  + Bargaining: As the reality of the loss sets in, the person may promise to change if what was lost can be returned.
  + Sadness: Beyond the feelings of sadness, feelings of isolation, alienation, and hopelessness may occur.
  + Acceptance: The person faces the reality of the loss and experiences closure (the acceptance of loss).
* Sadness versus Depression
  + Everyone feels sad sometimes. You may feel sad for different reasons. You may have experienced major life changes or disappointing events. ([CDC, 2023](https://www.cdc.gov/howrightnow/emotion/sadness/index.html))
    - Sadness is usually triggered by a difficult, stressful, hurtful, challenging, or disappointing event, experience, or situation.
  + Being sad is a normal reaction in difficult times. But usually, the sadness goes away. When a sad mood lasts for 2 weeks or more and interferes with normal, everyday functioning, you may be depressed.
  + Depression does not necessarily require a stressful event or situation, a loss, or a change of circumstance as a trigger. Symptoms of depression include:
    - Feeling sad, empty, or hopeless often or all the time
    - Not wanting to do activities that used to be fun
    - Weight gain or loss, or changes in appetite
    - Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, or sleeping too much
    - Feeling irritable‚ easily frustrated‚ or restless
    - Lack of energy or feeling tired
    - Feeling worthless or overly guilty
    - Trouble concentrating, remembering things, or making decisions
    - Thinking about suicide or hurting yourself
  + If you notice or recognize someone who might be feeling long periods of sadness or overwhelming feelings, it is OK to ask them how they are feeling. You can also ask them if they would like some help or support (refer to Lesson 5).
  + What could you do if you are feeling sadness or experiencing grief and loss?
  + **Acknowledge what’s happening.** It’s OK to *not* feel OK. If you are feeling sad, know that you are not alone.
  + **Take care of yourself.** Eat well, exercise, and rest. Take time for yourself. Acknowledge your successes. You are doing the best you can.
  + **Be mindful of how you’re feeling.** While doing an activity you enjoy, focus on the here-and-now. Notice how each part of an activity gives you satisfaction, hope, joy, or stress reduction. This can be as simple as staying present while you are making dinner and enjoying each step in that process.
  + **Maintain connections with others.** Reach out to people you want to connect with, like your friends and family.
  + **Get help from a professional, especially if your sadness does not go away.**  
    If you think you may be depressed, the first step to seeking treatment is to talk to a health care provider. This is especially important if your symptoms are getting worse or affecting your daily activities. *Depression is not your fault*. Getting support helps you and your loved ones.
* What are resources that could support someone who is experiencing grief and loss?
  + Trusted adults, friends, health professionals, and resources.
  + Friends who are empathetic, supportive, and caring in a nonjudgmental manner.
* How can I help? What can I do if I recognize someone is experiencing grief and loss?
  + Show empathy and support:
    - Be present. Just be available to listen, talk, or do activities.
    - Help the person to recall happy, positive memories.
    - Be a sympathetic listener and use silence when appropriate. Sometimes just nodding your head shows that you understand what the person is saying.
    - Don’t rush the grieving process or attempt to resolve the person’s grief in one day.
  + Offer additional help and support from a resource, especially if the person asks for help. (It is OK to ask the person if they feel like they need someone to talk with or help them.)

Closure:

* What is grief?
* What are the important tips to remember about grief and loss?
* If you recognize or notice you or your friend needs support, be supportive by reaching out.
  + **Recognize** the emotions, feelings, and behaviors.
  + **Reach out** by being supportive and demonstrating empathy.
  + Use **resources** that support ME health.

Attachment 6.1: Feelings Index



Attachment 6.2: Grief & Loss Guided Notes

Match the definition with the term.

