




2012-09-29

Supporting Children's Grief after a Death: A Guide for School Psychologists

Catherine Alexandra Bergeson
Brigham Young University - Provo

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Counseling Psychology Commons](#), and the [Special Education and Teaching Commons](#)

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Bergeson, Catherine Alexandra, "Supporting Children's Grief after a Death: A Guide for School Psychologists" (2012). *All Theses and Dissertations*. 3387.
<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/3387>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Supporting Children's Grief After a Death:
A Guide for School Psychologists

Catherine A. Bergeson

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Educational Specialist in School Psychology

Melissa Allen Heath, Chair
Gordon Gibb
Beth Vaughan Cole

Department of Counseling, Psychology and Special Education

Brigham Young University

December 2012

Copyright © 2012 Catherine A. Bergeson

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

Supporting Children's Grief After a Death: A Guide for School Psychologists

Catherine A. Bergeson

Department of Counseling Psychology and Special Education, BYU
Educational Specialist in School Psychology

The death of a loved one is a significant stressor for children. Most children are exposed to grief at an early age. Without necessary support and guidance, children are much more susceptible to negative emotional, cognitive, and developmental effects. Expressive therapies such as bibliotherapy are supposed to provide a safe and healthy outlet for children's grief. However, school psychologists have limited pre-service training and readily available resources to effectively address children's death-related grief. This study included a survey of school psychologists from the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) Crisis Management Group. Of the 431 potential members, 22% ($N=95$) responded to an online survey. Of these surveys, 89 were considered complete and representative of school psychologists experienced in working with grieving elementary school-aged children. Participants responded to questions regarding availability of, use of, and need for printed materials to support children's grief. Participants were also asked to share their ideas, activities, and children's picture books which supported children's grief. Based on survey responses, practical guidelines and a resource list of activities and grief-related materials were summarized to assist school psychologists in better supporting young children's adaptive coping skills following the death of a loved one.

Keywords: children's grief, death, bibliotherapy, lesson plans, teaching materials, elementary school support

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I can think of nothing more gratifying than the opportunity to delve into the topic of grief and bibliotherapy with such amazing and brilliant people. Melissa Allen Heath, PhD, has been not only an inspiring mentor and chair, but a supportive and encouraging friend. Her countless hours brainstorming and guidance have turned a once intimidating project into a pleasant and life-affecting experience. Her giving of time, snacks, and a listening ear has helped me to set my personal goals high in shaping the kind of person I would like to become. I would also like to thank Dr. Gordon Gibb and Dr. Beth Cole for their personality, perspective, and vision of how to make this research meaningful and applicable for all individuals in helping professions.

I am also greatly indebted to Stephanie Steele and the other staff members of The Sharing Place in Salt Lake City, Utah, for their eagerness to share grief-related activity ideas and materials. These valuable materials make up the majority of activity ideas that have been included as resources to compliment bibliotherapy implementation.

Having experienced death-related grief and loss as a child and attended The Sharing Place, I can personally attest to the great importance and effectiveness of grief therapy. The consistency of love and support provided by neighbors, friends, family, and those in helping professions lend strength and hope in an otherwise lonely and foreign experience.

I wouldn't be anywhere in life without my eclectic and loving family members, who have supported me unconditionally in all of my endeavors. Lastly, I hope to convey my greatest love and appreciation for my mom, whose courage, creativity, and optimism in the face of grief allowed me to see the potential for joy in life and the meaning of its lessons.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Children’s Grief.....	1
Supportive resources.....	2
Selection of resources	4
School-based support.....	5
Purpose of Study	5
Literature Review.....	7
Children’s Grief.....	7
Symptoms of children’s grief.....	8
School-based grief support	8
Bibliotherapy	10
The process of bibliotherapy.....	11
Use in supporting children’s grief.....	12
Manuals to Support Children’s Grief.....	13
Challenges in Providing School-Based Grief Support	14
Accessing materials	15
Funding school-based grief support.....	16
Working under time constraints.....	17
Statement of Problem	17
Research Questions.....	18
Method.....	19

Pilot Survey	19
Finalized Survey	20
Participants	22
Data Collection and Organization	22
Data Analysis	23
Results	25
Research Question 1	25
Research Question 2	28
Research Question 3	29
Discussion	31
Limitations	31
Implications for Practice	32
References	37
Appendix A: Pilot Survey	43
Appendix B: Finalized Survey	44
Appendix C: Grief Activity Ideas	45
Appendix D: Grief-Related Lesson Plans for Groups of Children	47

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	School Psychologists' Ratings: Importance of Including Specific Grief Support Topics/Content	26
Table 2	School Psychologists' Ratings: Need for Additional Information on Specific Grief Support Topics/Content	27
Table 3	Summary of Responses to Survey Question #3	28
Table 4	Children's Grief: List and Description of Recommended Children's Books	30

Introduction

The concepts of death, grief, and mourning are not new to individuals or society. These concepts have been the theme of religious works, poetry, art, folklore, and countless other outlets for thousands of years. However, no matter how familiar one might be on the subject of death, our direct encounters with death are personal, a harsh reality with far-reaching effects that are uniquely experienced. Upon reaching age sixteen, nearly a quarter of all children have encountered a significant stressor, often the death of a close friend or family member (Costello, Erkanli, Fairbank, & Angold, 2002, p. 99). Furthermore, prior to the age of 18, almost 4% of children in the U.S. (approximately 2.5 million) have experienced the death of a parent (Haine et al., 2008; Quin-Lee, 2009).

Children's Grief

Worden's *tasks of grief* provide an outline of how children grieve. He designated four basic tasks: (a) accepting that death is a reality, (b) experiencing the feelings and emotional pain associated with death and separation from the deceased, (c) adjusting to changes and an altered environment that no longer includes the deceased, and (d) finding ways to remember and memorialize the deceased (Worden, 1982, 1991, 1996). Since children grieve differently than adults on many levels, often the telling signs of inner turmoil can be overlooked or misattributed to other factors. Understanding symptomatic responses to grief and what to look for in different age groups is central to helping children cope on an individualized level and is key to effective support within the school system.

Children spend a large portion of their day in school. During their time in school, much more than academic learning takes place (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Osterman, 2000; Ross, Powell, & Elias, 2002). Children learn social and informational skills that are critical to

their development and adaptation across various environments. Faced with challenging circumstances (e.g., parents' divorce, bullying, death of a loved one, etc.), children seek support from peers and teachers (Heath & Sheen, 2005). As such, schools have the opportunity to provide social support that greatly enhances a child's resiliency and coping skills (Sprague & Walker, 2005).

Complications that come about in the process of grief not only affect a child emotionally, but academically, socially, and developmentally as well (Corr, 1996; Corr, Nabe, & Corr, 2003). Consistent throughout studies, about one-fifth of bereaved children show various behavioral and emotional symptoms that trigger referrals to a specialist. These symptoms include episodes of anger, characteristics of depression and anxiety, and arrested development in typical milestones (Cerel et al., 2006). However, when children are led through this journey by caring family members, teachers, and school support, their increased understanding and comfort with the realities of death improve the quality of life, in and out of school (Homedes, 1987). If given a safe environment in which they can express themselves and acquire facts in a sensitive manner, negative events, such as needing to cope with the death of a loved one, become positive learning experiences that prepare them for future challenges.

Supportive resources. Children require a unique approach to help them facilitate their grief experiences. Often play and other expressive therapies can be a natural way for them to channel and give voice to their wide range of feelings (St. Thomas & Johnson, 2007; Webb, 2010). Bibliotherapy, defined as using books/literature to foster growth or healing, can be an effective conduit for helping grieving children. Though a relatively newer field in the measurable sense, bibliotherapy has historically been put into casual practice through varied forms. The use of bibliotherapy in therapeutic settings is gaining popularity and is being put into more frequent

use by helping professionals (Jack & Ronan, 2008). Bibliotherapy can be implemented in individual and group settings to address a wide variety of topics ranging from bullying (Heath, Moulton, Dyches, Prater, & Brown, 2011), domestic violence, death of a pet, and grief in general (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1993; Sheen, Heath, Jones, Heaton, & Gstettenbauer, 2005).

Though more research on the measurable effects of bibliotherapy is needed, it is clear that grief that is not addressed properly can lead to significant negative results (Melhem, Moritz, Walker, Shear, & Brent, 2007). “Encounters with bereavement arising from the deaths of significant others influence a child’s subsequent development” (Carney, 2004, p. 308). Those that experience the trauma and stress of grief may become effectually trapped in those feelings if not given a way to release them. This anxiety and emotional instability can lead to serious emotional and psychological implications in the future if adequate support is not provided (Carney, 2010; Mireault & Bond, 1992; Saler & Skoinick, 1992; Wolfelt, 2002).

It is important to follow simple guidelines to effectively implement bibliotherapy in the classroom: (a) use a pre-reading plan—choose a book to meet specific circumstances or needs; (b) use guided reading—take time to let the message sink in through questions and pointing out important applicable principles; (c) have a post-reading discussion—open up to get feedback and talk openly about students’ perceptions; and (d) do a follow-up or problem-solving/reinforcement activity to preserve therapeutic effects (Berns, 2004; Jackson, 2006; Pardeck & Pardeck, 1993). Bibliotherapy is helpful in that those who participate are led through a journey of “identification, catharsis, and insight” (Berns, 2004, p. 326; Jackson, 2006, p. 41). They form connections with characters and circumstances, find release of tension or uncertainty, and are able to apply learned principles to their own personal experiences.

Selection of resources. Thankfully, with the plethora of resources currently available, school psychologists have a wide variety of grief-related treatment materials from which to choose (Johnson, 2004). There are fiction-based, child-friendly stories that gently talk about life and death, booklets that guide what others can do or not do to make the bereaved feel comfortable, medically-focused pamphlets on maladaptive symptoms, and workbooks of activities and ideas of discussion topics. With a click of a computer mouse or the aid of an experienced librarian, lists of these resources are easily viewed. Unfortunately, selecting from such a wide variety of resources may pose difficulties for school psychologists who want to assist.

Based on interviews, hands-on personal attempts, and syntheses of past research, it is clear that multiple options for accessing bibliotherapeutic tools may also lead to confusion, frustration, and increased expense. With such a vast array of resources, trying to select, procure, and utilize these materials is a daunting task for school psychologists. Though reference lists abound, it is rare to find useful recommendations and summaries of content. Additionally, school psychologists do not have a standardized rating system to help them identify the most helpful resources. If a desired resource is found, budget cuts and educational funding droughts can put a considerable strain on access. The lack of funding also prohibits many school psychologists from attending professional development workshops or extended training on how to apply and keep up to date on the latest in this ever-growing field. Immediately following a crisis situation in the schools, school psychologists do not have time to search through these countless resources, scramble for ideas, and then wait for materials to be shipped.

School-based support. Following the death of a parent, sibling, peer, or loved one, children eventually end back up in schools and are expected to find a way to grieve while getting “back into the swing of things” alongside their fellow students. As research suggests, all individuals, including children, grieve uniquely (Cohen & Mannarino, in press) and require a significant amount of support and care during this vulnerable time. However, studies and personal interviews show a consensus that formal training in preparing school psychologists to address grief is inadequate, and the detail and scope of grief-related curricula is limited at best (Dickinson, 2007; Dickinson & Field, 2002). This lack of guidance and instruction often creates feelings of uncertainty among school psychologists regarding how to help the grieving child and create a supportive elementary school environment in which a specific child or the entire classroom may foster healthy coping strategies. Other resources, such as journals, books, and the Internet, may be difficult to navigate and waste time and money.

Purpose of Study

To address children’s grief directly and effectively in the classroom’s natural setting, school psychologists need concise, quick-reference resources (Heath & Winters, 2010). Hence, the purpose of this study is to identify school psychologists’ specific needs in addressing elementary school children’s death-related grief. Considering these needs, basic guidelines for addressing grief are specified and a compendium of resources and activities are recommended to address aspects of children’s grief, specifically in school and classroom settings. Along with these resources, several lesson plans to be used in grief-related bibliotherapy are included in response to school psychologists’ needs.

In the following literature review, I will first discuss children's grief and symptoms, with an emphasis on the importance of addressing grief in schools. Next, I present and give an overview of the process of bibliotherapy and its benefits and application through a review of existing empirical literature on the subject. I then briefly review current manuals and printed resources that are available to school psychologists, their concerns in accessing and implementing the available resources successfully, and lastly, the statement of the problem.

Literature Review

The definition of grief is fairly well represented in the current literature. It often includes reference to bereavement. Some of the synonyms of “grief” include affliction, anguish, dolefulness, dolor, sorrow, heartache, heartbreak, and woe (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/grief>). “Grief is the constellation of internal thoughts and feelings we have when someone loved dies. Mourning is the outward expression of grief. Everyone grieves when someone loved dies, but if we are to heal, we must also mourn” (Wolfelt, p. 25). One thing to keep in mind is that “grief is not an illness” (Rowling, 2003) and should be addressed in an open and healthy manner.

Worden’s tasks of grief provide an outline of how children grieve. He identified four basic tasks: (a) accepting that death is a reality, (b) experiencing the feelings and emotional pain associated with death and separation from the deceased, (c) adjusting to changes and an altered environment that no longer includes the deceased, and (d) finding ways to remember and memorialize the deceased (Worden, 1982, 1991, 1996). These tasks need not be experienced sequentially or within a certain time frame and can even be revisited in reaction to other life experiences. Teachers and educators who are aware of these tasks will be better equipped to identify where children are in the grieving process and thus more accurately provide support and interventions.

Children’s Grief

As discussed above, cognitive reactions and “tasks” are an important part of the grieving process. Depending on the age and developmental maturity of the child, grief is manifested in a variety of physical, emotional, and mental symptoms. For purposes of this study, the grieving process of children ages 7–11 will be highlighted.

Symptoms of children's grief. Between the ages of 7–11, children become more capable of concrete and logical thinking. As opposed to younger children, who often do not understand the finality of death, older children begin to see death as an irreversible event, even though they may wish for it to be reversible. The concept of death may be viewed as punishment. They begin to ask for details of the death and other specific questions and become preoccupied with concern for the deceased physical body. Based on the responses of others, they look for social cues to see how they should or should not respond and to gain understanding about the concept of death. Other manifestations of grief symptoms in the classroom might include disturbed eating or sleeping patterns; acting out, including increased frustration, anger, aggression, and noncompliance; difficulty focusing attention, remembering, and learning new material; crying; and withdrawal from social interaction (The Dougy Center, n.d.).

School-based grief support. Children who attend schools come from all backgrounds and walks of life. Anything from family structure and involvement to what the child ate for breakfast on a particular morning may affect academic performance and the flow of the school day. Schools are a place to learn and ideally foster a safe environment to explore and integrate life skills with conceptual development. In some form, it is not unusual that death and loss will be encountered during the school year by one or multiple students. Topics that are not addressed appropriately in schools will be sought after and learned through another source, which may or may not provide the needed accuracy, sensitivity, or care of the student or the issue.

Complications that arise in the deluge of grief not only affect a child emotionally, but academically, socially, and developmentally as well (Corr, 1996; Corr, Nabe, & Corr, 2003). Studies have consistently found that about one-fifth of bereaved children show various significant behavioral and emotional symptoms which lead to a referral to a specialist. These

symptoms can include episodes of anger, characteristics of depression and anxiety, and arrested development in typical milestones (Cerel et al., 2006). In schools, differences between grieving children and their classmates become an especially highlighted rift and may lead to social and behavior problems (Hois, 2007). In relation to possible effects of death-related grief on students, a 1985 article by Van Eerdewegh says, “One particular symptom drew our specific attention: the widespread drop in school performance in all categories of bereaved children. This is probably a good barometer of inner turmoil within the child and the family unit. Potentially it may lead to rejection of school, underachievement and school dropout, though long term data have also shown the presence of an inverse reaction of over-achievement” (p. 191). Therefore, the responsibility to manage the distribution of information, support, and coping skills to grieving students falls on invested educators who are concerned with students’ overall well-being, in and out of school.

Studies show that there can be significant negative effects for children who do not have the support and opportunity to grieve in a healthy manner (Kirwin & Hamrin, 2005). Wolfelt (2002) warns, “If over time, children are not compassionately companioned through their complicated mourning journeys, they are at risk for behavioral and emotional problems” (p. 655). These emotional difficulties often include anxiety and depression (Mireault & Bond, 1992; Saler & Skoinick, 1992). In an article on death education for children Homedes states, “In my opinion, preparing young people for life includes preparing them for death” (1987, p. 34). “The ability to make peace with death improves the quality of life. It is an important subject that should not be avoided, but understood and accepted” (Homedes, 1987, p. 35).

Death and loss-related guidance on an as-needed basis provides support and healthy coping strategies that are essential for students’ progress. In the classroom and schools, death-

related literature used as a form of bibliotherapy can provide much of the structure and support to facilitate healthy grieving.

Bibliotherapy

Bibliotherapy is any use of printed materials to aid in a therapeutic process. It is effective in many age groups as a means to connect themed stories to real life experiences. Like many aspects of psychology, bibliotherapy is a relatively newer field in the sense of time-tested intervention and application. However, the therapeutic and instructive use of storytelling has been put into play for centuries by means of cultural myths and legends, fairy tales, and even ancient religious accounts (Moyers, 2006). Through the stories that have been passed down over generations, the reader/listener comes to identify key themes and apply time-transcending principles to personal experience (St. Thomas & Johnson, 2007). “Whatever the sources of trauma and grief, children have the ability to both comprehend and resolve life’s difficulties by playing out all parts of themselves and the story and searching for personal and collective truth” (St. Thomas & Johnson, 2007, p. 22).