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| \_\_\_\_\_\_1. Grief | 1. Dealing with difficult changes, concerns, and conflicts in your life in a healthy manner |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_2. Loss | 1. The act of showing sorrow or grief |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_3. Emotions | 1. Strategies used to reduce or manage internal or external feelings |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_4. Feelings | 1. Sensations in our body that we experience subconsciously in our downstairs brain |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_5. Coping | 1. Generated from our thoughts and emotions and expressed consciously from our upstairs brain |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_6. Mourning | 1. The emotional response to any type of loss, not limited to death alone |

1. List two emotions or behaviors you could recognize when someone is grieving a loss.
2. How can you help if someone is grieving a loss?
3. List a resource you could reach out to for someone who is experiencing grief or loss.



Attachment 6.3a: Coping with Grief and Loss Activity

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| **COPING WITH LOSS AND GRIEF** | |
| Most people associate grief and loss with situations that are related to the death of a loved one. However, many people experience situations of loss and feelings of grief that may be due to a range of life experiences and situations. Examples of significant family changes that can trigger feelings of loss and grief include a parent leaving home, divorce/separation, moving, changing schools, illness of a loved one, a parent or other family member in jail, a new sibling, living in a foster home, homelessness, etc. | |
| **READ**: *Choose ONE of the articles in Attachment 6.3b, then respond to the prompts.* | |
| My Brother’s Death Changed Our Family Forever | * How did Hash’im’s death affect Sophia and the rest of Sophia’s family? * Did the fact that Hash’im’s death came unexpectedly, violently, and at a young age affect the impact of his death on his family? Explain. * Sophia says at the end of the article that, four years after her brother’s death, she has learned to forgive his killer. How do you think she or anyone who has lost a loved one to violence could come to this position? Do you think you should try to forgive those who perpetrate wrongs or violence on us? Why or why not? |
| After My Parents Divorced, My Childhood Was No Longer Mine.  It Belonged to Them. | * Leigh-Ann states, “Choice is met with consequences.” What are some choices she made, and what were the consequences of those choices?  Were they positive and/or negative? Explain. * Summarize the impact of Leigh-Ann’s parents’ divorce compared to her future life she looks forward to after marriage. |
| Where Do the Sparrows Go When They Die? | * Why do you think Tommy didn’t want to see Casey when she found out he was sick?  What do you think changed Tommy’s mind? * How do you think Tommy’s illness and death affected those around him? |

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| **WRITE** *Review* [*Helpful/Unhelpful Traits for Supporting a Griever*](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1dwWUoULVkqaJA-5a4fC4gcz0ByD1LnPsRmw8CBljrmE/edit?usp=sharing)*, then choose* ***ONE*** *of the tasks to complete and turn in.* | | |
| **Sympathy Card**  Write a sympathy card to someone who is experiencing grief or has recently experienced a loss. | **Conversation**  Write dialogue showing support to someone who is experiencing grief or has recently experienced a loss. | **My Grieving Journal**  Write a journal entry or reflection related to a loss and/or grief you have experienced. (This will be turned in.) |



Attachment 6.4b: Coping with Grief and Loss Activity

Story 1: *My Brother’s Death Changed our Family Forever* by Sophia Mostella ([LINK](https://youthtoday.org/2001/02/a-family-changed-forever/))

Hash’im died on a Monday four years ago. He had just turned 20 a week before and he was taking the bus home from the DMV where he’d been applying for his driver’s license. A 16-year-old boy and four of his friends approached Hash’im on the bus and told him to give up his silver chain and pager. My brother refused, and the boy shot him in the face.

I was 11 at the time. I was watching TV at home when the phone rang and my mom picked up. After she hung up, she and my dad got in the car and said they were going somewhere. Two hours later, they came home. My dad was holding my mom. She looked sick. I thought it was something with my mom’s health.