Bibliotherapy can be implemented to address a wide variety of topics ranging from bullying, domestic violence, death of a pet, and grief in general (Sheen et al., 2005). Whatever the topic may be, “bibliotherapy involves a child reading about a character who successfully resolves a problem similar to the one the child is experiencing. Using reading material to help solve emotional problems and to promote mental health is bibliotherapy” (Jackson, 2006, p.13). A reader or child who might not normally be as open to expressing themselves freely is given an opportunity to relate passively with another. “The child, through reading, has the freedom to hold an internal dialogue in accordance with his unique life experience, initiated by the author’s narrative” (Jones, 2001, p.17). The child is able to take part in the progressive journey of the

character's emotional development, and is gently guided to find personal meaning to life's events.

The process of bibliotherapy. Most people can sit down and read about a topic without having any sort of psychological or emotional breakthrough. Some readers might bond or connect with the characters and feel a sympathetic emotional response. However, reading as a pastime is not the same as bibliotherapy under the guidance of a trained individual (Berns, 2004). For implementation in the classroom, the bibliotherapeutic process focuses on three essential elements: identification, catharsis, and insight (Berns, 2004, p. 326; Jackson, 2006, p. 41).

In identification, the student becomes aware of similarities between themselves and the character, even being able to identify with characters that are animals as long as they accurately represent human traits and responses. Once a sense of identification is reached through reading, the child is then brought to catharsis, or a release of tension. With less stress and emotional strain, the child can apply what is learned (insight) in a more objective way to his or her personal situation (Jackson, 2006).

In Jackson's *Bibliotherapy Revisited: Issues in Classroom Management*, she clearly outlines four steps in using bibliotherapy for the teacher (adapted from Jackson, 2006, p. 43).

1. *Pre-reading plan*: Choosing which books to use to address a specific topic or problem. This includes being aware of possible reactions from students affected by similar circumstances.
2. *Guided reading*: Taking time to pause, asking pre-determined questions, and pointing out key principles or inferences that students can apply.
3. *Post-reading discussion*: Getting students' feedback through questions and open-ended discussion, allowing students' unique interpretations as a guide.
4. *Follow-up problem-solving/reinforcement activity*: After reading the story with

children, it is important to extend the core message into a follow-up activity that encourages discussion and further emotional exploration. This helps children gain a deeper understanding of the topic and builds a connection between the story and their daily life. Stretching the story into practical application and helping children gain a deeper understanding is “the most crucial stage in the process because without such follow-up the process is merely a reading, without preserving any kind of therapeutic validity” (Berns, 2004, p. 325; Pardeck & Pardek, 2003). Through the use of correlating activities and hands-on projects, children are provided the opportunity to freely express themselves and find outlets to apply insights gained from the reading. These insights can then be generalized to different phases of the grieving process and consequently foster healthy means of coping, not only for their current difficulty but inoculation for future events.

Use in supporting children’s grief. As previously discussed, all people grieve, but that grief is manifested differently based on countless influences. For children especially, their comfort level and capacity to express their emotions verbally is limited by developmental and situational factors. New and tumultuous emotions ranging from helplessness, anxiety, sadness, anger, suppression of feelings, denial, loneliness, extreme sensitivity, fear, and moodiness experienced by grieving children can be distressing and destructive (Broadway, 2008). “They [children] become imprisoned in these feelings if they are not given the freedom to *work through* their grief” (Carney, 2004, p. 308). Honing their already active and creative propensities, hands-on therapies can be a particularly effective and cathartic means to help them work through the grieving process. “Children are open to the silent deeper truths of human survival. Interwoven in the matrix of nature, creativity, and magic, children form a total and believable relationship

between themselves, their life lessons and the process of making meaning out of these realities through ritual, play, and the free spontaneous use of art materials” (St. Thomas & Johnson, 2007, p. 13). Making the most of these instincts to play, interact through stories and activities, and discuss can lead quite naturally to constructive results.

In a 1995 article, Pehrsson and McMillen synthesized the potential positive effects of using bibliotherapy with children: development of one’s cultural/ethnic individuality and ethical attentiveness, increased appreciation and understanding of others’ situations and backgrounds, coping tactics in reaction to problems, greater self-awareness, and more generalizable empathy were noted as benefits. Bibliotherapy can also be a means of building self-esteem, emotional development, and social skills, and can reduce negative emotions such as anxiety, loneliness, and stress. Furthermore, the opportunity to tell one’s own story and be part of a discussion can validate and empower otherwise timid or less-expressive children.

Manuals to Support Children’s Grief

Most manuals and workbooks about children’s grief follow a similar format: brief discussion of grief and its symptoms pertaining to different age ranges followed by lists of books or activities that correlate with varying tasks. Occasionally, manuals and handouts focus on common myths about grief or things to say or not say to a bereaved child (Sinykin, 2007). Most are colorful and engaging for children. Some focus on a specific age range or type of bereavement and are extremely detailed, providing a mound of options for activities and discussion in list form. Others cover grief in a more generic way, briefly outlining common themes of grief with one or two ideas of books or activities to implement. Though simple, the concepts covered by these supports are important supplements to help children in the grieving process. As previously noted, children between 7–11 years of age are very inquisitive concerning

death and need accurate information. Grief-related handbooks often include a guide on the basic facts of death and bereavement:

Specific tasks undertaken toward this goal [allowing the child to healthily grieve] include psychoeducation regarding the identification of grief reactions and the course of bereavement, construction of a non-traumatic mental representation of the deceased, promotion of tolerance for current and future reminders of losses, and addressing conflicts over past interactions that evoke regret, guilt, or shame. This therapeutic work serves to promote acceptance of traumatic losses, mobilize adaptive coping strategies, and facilitates a more normative grieving process. (Saltzman, 2001, p. 49)

Most manuals and workbooks are tailored for use in community grief groups and in private practice. However, in line with the principles of grief support in groups and private practice, implementation of these types of workbooks in the schools has similar effects. Whether in schools or other settings, opportunities to express oneself and grieve through discussion and “re-telling of the trauma experience in a safe and supportive environment [serves] to increase tolerance for traumatic memories and to decrease traumatic avoidance” (Saltzman, 2001, p. 48). Though there are ample possibilities and a positive flow of ideas and helps for various needs, and though there is no “right” or “wrong” way to compile grief-related materials, for use in the classroom, many of these resources provide limited and confusing options that are not conveniently implemented by school psychologists.

Challenges in Providing School-Based Grief Support

Although school psychologists may perceive the benefits of supporting children following the death of a loved one, they face challenges in providing such services. Three major barriers impeding school psychologists from supporting children’s grief include (a) accessing

materials (Corr, 2004; Johnson, 2004), (b) funding school-based grief support (Breen, 2011; White, 2007), and (c) managing time constraints (Breen, 2007). These challenges are more fully described in the following sections.

Accessing materials. As is common now in our society, for any supplemental information or assistance on any given subject, the first step a school psychologist might take would be to search for information on the Internet. From the perspective of a teacher or educator, if one does a simple online search on the topic of grief-related books or bibliotherapy for children, a number of resources appear. A more specific search of “books about grief for children” yields approximately 8,470,000 results. Upon further exploration of the results, many links to books are recommended by support networks and groups, book lists from libraries or people with grief experience, and, of course, a plethora of books for sale make up the mix.

Earl Grollman stated that the biggest change he had seen in children’s books in the last 25 years is the number of titles. He explained, “When I wrote *Explaining Death to Children* (1967), there were but a handful of books....Today it would take the length of a football field to hold all the volumes” (Johnson, 2004, p. 301). Similarly, Corr stated, “Currently, my master list of titles contains 159 titles for pre-school and elementary school readers, along with 80 additional titles for middle school and high school audiences” (Corr, 2004, p. 338).

There are many resources available to teachers on the topic of grief. Books on grief-related issues have multiplied exponentially over the past couple of decades and continue to be published. Though it is difficult to keep up to date on such a wide variety of available books and topics, the good news is that there are many options from which to choose to help children learn a variety of lessons. With appropriate selection, teachers can help students to identify with characters experiencing emotions such as “feeling left out” after a loss and can encourage

sharing thoughts and questions related to death. Students can also learn about creating memorials, typical grief reactions to death and loss, coping strategies, and healthily moving on through love and life (Corr, 2004; Waas, 2003).

The vast quantity of resources that address different types of loss and grief in a child-friendly way makes it difficult to know which books are reputable or best for specific needs. Though the books are out there, few guides are available to instruct educators and caring adults about which may be used most effectively. Moreover, educators are restricted from using many accessible resources based on varying levels of expense.

Funding school-based grief support. Even with the most competent and informed of school psychologists, securing the funding to get needed resources can become more than a burden. As of 2006, with the tax cuts and budget reductions by Congress under President Bush, 42 education programs were ended and the budgets for four other programs were slashed by over four billion dollars (White, 2007). Budgetary constraints not only keep many rurally-based educators from being able to travel to professional development venues and learn the latest grief-related information but greatly influence their ability to buy resources as well. Access to journal articles is also often reserved for those involved with higher-level education institutions or university libraries and is not a feasible option for those in primary and secondary education. Thus, the Internet is once again widely used to supplement otherwise unattainable resources (Breen, 2011). As noted above, a broad search for grief materials leads to innumerable results. However, a simple online search more specifically targeting free books and printed resources supporting children's grief yields few legitimate results. In contrast, a similar search for Internet resources yields literally thousands of links to grief-related Internet websites.

Working under time constraints. In a recent Australian study by Lauren J. Breen, semi-structured interviews with 19 grief counselors were conducted to ascertain the connections between contemporary grief and theoretical research and practice. In relation to their access of grief-related information, counselors stated reasons why their access to information was limited. “A lack of time to source, read, and retain information was the most common reason [stated] ($n = 8$)” (Breen, 2011, p. 292). Also, in new circumstances where grief needs to be addressed, time is of the essence. Educators do not have the luxury of searching vast numbers of options, finding a resource, and then waiting several days for shipping. It is not in the best interest of the adult or the child in the sensitive and important time after a loss.

Statement of Problem

In spite of the plethora of resources available, school psychologists have little opportunity to learn of the most current available resources. On statewide and national websites catering to these fields, a simple search on the topic of “grief and loss” brings up numerous sources and articles that are not necessarily easy to implement in the classroom. If school psychologists are lucky enough to pinpoint a helpful website or database of applicable materials, they are almost always for sale and excluded from the public domain. With educational budget cuts and time constraints in the classroom, school psychologists are left stranded at a time that is crucial to address grief and loss with students. Since grief-related training is not usually available in depth to school psychologists, they need clear-cut structure and instruction regarding how to best guide students through the grieving process, tailored to each child’s specific needs. As stated, this would be most helpful in the form of a printed grief resource complete with simple lesson plans and lists of recommended books and activities for bibliotherapeutic use that pinpoints needs of children and addresses them in an interactive, easily-implemented way.

Research Questions

This study examined the following research questions based on school psychologists' perceptions of elementary school classroom support for children's grief:

- (a) When supporting elementary school-aged children who are grieving a death, what do school psychologists identify as the most important characteristics of printed grief resources?
- (b) In order to better support grieving elementary school-aged children after a death, which death-related topics do school psychologists identify as needing additional representation in printed resources?
- (c) What ideas, recommended activities, and children's books do school psychologists feel have proven successful in supporting children's grief?

Based on the answers to these research questions, a comprehensive guide of important characteristics of lesson plans and important grief topics is compiled to aid in the creation of lesson plans and a list of activities and other recommended printed materials for school psychologists' support of elementary-aged children.

Method

In preparing to conduct this research, two professionals who provide grief counseling for children were interviewed. One interview was conducted with a licensed professional counselor, the executive director of The Sharing Place, a non-profit organization that provides grief support to children, teens, and adults in Salt Lake City, Utah. The other interview was with a school psychologist who currently practices in an elementary school in the Canyons School District in Sandy, Utah. Both professionals facilitate healthy grief practices and offer supportive services in school-based and community-based mental health settings. These professionals shared their grief-related resources and recommended activities.

Pilot Survey

The pilot survey and the finalized survey were designed based on a previously conducted in-depth review of grief-related literature on the subject of using bibliotherapy to help children in schools (Pehrsson & McMillen, 2005, 2010). The data—perceptions of school psychologists—were collected using an instrument designed and piloted for this study. This survey was designed based on similar bibliotherapy-related studies (Pehrsson & McMillen, 2005, 2010) and recommendations from personal interviews with mental health professionals who provide support for grieving children.

The pilot survey (see Appendix A) was introduced at the crisis intervention meeting at the National Association of School Psychologists' (NASP) 2011 conference in San Francisco, California. Attendees ($N=32$) were informed verbally that the study was part of a graduate-level thesis project and that their responses would help the primary researcher in refining a research survey.

The pilot survey consisted of eight questions and three sub-questions designed to assess the school psychologists' attitudes, views, and experience in implementing bibliotherapy to treat grieving students. The first three questions were rated on a Likert scale, and the remaining questions were open-ended or categorical in format. Thirty-two school psychologists were offered the survey and instructed to return completed papers at the end of the meeting (if they chose to participate). Seven attendees completed the survey.

A brief discussion with all group members attending the meeting indicated that open-ended questions would most likely discourage participation (open-ended questions are too time consuming). Participants indicated that the shorter the time required to complete the survey, the more likely individuals would be willing to participate. Additionally, all members indicated they would be interested in receiving a free packet of resources (manual with lesson plans and activities) on the topic of supporting children's grief. Members indicated a preference for ready-to-use resources that required minimal preparation on their part. This feedback (verbal and written) was utilized to refine the survey. Based on participants' feedback of the pilot survey, the final survey was edited to best represent the proposed research questions and to provide greater clarity for participants.

Finalized Survey

After considering the NASP attendees' input, the original pilot survey (Appendix A) was drafted into the final format (Appendix B). The final survey was conducted online through Qualtrics (link provided through the organization's email database). The finalized survey began with a contingency question to eliminate participants who had not or did not currently work in elementary school settings. This was followed by a brief introduction to the purpose of the research. Participants were informed that their feedback would be used to tailor a grief resource

manual to best meet their needs. First, participants were asked to rate the importance of various characteristics that might be included in grief support materials. Participants were asked to circle their preferences on a 5-point Likert scale (1=*Not important* to 5= *Very important*). These included the following elements or characteristics of lesson plans focused on offering classroom grief support: (a) a brief information guide about how to implement bibliotherapy, (b) a ready-to-use lesson plan, (c) a brief outlined lesson plan with bulleted points for discussion, (d) a scripted lesson plan with verbatim questions and dialog, (e) classroom activities (games), (f) student worksheets aligned with lesson (ready to copy), and (g) a list of recommended children's books (related to grief).

In the second portion of the survey, participants were asked to rate the topics for which they needed more classroom materials on a 5-point Likert scale according to perceived priority level (1=*Not a priority*; 5= *Essential*). Topics included (a) generic information regarding coping with grief, (b) pet's death, (c) parent's death, (d) grandparent's death, (e) sibling's death, (f) friend's death, (g) death caused by natural disaster, (h) death caused by terrorism and man-made disasters, (i) death caused by murder, (j) death caused by suicide, (k) accidental death, (l) medical condition and terminal illness, (m) cultural differences in grief, (n) memorializing the deceased; and (o) other (please specify).

The survey concluded with an open-ended question, a request for participants to offer additional information: *Please share your ideas, activities, and children's books that have proven successful in supporting children's grief.* This request encouraged participants to share their successful experiences in supporting children's grief, providing the author with helpful ideas to be included in future printed grief resources.

Participants

Participation for the finalized survey was solicited from members of a national school-based crisis management group, titled “NASP Interest Group: Crisis Management in the Schools.” Although the exact group composition is unknown, membership is primarily school psychologists who are also members of NASP (M. A. Heath, personal communication, February 23, 2011). Members joined the special interest group because of a common interest in school-based crisis intervention. This is an Internet-based interactive group that convenes at the annual NASP conference and regularly communicates via the Internet. As of February 2011, group membership totaled 431. The group has an active message board with discussion topics and offers information to assist school psychologists in accessing school crisis intervention resources. The site also lists the number of posts per month since the group was established in 1999. Between 1999 and February 2011, over 2,000 messages were posted, averaging about 14 messages per month. Based on the group’s activity level, Internet accessibility, and membership of school psychologists, this group was chosen to complete the finalized survey.

Data Collection and Organization

All NASP Crisis Management Interest Group members were invited to complete the survey. An email invitation contained a description of the survey, purpose of research, and contact information of the primary researcher. The email also contained an active Internet link to the online survey. Prior to starting the survey, the Qualtrics survey explained the purpose of the research, estimated time to complete the survey, and contact information of the primary researcher and Brigham Young University IRB’s contact information. After reading this initial information, participants indicated a desire to proceed by clicking to advance the survey. Each

participant's identifying information remained confidential. Members were sent three additional email reminders over the subsequent months (May 9, 2011 through July 8, 2011).

Data were collected electronically (Qualtrics online survey). Likert scale scores from the final survey were tallied and summarized with descriptive statistics (totals, means, and standard deviations). Open-ended questions were evaluated for content, organized with similar responses, and summarized into categories of similar characteristics, including helpful printed grief resources, grief topics that needed to be more fully addressed, and recommended printed grief-related materials.

The results of the research were then used to compile a comprehensive source of recommended printed grief resources currently available to school psychologists working in elementary school settings. School psychologists' greatest needs regarding characteristics of lesson plans, printed grief materials, and grief topics needing greater representation were rated on a table of perceived level of importance. These resources and activities were then compiled as a guide for the creation of future printed grief materials to be used by school psychologists in elementary school settings. Furthermore, four books recommended by participants were used to create lesson plans that integrate participant feedback and needs in bibliotherapeutic structure, simplicity of implementation, and relevance of topic.

Data Analysis

Data analysis on the preliminary pilot survey began immediately as responses were received. The survey was "active" for the collection of responses from May 9, 2011 through July 8, 2011. The final survey data were collected via the qualtrics.com web site. Likert scale responses were described with descriptive statistics—means (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*) through the Qualtrics Web site software. Responses to the open-ended question (*Please share*

your ideas, activities, and children's books that have proven successful in supporting children's grief) were summarized, indicating the types of activities and books that participants recommended and the frequency in which they were suggested. Selected comments were included to accurately represent participants' recommendations.