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| My dad called my brother Jason from his room and he made us sit down at the table.  "What’s going on?" I kept asking. I started to worry because nobody answered.  "Where’s Elon?" I asked. Elon is my second oldest brother. "Where’s Hash’im?"  My dad looked sick. His face was red and he was stuttering.  "Just tell them, Louis," my mom said.  "Hash’im was … uh … on the bus … and … He was shot and he’s uh … dead." |  |

Elon came home from a doctor’s appointment at 6 p.m. He didn’t know yet. When my mom told him, he yelled at her, "You’re lying!" He broke down in a flood of tears and it was the saddest thing to see my mom holding him, crying for the first time since Hash’im died. In my family we usually don’t express emotions, especially sadness. It was one of the most tender moments ever shared in my family, and one of the most heartbreaking.

Hash’im’s death affected me I guess, but I’m still not sure exactly how. I tried to keep my feelings to myself and not think about it. I didn’t cry like people say you should, but I’m not discouraging it either. I just don’t think crying helps me personally. It just makes me feel worse. Writing this article has helped me be a little bit more open with my feelings. I also thought this could help all the people who lose someone every day, especially in this city.

He used to take care of me

What was Hash’im like? He was kind of quiet. I wasn’t as close to him as I was to Elon. He was my half-brother and a lot older, so he would take care of us all summer when my mom went to work. He’d feed us and watch us when we went out to play. He didn’t really get a chance to be a kid himself because he had to take care of us, and he did a great job of it too.

As quiet as he was, you knew that there was always something that disturbed him. He never talked about it, but maybe it had something to do with his father dying in a violent way when he was very young. He never got a chance to really get to know the man who looked so much like him. My mom said they were a lot alike in other ways.

He wasn’t perfect, and he didn’t always do the right thing. But he was my big brother, my protector and he didn’t deserve to die. I most regret not being able to tell him how much he meant to me and how much I always loved him and looked up to him.

When Hash’im was 16, he started to rebel and get into trouble with his friends. He was in and out of juvenile hall, and later jail. He had just gotten out of jail a month before he was killed. He was trying to get his life together, going to job interviews and getting his driver’s license. He never made promises before that he would do better, but he started saying it to my mom and really trying. He didn’t go out with his old friends, didn’t drink, and he stopped smoking. He would stay in the house all day when he wasn’t looking for a job

We’re now closer as a family

It was really hectic after Hash’im died. My mom couldn’t get out of bed. She was in the house all day and she wouldn’t eat. She was up walking all night. I couldn’t sleep either for about a month. I could hear her crying some nights. Everybody kept bringing food over. I can’t understand why they bring food when somebody dies, because you can’t eat. I’d try to make my mom eat some soup.

Every night we’d be in a circle and pray together—me, my dad, my older brothers, my mom and cousin. One night my dad was praying and I saw drops of water falling. I thought, "What was that?" It was my father crying, even though Hash’im wasn’t his son. It was the first time I saw him cry.

Hash’im’s death brought us closer as a family. We never hugged before, but now we do sometimes. My dad started saying, "I love you" (he says it once a year). Also, every night when my dad goes to work he kisses my mom on the cheek. Ewww, I thought at first but now I kind of understand because you never know if you may not see someone you love again.

Hash’im’s death made me a little bit more open and nice to people. My mom’s attitude is that if we have something, even it’s not a lot, we have to share it with somebody who doesn’t. They used to have to make me share, but now I kind of like giving to people.

I’m also a lot more forgiving. I’m forgiving even to the guy who did it. I just can’t believe that anyone can just shoot a person and not know what the consequences will be—if you shoot someone in the face, they die! And you go to jail. Even if he didn’t care, that shows you have to be crazy. I can’t help but assume the guy had some problems. I am in no way justifying what he did or making excuses for him or his actions. I can’t imagine wanting to hurt anyone just for a stupid chain and a pager. Was that worth my brother’s life?

Story 2: *After my parents’ divorced, my childhood was no longer mine. It belonged to them.* By Leigh-Ann Smith ([LINK](https://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/facts-and-arguments/after-my-parents-divorced-my-childhood-was-no-longer-mine-it-belonged-to-them/article12358944/))

I often had more than one birthday party as a kid. This sounds cool, but it wasn't all it was cracked up to be. I am a child of divorce. My childhood wasn't mine. It belonged to my parents.