Results

Of the original pilot survey presented at the 2011 NASP conference in San Francisco, California, only seven completed surveys were received by the researcher. Of the finalized survey distributed through the Qualtrics Web site, 95 participants started the survey. Of those 95, 81 completed the survey. Five participants did not complete the full survey because they discontinued after answering “no” to the first question: *Do you currently work or have you previously worked in elementary schools (K–6th grade)?* “It is more important to have respondents who are representative of the group from which you are sampling than to have a large return rate” (Suskie, 1996, p. 69).

Research Question 1

When supporting elementary school-aged children who are grieving a death, what do school psychologists identify as the most important characteristics of printed grief resources? Seventy-six of the 81 participants (94%) who completed the survey rated the following characteristics of printed materials on a scale of 1 (Not at all important) to 5 (Extremely important): (a) brief information guide about how to implement bibliotherapy, (b) ready-to-use lesson plan, (c) brief outlined lesson plan with bulleted points for discussion, (d) scripted lesson plan with verbatim questions and dialog, (e) classroom activities (games), (f) student worksheets aligned with lesson (ready-to-copy), and (g) list of recommended children’s books (related to grief).

Upon analysis of participant responses, participants rated *a recommended list of children’s books related to grief* as the most important characteristic of printed grief resources ($M = 4.36$). Other options ranked as *Moderately* to *Extremely* important include the following: *a*

brief lesson plan outlined with bulleted points for discussion (M = 4.29) and Ready-to-use lesson plan (M = 4.17). Other ratings are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

School Psychologists' Ratings: Importance of Including Specific Grief Support Topics/Content

Topics/content	Participants' ratings (<i>n</i>) indicating importance of grief topics/content					<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	Not at all important (1)	Slightly important (2)	Neutral (3)	Moderately important (4)	Extremely important (5)		
Brief information guide about how to implement bibliotherapy	7	8	14	28	19	3.58	1.24
Ready-to-use lesson plan	1	4	11	25	35	4.17	.96
Brief outlined lesson plan with bulleted points for discussion	0	4	6	30	36	4.29	.83
Scripted lesson plan with verbatim questions and dialog	7	8	25	21	15	3.38	1.19
Classroom activities (games)	2	7	14	29	24	3.87	1.05
Student worksheets aligned with lesson (ready to copy)	2	12	19	22	21	3.63	1.13
List of recommended children's books (related to grief)	0	4	6	25	41	4.36	.84

Note. *N* = 76.

Table 2

School Psychologists' Ratings: Need for Additional Information on Specific Grief Support Topics/Content

Question	Participants' ratings indicating need for information					<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	Not a priority (1)	Low priority (2)	Medium priority (3)	High priority (4)	Essential (5)		
Generic information: coping with grief	2	6	26	26	15	3.61	.98
Pet's death	3	17	28	20	7	3.15	1.01
Parent's death	1	0	11	24	39	4.33	.83
Grandparent's death	1	3	21	29	21	3.88	.91
Sibling's death	1	1	10	28	35	4.27	.84
Friend's death	1	1	15	28	30	4.13	.88
Death caused by natural disaster	1	11	25	22	16	3.55	1.03
Death caused by terrorism and man-made disasters	3	16	25	17	14	3.31	1.13
Death caused by murder	3	20	17	12	23	3.43	1.29
Death caused by suicide	1	8	14	23	29	3.95	1.06
Accidental death	1	6	19	30	19	3.80	.96
Medical condition and terminal illness	1	3	19	31	21	3.91	.90
Cultural differences in grief	4	6	13	23	29	3.89	1.17
Memorializing the deceased	1	10	24	24	16	3.59	1.01
Other (please specify by typing response)	24	0	6	5	7	2.31	1.69

Note. *N* = 75.

Research Question 2

In order to better support grieving elementary school-aged children after a death, which death-related topics do school psychologists identify as needing additional representation in printed resources? To address this topic, participants were asked to rank their perceived level of priority of topics for which they needed more printed grief resources on a scale of 1 (*Not a priority*) to 5 (*Essential*). This list included the following topics: (a) generic information: coping with grief, (b) pet's death, (c) parent's death, (d) grandparent's death, (e) sibling's death, (f) friend's death, (g) death caused by natural disaster, (h) death caused by terrorism and man-made disasters, (i) death caused by murder, (j) death caused by suicide, (k) accidental death, (l) medical condition and terminal illness, (m) cultural differences in grief, (n) memorializing the deceased, and (o) other (please specify). Seventy-five out of 81 participants responded to this question. Topics receiving highest ratings included *parent's death* ($M = 4.33$), *sibling's death* ($M = 4.27$), and *friend's death* ($M = 4.13$). Table 2 contains additional information pertaining to the perceived need for additional information on specific grief support topics.

Forty-two out of 75 respondents suggested an alternate need in the *other* category.

Participants' additional death-related needs are listed in Table 3.

Table 3
Summary of Responses to Survey Question #3

Death of an important individual ($n = 6$)	Disenfranchised death/other types of loss ($n = 6$)	Areas needing more information ($n = 8$)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Staff member's death ▲ Dying child ▲ Death of a teacher (2) ▲ Death of a friend's parent ▲ Miscarriage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Gang-related Death ▲ Military related death ($n = 2$) ▲ Death in the community through violence ▲ Moving/divorce ▲ Grief related to loss other than death 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Resources concerning spirituality and grief ▲ Developmental difference in grief ▲ Dealing with one's own mortality ▲ Supporting children with grieving parents ▲ Bilingual ▲ Public memorials ▲ None ($n = 2$)

Note. Participants' responses ($n = 20$) were categorized into the three major descriptors.

Research Question 3

What ideas, recommended activities, and children's books do school psychologists feel have proven successful in supporting children's grief? The school psychologists who participated in this study were able to list many books or resources that they deemed to be valuable and appropriate for using with grieving children. Thirty-nine participants answered this question. A summary of topics and their pervasiveness of use by school psychologists are included in Table 4. Books mentioned more than once were marked with an asterisk, and authors, current cost on the Amazon.com web site, and possible range of age for use were included in the table for convenience.

In addition to the books suggested by participants in the open-ended question, respondents included statements of activities and advice in relation to grief therapy. These recommended ideas for activities, along with those contributed through personal interviews, are documented in Appendix C. Overall, participants overwhelmingly commented on the importance of facilitating expression and healthy grieving through various methods of talk therapy, play therapy, and art therapy. One participant stated

I usually use play therapy and work with the child about the change in the [dynamics] in the family when a parent dies... I think it's important to the child to be able to express the loss. I also [have] done artwork with them and that seem[s] to help open them up about what they think and feel about death in general.

Another participant noted, *I think helping students (and adults) understand the typical grieving process is critical.* That being said, the perspective of another was that *the creation and provision of such materials would be great, but so would an outline of the psychologists' role in this process and appropriate training.* These responses indicate that though school psychologists

acknowledge the importance of bibliotherapy, they feel they need more clarification on their role in using bibliotherapy and more structure or training to feel confident in its use.

Table 4

Children's Grief: List and Description of Recommended Children's Books

Recommended book/manual	Author	Cost (on Amazon for new, hardcover)	Age range
Badger's Parting Gift	Susan Varley	\$13/49	4-8 yrs
I'll Always Love You	Hans Wilhelm	\$12.56	4-8 yrs
The Memory Box	Kristen McLaughlin	\$5.95	4-9 yrs
Everett Anderson's Goodbye	Lucille Clifton	\$7.99	4-8 yrs
A Terrible Thing Happened	Margaret Holmes	\$10.91	4-8 yrs
The Giving Tree	Shell Silverstein	\$12.23	4-8 yrs
What is Heaven Like?	Beverly Lewis	\$10.19	4-8 yrs
Life Cycle Books	Varies	Prices Vary	2-8 yrs
I'm a Superhero	Daxton Wilde	\$9.95	9-12 yrs
Tear Soup	Pat Schweibert	\$12.92	6+ yrs
Life Times*	Bryan Mellonine	\$11.20	PreK-10yrs
When Someone Very Special Dies	Marge Heegaard	\$9.95	9-12 yrs
The Next Place*	Warren Hanson	\$10.61	4-8 yrs
What on Earth do you do When Someone Dies?	Trevor Romain	\$8.99	9-12 yrs
The Tenth Good Thing About Barney	Judith Viorst	\$11.96	4-8 yrs
When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death	Laurie Kransy Brown	\$13.80	4-8 yrs
Don't Despair on Thursdays	Adolf Moser	\$15.95	9-12 yrs
Gentle Willow: A Story for Children About Dying	Joyce C. Mills	\$14.95	4-12 yrs

*Book titles suggested more than once in survey responses

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate school psychologists' perceived efficacy of bibliotherapy among grieving elementary school students after a death. Based on participants' answers to survey questions, a comprehensive guide of important characteristics of lesson plans and needed coverage of grief topics was assessed to aid in the creation of lesson plans and lists of recommended books and activities for school psychologists' support of elementary-aged children. In this section, limitations of this study will be addressed. Next, implications for practice will be discussed with an explanation of one of the included lesson plans (all lesson plans can be found in Appendix D), as well as suggested activities to further integrate and apply survey results. Finally, recommendations for future research will be addressed.

Limitations

Although measures were taken to include as many participants in the survey as possible, only 81 out of a potential 431 members of the NASP Crisis Management Group completed the survey. With this low response-rate, it is difficult to ascertain the generalizability of the research findings. With a greater number of randomly selected participants, results would more clearly indicate which grief-related topics school psychologists consider to be in high demand. This information would be helpful in guiding future research to more adequately meet practitioners' needs. Future research involving recommendations from a larger sample of school psychologists would also assist in creating a more comprehensive database of resources and ideas, which have proven helpful and effective in addressing children's grief.

Furthermore, the information provided by the survey is subjective. The responses are based on the perceptions of the school psychologist who completed the questionnaire regarding the need for certain topics, resources, and strategies deemed to be helpful in effectively

implementing bibliotherapy and grief support. Therefore, results are impacted by each school psychologist's cultural background and religious beliefs regarding death, personal experience with death and grief, previous training and preparation to work with grieving students, and personal views about how to best support grieving children.

Finally, the survey was created to measure school psychologists' perceptions of bibliotherapy to support grieving students and their perceived needs in relation to grief-related topics and materials. Although this study's survey was based on previously conducted research, no reliability and validity data regarding the survey are available. Survey questions were assumed to elicit honest responses which measured what the researcher intended to measure.

Implications for Practice

This study addressed the current standing of school psychologists' use of bibliotherapy through printed materials. After reviewing survey data, current literature regarding the efficacy of bibliotherapy, and available children's books and related activities and materials to supplement bibliotherapy, it is clear that school psychologists are in need of greater support, training, and access to materials to implement bibliotherapy with grieving elementary-aged students. In accordance with proposed hypotheses, participants rated a list of recommended resources and children's books related to grief as being most important in their implementation of bibliotherapy. Participants' suggestions of recommended books in Research Question 3 were used to compile a quick-reference list of grief-related books (see Table 4).

Results also showed that school psychologists perceive a great need for ready-to-use, brief lesson plans with prompts for discussion. School psychologists identified topics that needed greater representation in grief-related literature and materials, including death of a parent, death of a sibling, and death of a friend. Participants also identified a wide range of subjects that they

perceived as having relatively little to no representation in current literature. In response to research data, ready-to-use lesson plans were created, using four of the books that were suggested by participants in Table 4. These books are found in Appendix D and include *When Dinosaurs Die*, *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney*, *Don't Despair on Thursdays*, and *Tear Soup*.

As noted by survey responses, school psychologists felt that they have had relatively minimal training on the proper implementation of bibliotherapy. Thus, Appendix D begins with a brief one-page overview of the bibliotherapy process. This information is included to assist school personnel in effectively carrying out each lesson with structure and confidence. Furthermore, each of the included lesson plans addresses one of Worden's proposed tasks of grief and provides a conceptual framework from which to select an appropriate book tailored to students' unique needs.

The lesson plan for *Don't Despair on Thursdays* will be used as an example of how these books (along with the others included in Table 4) may be used for bibliotherapeutic purposes in classroom, group, or individual settings. It starts with a brief summary of the book and includes an outline of the book's information, including the intended age group, date of publication, and number of pages. Next, the reading objective is defined: *After reading this book, students will be able to identify what grief is, whom grief affects, and what to do when feelings of grief seem overwhelming.*

As requested by survey participants, the lesson plan includes a list of materials needed for the post-reading activity, a short list of words or concepts that may need to be explained before the reading, and bulleted points for pre- and post-reading questions. The reader might begin by informing the students:

We are going to read a story about some boys and girls and some of their feelings. Some of them have had hard things happen in their lives, some have had happy things. You might have experienced some of the same things too. Listen carefully and think about if some of the things these boys and girls do might help you when you feel like despairing.

Then, as a part of the post-reading discussion, the reader might return to the story to show pictures and ask the following questions:

What are some of the changes that happen in your life? What kinds of changes/experiences make you happy? What kinds of changes/experiences make you sad/angry/scared? Why might it be helpful for us to cry? Is it okay if all types of people cry?

As a post-reading activity the reader will instruct the class to make an individualized note card like the character in the story:

Give each student an index card and a writing utensil of their choice. Instruct them to write a message to themselves with a key phrase they would like to remember (i.e., "Don't Despair on Thursdays!"). On the other side of the card, have them write the same reminder, and rest of the days of the week. Have them put the note in a place where they can see it daily.

The post-activity discussion is meant to reinforce the concepts of the lesson and make it applicable on an individual basis:

Today we read about some of the changes that we experience in our lives and some things that make us grieve. We learned that all people grieve differently, and that it's okay for us to take as much time as we need to grieve and show our

feelings. When we are grieving, sometimes we might feel like we don't have any hope, but we can remind ourselves not to despair, today or any other day!

School psychologists' suggestions for books, activities, and materials vary and are meant to be tailored to an individual's unique circumstances and therefore may be implemented according to best judgment and practice. That being said, perhaps the most meaningful outcome of this study is the compilation of recommended strategies and activities that address the emotional and social needs of grieving children (Appendix C). These ideas and activities were contributed by survey participants and two Utah practitioners: (a) Stephanie Steele, a licensed professional counselor and executive director of a non-profit grief support organization in Salt Lake City, Utah and (b) an elementary school psychologist employed by the Canyons School District in Sandy, Utah. The wealth of ideas provided by these professionals resulted in a lengthy list of activities. Taking into account a child's specific needs and concerns, school psychologists may consider and select activities to best address children's grief. These activities were organized into the following categories: memorializing activities, activities to elicit discussion of memories or feelings, activities for externalizers, activities to maintain a relationship with the deceased, activities that address death-related issues or monitor unexpressed feelings, and activities that validate. Additionally, an anecdotal list of tips and things to remember was included to provide a general framework of tactics that have proven successful in working with grieving children.

Recommendations for Future Research

It is recommended that future research and meta-analyses be done to determine which children's books have the greatest positive impact with bereaved students, an optimum timeframe in which bibliotherapy should be introduced after a death, and the overall efficacy of

bibliotherapy in comparison to other therapeutic strategies. More structured training opportunities in the implementation of bibliotherapy for school personnel would also be an important step in helping students deal with a wide range of issues more proactively and with greater competence.

As a result of this study, school psychologists' specific needs were identified in regard to grief-related printed resources. These needs were clearly stated and included requests for grief-related materials that offer a greater breadth of topics, bibliotherapy lesson plans that are concise, well organized, and easily accessible, and lists of highly recommended resources that are considered effective. Based on these needs, four sample lesson plans were created, and comprehensive lists of recommended books and activities were compiled. With these resources, along with a greater understanding of the physical, emotional, and mental impact following a death, school psychologists and other caring adults can be better prepared to provide the sensitive guidance and support desperately needed by grieving children.

References

- Berns, C. F. (2004). Bibliotherapy: Using books to help bereaved children. *OMEGA: The Journal of Death and Dying*, 48(4), 321–336.
- Breen, L. J. (2010–2011). Professionals' experiences of grief counseling: Implications for bridging the gap between research and practice. *OMEGA: Journal of Death and Dying*, 62(3), 285–303. doi:10.2190/OM.62.3.e
- Broadway, M. D. (2008, June). Dealing with death: Books to help young people cope with grief. *Teacher Librarian*, 35(5), 44–48.
- Carney, K. L. (2004). Barklay & Eve: The role of activity books for bereaved children. *OMEGA: The Journal of Death and Dying*, 48(4), 307–319.
- Cerel, J., Fristad, M. A., Verducci, J., Weller, R. A., & Weller, E. B. (2006). Childhood bereavement: Psychopathology in the 2 years postparental death. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 45(6), 681-690. doi:DOI: 10.1097/01.chi.0000215327.58799.05
- Cohen, J. A., & Mannarino, A. P. (2011). Supporting children with traumatic grief: What educators need to know. *School Psychology International*, 32(2), 117–131.
- Corr, C. A. (2003–2004). Bereavement, grief, and mourning in death-related literature for children. *OMEGA: The Journal of Death and Dying*, 48(4), 337–363.
- Costello, E. J., Erkanli, A., Fairbank, J. A., & Angold, A. (2002). The prevalence of potentially traumatic events in childhood and adolescence. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 15(2), 99–112.