I lost myself in every effort to appease each side of my family. Shuffling alone between two separate lives meant that I was on the fringe of each family, never an insider. The people I loved most were never in the same room together, and many of them barely even knew each other existed. I missed out on events and celebrations because I would have to spend time with my other family.

Children of divorce learn to cope with these inconsistencies and instability, but by the age of 10, I no longer wanted to deal with it. I didn't want to live in two different homes with two different bedrooms, different clothes, different toys, different friends and different rules. I was a 10-year-old caught between a rock and a hard place.

So one day I told my dad that I didn't want to visit any more. It was a courageous and ignorant act of defiance. We will never know if it was the right decision or not, but at that time neither one of my parents possessed the objectivity or emotional stability it would have taken to unearth a more positive solution. And so that was the way things went.

The power struggle that had lain dormant between my parents erupted again, and this time it was directed at me. This time, I was responsible for the discord. In one house, I was blamed; in the other, I was a victim. There were no more multiple birthday parties. Instead, there was stability and consistency in one house, anger and avoidance in the other.

Choice is met with consequences, and as time went on, I fell out of touch with my dad's family. It's hard to stay in touch with people connected to someone we have pushed away. Cousins I used to play with were erased from my life. We never visited again. Was that because it's best to keep severed ties cut? Or was it my punishment for being a horrible child? All I knew was silence and loss.

When I was in my early teens, my mom remarried and I met new cousins. I learned new Christmas traditions and sat with new kids at the dinner table. Instead of being ushered from one family to the other, life settled down. Even though I heard from my dad only once or twice a year, life was fairly stable. But that changed again when my mom and step dad split up during my first year of university.

I tried to keep in touch with family members every time I went home for the holidays. Again, I tried to please everyone while anxiety flooded my thoughts. Whom should I spend Christmas Eve with? Should I visit with this family or that one? Will they be offended if I don't make time to see them? Will they be offended if I don't bring presents?

I would have loved to have everyone drop by and visit me, but that would not have gone over very well at my mom's house. Instead, I diligently visited everybody on my own, carrying thoughtful little presents I bought on my student budget. I would make small talk and feel like an outsider. I was always the awkward guest, never the welcoming host.

For 10 years after I graduated from university, I lived away from home. Not a single family member from any one of my four families (save for my mom) came to visit, called or even let me know when they flew through town. Yet, every time I went home for Christmas, I scheduled visits, bought presents and made time to see as many people as I could. I did this to make them feel good. Not me.

Two years ago, I moved back home and now I live less than a day's drive away from all four of my families, their new spouses and young kids. We are all connected on Facebook, but my mom is still the only person who ever calls or visits.

When I hear that a family member passed through town but didn't call, it saddens me, but I realize that they don't call because they don't really know me. To them, I was never a fixture. I was only ever around a few Christmases here and there.

Although they were my family, I was never theirs. They don't know that they are just one of several people spread across four different families that I wasn't able to keep in touch with.

Sometimes, divorce spreads us too thin to make any real, lasting family connections.

This summer, I will marry into a Maritime family. I'm trying not to have too many expectations (I know no family is perfect), but my soon-to-be husband is the king at keeping in touch with people. He is persistent, charismatic, forgiving and loyal. He is teaching me what family means. Together, we will teach our kids to reach out to one another with compassion and to stick by each other through times of darkness.

I'm looking forward to joy, friendship and hospitality with my new family, and I plan to do everything I can to stay married.

Story 3: *Where do sparrows go when they die?* By Casey Kokoska

A question I often asked myself as a child was, "where do the sparrows go when they die?" I didn't know the answer then and I still wonder about it. Now I see a dead bird silenced by some evil force, and I know he didn't die. Something killed him: the elements took him away, a lost soul in the night.

When I was six, my best friend was a boy on my street. We used to play in my sandbox, talking of things long forgotten by grown-ups -- like never growing up, or the monsters under our beds and in dark closets. His name was Tommy, but I called him Sparrow because he was small for his age. It’s ironic to think of that now because he died too.

I remember the day I found out Tommy was dying. I waited in the sandbox for him, half-heartedly building the castle we began the day before. Without Tommy I was only half, so I waited for him for what seemed like forever, and it began to rain. Then I heard a distant ring from the house. About 10 min later my mother came out, sheltered by her umbrella, but her face was wet just the same. We walked together to the house. Just before we entered, I turned and watched the rain beat down the sandcastle Tommy and I built.

Once I was inside and had a cup of hot chocolate in my belly, my mother called me to the table. She put her hands on mine. They were shaking. I immediately felt it: something had happened to Tommy. She said doctors had performed some tests a while back, and something showed up wrong. That something was leukemia. I didn't know what it was and I looked at my mother with confused eyes, but with knowing and a heavy heart. She said that people who had what Tommy got -- no: what got Tommy -- had to go away. I didn't want him to go away. I wanted him to stay, stay with me.

The next day I had to see Tommy. I had to see if it was all true, so I had the bus driver drop me off at his house instead of mine. When I reached the door, Tommy's mom said he didn't want to see me. She had no idea how easily she could hurt a little girl. She broke my heart like a piece of cheap glass. I ran home in tears. After I returned home, Tommy called. He said to meet him at the sandbox after our parents went to bed, so I did.

He didn't look any different, maybe a little paler, but it was Tommy. He did want to see me. We talked to those subjects incomprehensible to adults, and all the while we rebuilt our sandcastle. Tommy said we could live in one just like it and never grow up. I believed him wholeheartedly. There we feel asleep, engulfed in true friendship, surrounded by warm sand and watched by our sandcastle.

I woke up just before dawn. Our sandbox was like a desolate island surrounded by a sea of grass, interrupted only by the back patio and the street. A child's imagination is never-ending. The dew gave the imaginary sea a reflective shimmer, and I remember reaching out to touch the dew to see if it would make the make- believe water ripple, but it didn't. I turned around, and Tommy jolted me into reality. He was already awake, staring at the sand castle. I joined him, and there we sat, locked in the awesome magic the sand castle held for two small children.

Tommy broke the silence. "I'm going to the castle now."

We moved like robots, as if we knew what we were doing. I guess in some small way we did. "I'm going to the castle now. Come visit, I'll be lonely." I promised him with all my heart that I would. Then he closed his eyes, and then my Sparrow flew away to where I knew at that moment all the other sparrows went when they died. And there he left me, holding a soulless, crippled bird in my arms.

I went back to Tommy's grave 20 years later and placed a small toy castle on it. On the castle I had engraved, "To Tommy, my Sparrow. I'll come to our castle someday, forever."

When I'm ready, I'll go back to the place where our sandbox was and imagine our sandcastle. Then my soul, like Tommy's, will turn into a sparrow and will fly back to the castle, and to Tommy, and to all the other little lost sparrows. A six-year- old again, who will never grow up.

Attachment 6.4c: Helpful/Unhelpful Traits for Supporting a Griever

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| Helpful | Unhelpful |
| * Supportive, but not trying to fix the person * About feelings * Non active, not telling anyone what to do * Admitting he/she can't make it better * Not asking for something or someone to change their feelings * Not time limited * Able to sit and tolerate silence and tears * Able to sit and listen and listen and listen * Interested in the story the griever tells | * They want to fix the loss * They are about our discomfort * They are directive in nature * They rationalize or try to explain loss * They may be judgmental * Not about the griever * May minimize the loss * May compare or contrast the loss * Put a timeline on loss and grief * May share their own loss instead of listening to mine at this time (there is time for that in the future, just not right now). |

Source: <http://www.griefspeaks.com/id40.html>

A blue face with a flower on it

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