- Dickinson, G. E., & Field, D. (2002). Teaching end-of-life issues: Current status in United Kingdom and United States medical schools. *American Journal of Hospice and Palliative Care, 19*, 181–186.
- The Dougy Center. (n.d.). *Developmental grief responses*. Retrieved from <http://www.dougy.org/grief-resources/developmental-grief-responses/>
- Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011, January/February). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development, 82*(1), 405–432. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x
- Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of Educational Research 74*(1), 59–109. doi: 10.3102/00346543074001059
- Grollman, E. (Ed.). (1967). *Explaining death to children*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press
- Haine, R. A., Ayers, T. S., Sandler, I. N., & Wolchik, S. A. (2008). Evidence-based practices for parentally bereaved children and their families. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 39*(2), 113–121.
- Heath, M. A., Moulton, E., Dyches, T. T., Prater, M. A., & Brown, A. (2011). Strengthening elementary school bully prevention with bibliotherapy. *Communique, 39*(8), 12-14.
- Heath, M. A., & Sheen, D. (2005). *School-based crisis intervention: Preparing all personnel to assist*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Heath, M. A., & Winters, E. (2011). Psychological first-aid: Preparing teachers to support children's mental health needs. *The Observer, 26*(2), 26–29.

- Hois, S. (2007). *Effects of separation and loss on children's development*. Family Development Resources, Inc. Retrieved from <http://thefamilygateway.net/wp-content/uploads/Effects-of-Separation-and-Loss-on-Childrens-Development.pdf>
- Homedes, N., & Ahmed, S. M. (1987). In my opinion... Death education for children. *Children's Health Care*, 16(1), 34. Retrieved from EBSCO host.
- Jack, S. J., & Ronan, K. R. (2008). Bibliotherapy: Practice and research. *School Psychology International*, 29, 161–182.
- Jackson, M. N. M. (2006). *Bibliotherapy revisited: Issues in classroom management. Developing teachers' awareness and techniques to help children cope effectively with stressful situations* [ERIC ED501535, online submission]. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED501535.pdf>
- Johnson, J. (2004). Historical perspectives and comments on the current status of death-related literature for children. *OMEGA: The Journal of Death and Dying*, 48(4), 293–305.
- Jones, E. H. (2001). *Bibliotherapy for bereaved children: Healing reading*. Philadelphia, PA: J. Kingsley Publishers.
- Kirwin, K. M., & Hamrin, V. (2005). Decreasing the risk of complicated bereavement and future psychiatric disorders in children. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 18(2), 62–78.
- Melhem, N. M., Moritz, G., Walker, M., Shear, K., & Brent, D. (2007). Phenomenology and correlates of complicated grief in children and adolescents. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 46(4), 493–499.
doi:10.1097/chi.0b013e31803062a9

- Mireault, G., & Bond, L. (1992). Parental death in childhood: Perceived vulnerability, and adult depression and anxiety. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 62(4), 517–524.
- McEntire, N. (2004, March). Children and grief. *CYC-ONLINE*, 62. Retrieved from <http://www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cycol-0304-grief.html>
- Moyers, B. (2006). *Faith and reason*. Arlington, VA: Public Broadcasting Service.
- Osterman, K. F. (2000). Students' need for belonging in the school community. Review of Educational Research, 70(3), 323–367. doi: 10.3102/00346543070003323
- Pardeck, J. T., & Pardeck, J. A. (Eds.). (1993). *Bibliotherapy: A clinical approach for helping children*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Pehrsson, D., & McMillen, P. A. (2005). Bibliotherapy evaluation tool: Grounding counselors in the therapeutic use of literature. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 32(1), 47–59.
- Phersson, D., & McMillen, P. (2007). Bibliotherapy: Overview and implications for counselors. (ACAPCD-2). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association. Retrieved from <http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/ACAPCD/ACAPCD-02.pdf>
- Pehrsson, D., & McMillen, P. S. (2010). A national survey of bibliotherapy preparation and practices of professional counselors. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 5(4), 412–425.
- Ross, M. R., Powell, S. R., & Elias, M. J. (2002). New roles for school psychologists: Addressing the social and emotional learning needs of students. *School Psychology Review*, 31, 43–52.
- Rowling, L. (2003). *Grief in school communities: Effective support strategies*. Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.

- Saler, L., & Skoinick, N. (1992). Childhood parental death and depression in adulthood: Roles of surviving parent and family environment. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 62(4), 504–516.
- Saltzman, W., Steinberg, A., & Layne, C. (2001). A developmental approach to school-based treatment of adolescents exposed to trauma and traumatic loss. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Group Therapy*, 11(2-3), 43–56.
- Schuurman, D. L. (2003). Literature for adults to assist them in helping bereaved children. *OMEGA: Journal of Death & Dying*, 48(4), 415–424.
- Sheen, D., Heath, M. A., Jones, N., Heaton, E., & Gstettenbauer, A. (2005). Children's literature: A resource to assist with crisis intervention. In M. A. Heath & D. Sheen (Eds.), *School-based crisis intervention: Preparing all personnel to assist* (pp. 64–76). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Sinkin, S. (2007). *Children and grief handout*. Retrieved from <http://www.sherisinykin.com/Children%20&%20Grief%20Handout.pdf>
- Sprague, J. R., & Walker, H. M. (2005). *Safe and healthy schools: Practical intervention strategies*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Steen, K. (1998). A comprehensive approach to bereavement. *The Nurse Practitioner*, 23(3), 54–68.
- St. Thomas, B., & Johnson, P. (2007). *Empowering children through art and expression: Culturally sensitive ways of healing trauma and grief*. London, United Kingdom: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Van Eerdewegh, M. (1985). The bereaved child: Variables influencing early psychopathology. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 147, 188–194.

- Waas, H. (2003). Death education for children. In I. Corless, B. B. Germino, & M. A. Pittman (Eds.), *Dying, death, and bereavement* (pp. 25-41). New York, NY: Springer.
- Webb, N. B. (Ed.). (2010). *Helping bereaved children: A handbook for practitioners* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford.
- White, D. (2006). Bush 2006-07 budget cuts \$4.3 billion from education. Retrieved from <http://usliberals.about.com/od/education/a/EdBudget07.htm>
- Wolfelt, A. D. (2002). Children's grief. In S. E. Brock, P. J. Lazarus, & S. R. Jimerson (Eds.), *Best practices in school crisis prevention and intervention* (pp. 653–671). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.
- Wolfelt, A. D. (2005). *Healing your holiday grief: 100 practical ideas for blending mourning and celebration during the holiday season*. Fort Collins, CO: Companion Press.
- Worden, J. W. (1996). *Children and grief: When a parent dies*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Appendix A: Pilot Survey (drafted 2/11/2011)

Elementary School Classroom Grief Support: Lesson plans and Activities

As part of my graduate thesis project, **Elementary School Classroom Grief Support: Lesson plans and Activities**, I am creating a survey to initially assess needs and gather successful ideas. Your feedback will help me create a free, hands-on resource of grief-related classroom lessons and activities. After compiling the resource, I will email materials to the NASP crisis interest group and other groups that support children's mental health. Thank you for helping me develop my survey---the first step in helping me compile this resource!

Catie Bergeson cabergeson@gmail.com Brigham Young University School Psychology Program

In relation to helping elementary schools address children's grief...	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
Lesson plans and ideas for activities are easy to access	1	2	3	4	5
My current resources (lesson plans and activities) meet my needs	1	2	3	4	5
I would appreciate more lesson plans and activities	1	2	3	4	5

1. To help support children's grief in elementary school classrooms.....

- (a) Which resources/books/children's books/activities would you recommend?
- (b) Summarize characteristics of helpful grief resources.
- (c) Describe barriers/difficulties faced when accessing lesson plans and activities to support children's grief.

2. IMPORTANT GRIEF TOPICS: In relation to supporting children's grief in elementary school classrooms, which specific grief-related topics need to be more fully addressed?

3. YES NO (*circle response*) If completed in less than 10 minutes, would you be willing to complete this survey?

4. (*circle your response*) Would you prefer to complete this survey by **phone**, **internet survey link**, **email**, or **hard copy** (mailed to your address)?

NOTE: If you have additional insights to share (by phone or email), please list your contact information and available dates/times (if by phone) or please email Catie Bergeson cabergeson@gmail.com

Name: _____

Email address (optional) _____

Phone # & available times: _____

Appendix B: Finalized Survey (drafted 3/21/2011)

Participants: School psychologists who currently work with or have worked in elementary schools.

Introduction: I am conducting a study on school psychologists' needs for printed materials to support grieving elementary school-aged children after a death. Your feedback will be used to specifically target what school psychologists need to better support grieving elementary-aged children and will be used as guidelines for grief-related printed materials to be made in the future.

Based on your needs, when searching for/accessing printed grief resources for use in elementary schools, please rate the following content on a scale of 1 (Not At All Important) to 5 (Extremely Important).

Please rate the importance of each item by circling the number

Classroom grief support materials should include the following:	Not At All Important	Slightly Important	Neutral	Moderately Important	Extremely Important
Brief information guide about how to implement bibliotherapy	1	2	3	4	5
Ready-to-use lesson plan	1	2	3	4	5
Brief outlined lesson plan with bulleted points for discussion	1	2	3	4	5
Scripted lesson plan with verbatim questions and dialog	1	2	3	4	5
Classroom activities (games)	1	2	3	4	5
Student worksheets aligned with lesson (ready to copy)	1	2	3	4	5
List of recommended children's books (related to grief)	1	2	3	4	5

Based on your elementary schools' needs, in regard to supporting children's grief, please indicate the topic/s for which you need more printed resources.

Please circle the number indicating the level of priority of topics for which you need additional information.

	Not A Priority	Low Priority	Moderate Priority	High Priority	Essential
Generic information: coping with grief	1	2	3	4	5
Pet's death	1	2	3	4	5
Parent's death	1	2	3	4	5
Grandparent's death	1	2	3	4	5
Sibling's death	1	2	3	4	5
Friend's death	1	2	3	4	5
Death caused by natural disaster	1	2	3	4	5
Death caused by terrorism and man-made disasters	1	2	3	4	5
Death caused by murder	1	2	3	4	5
Death caused by suicide	1	2	3	4	5
Accidental death	1	2	3	4	5
Medical condition and terminal illness	1	2	3	4	5
Cultural differences in grief	1	2	3	4	5
Memorializing the deceased	1	2	3	4	5
Other (please specify below)	1	2	3	4	5

Please share your ideas, activities, and children's books that have proven successful in supporting children's grief.

Appendix C: Grief Activity Ideas

These activities were provided by Stephanie Steele (The Sharing Place, SLC, UT) and research participants.

MEMORIALIZING ACTIVITIES

- Memory blocks on the wall- w/school supplies
- Planting bulbs in honor of the deceased
- Stepping stones made with found objects with names or messages
- Rock garden in honor of the deceased
- Stained glass window made out of tissue paper/contact paper to hang in memory of the deceased
- Silly string the person's name on cement or other surface
- Prayer flags made with paper (sprayed with "bio colors") and hang outside. When it rains, the water washes the prayer to the person
- Memory boxes—filled with mementos, poems, cards, private thoughts, etc.
- Decorate and stuff pillows to help remember the deceased
- Create a paper chain of memories (can be built over months or even color coded by season)
- Pipe cleaner sculpture to memorialize the deceased
- Hearts made from colored telephone wire

ACTIVITIES TO ELICIT DISCUSSION OF MEMORIES OR FEELINGS

- Throwing yarn into webs of grief by asking questions about the deceased with each throw
- Stringing a bead necklace—talk about one memory per bead
- Distribute a box of Band-aids and have the child put a Band-aid on a spot that "hurts" because of the death
- Write "Grocery list" of the deceased, listing their favorite things they would get if they were shopping for groceries
- Starburst roulette—each color of starburst is assigned a theme or topic prompt. When the student draws a starburst, they share a corresponding thought or memory to that color's theme. (especially good as an ice breaker activity)
- "Jenga"—for each piece removed, share a memory or something about the deceased. This activity is also good to see how students cope with something they've created being destroyed and can facilitate a discussion about anger
- Simply talking about the "things I remember or things I liked best about..."

ACTIVITIES FOR EXTERNALIZERS

- Throw ice cubes at signs that say "I hate death!"
- Line the bottom and sides of a shoebox with paper. Place marbles and some paint inside and have the student shake the marbles around in the box. Relieves anger or pent-up emotion and is fun for kids to create
- Button box, rice box, sand box to relieve anxiety (button box creates less of a mess!)
- Shaving cream finger painting
- Throw tennis balls dipped in paint against white paper on a wall
- Throwing cotton balls

ACTIVITIES TO MAINTAIN A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DECEASED

- Painting with water on the sidewalk—writing memories or messages they want to share, which then disappear
- Origami with messages, things left unsaid, or recent news they would like to convey

- Fold a paper in half lengthwise and compare/contrast the differences/similarities between the child and the deceased
- Large metal board with magnets that can be arranged to write messages or thoughts
- Insert an imaginary letter into a helium-filled balloon and let it float away to the sky

ACTIVITIES THAT ADDRESS DEATH-RELATED ISSUES OR MONITOR UNEXPRESSED FEELINGS

- Charades about end-of-life issues (for older kids)
- Grief time line—from first encounter with death of just of memories
- Gluing body rock people (requires patience)
- Have them do a puzzle that has a missing piece—creates a metaphor/discussion starter to make a connection that sometimes all things seem to be going well, but you can't see that one piece is missing. Even if you make a new piece and replace it, it isn't the same as the original.
- “Sorry” and other games that correlate with other real life experiences.
- Set up a project for collaboration (i.e., drawing on each others' pictures) where they can choose when to switch
- Grow grass inside of a plastic soda bottle-This allows students to see the life/death cycle clearly

ACTIVITIES THAT VALIDATE

- Make a list of stupid things that people say
- Making a talking stick with a ribbon-each member has the opportunity to contribute
- Website or personal journal (i.e., The Sharing Place newsletters) with things they wished they said before the person died
- Role Playing to prepare the child to re-enter school

TIPS and THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Tip: For the first appointment, have them draw a picture of themselves, family, etc to help see where they are in the grief process
- Tip: It is helpful to establish ground rules before talking about grief and loss that cover issues such as confidentiality, no put downs, etc, with a clear emphasis that all understand that there is not grief or loss bigger than another
- Tip: Don't say “Sorry.” Instead change it to “I'm sorry you had to experience that.”
- Tip: Give them something to hold in their hands or fidget with to help them relieve anxiety
- Tip: It is helpful to have students draw pictures of the deceased instead of bringing actual photographs, which might hit too close to home
- Tip: Talking square-on or face-to-face can be intimidating to kids. Talking while working on a project together or sitting more side-by-side
- Remember: It is important to keep an open dialogue so the child knows it's okay to discuss their feelings any time
- Remember: There is no right or wrong way to grieve, and the grief process never ends completely. It is important to know that something that happened a long time ago can be manifest in emotions and actions
- Remember: Most activities should promote talking, expression, and group building

Appendix D: Grief-Related Lesson Plans for Groups of Children

Bibliotherapy, defined as using books/literature to foster growth or healing, can be an effective conduit for helping grieving children. Though there are many types of grief and many resources to address it, School psychologists are in need of concise, quick-reference resources to address children's grief directly and effectively in the classroom's natural setting (Heath & Winters, 2010). Additionally, these resources need to be more accessible by being free, readily accessible, and ready to implement.

It is important to follow simple guidelines to effectively implement bibliotherapy: (a) pre-reading plan—choosing a book to meet specific circumstances or needs; (b) guided reading—taking time to let the message sink in through questions and pointing out important applicable principles; (c) post-reading discussion—opening up to get feedback and talk openly about students' perceptions; and (d) follow-up problem—solving/reinforcement activity to preserve therapeutic effects (Berns, 2004; Jackson, 2006; Pardeck & Pardeck, 1993).

The following lessons plans have been created as a go-to resource for school psychologists who are working with grieving elementary school children. Though they are not intended to be a cure-all for all children or all grieving situations, they can be a helpful guide to facilitate a healthy grieving experience.

For convenience and better focus of needs, the lesson plans have been organized by William Worden's four basic tasks of how children grieve: a) accept that death is a reality, b) experience the feelings and emotional pain associated with death and separation from the deceased, c) adjust to changes in an altered environment that no longer includes the deceased, d) find ways to remember and memorialize the deceased (Worden, 1982, 1991, 1996).

ACCEPT THAT DEATH IS A REALITY

“When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death”



Materials:

- Small (10-50 piece) puzzle (or multiple puzzles for multiple groups)
- Shoeboxes or other containers that can be decorated
- Colored construction paper, glue, markers, glitter, pom-poms, felt, or anything else for decorating

Key Vocabulary or concepts: alive, dead, suicide, funeral, cremation, (glossary included in back of the book)

Pre-Reading Activities [Introduce the book to the group]

Have you ever wondered what happens when someone dies? What kinds of things do you wonder about when someone dies? Today we are going to read a book that may give a lot of answers about the things that you have wondered about death.

Post-Reading Discussion [Stop periodically to show pictures and ask the following questions.]

- Depending on maturity level/group sensitivity, you may ask the question that starts each section (i.e. “What does Alive mean?”) and have a member of the group answer it in their own words to lead into the book’s answer.
- Show the pictures from the scenarios on pages 6-8. How do you think that these dinos are feeling as they see someone who is dying or hurt?
- What are some of the ways that people cope differently to people’s lives and ways that cope with in everyday life paint out their responses (pg 10-11)
- What are some things the dinos dreamt about when their loved one died?
- What kinds of the ways that you can let out mad feelings without getting into trouble?
- What are some things that you can do to help remember someone?

Post-Reading Metaphor

“Sometimes all things seem to be going well, but you can’t see that one piece is missing. You might not understand where the piece goes until you notice the emptiness that you feel as the missing piece is missing from your life. When you make a new plan and realize it isn’t better to look inside the same as the old one.”

- Use construction paper and decorating materials to personalize shoe boxes or other containers in memory of someone that the student knows. Encourage them to put a message, picture, poem, drawing, or anything else that is special to them where they can get it out when they want.

Closure: Just like the dinosaurs showed us in this book, death is a part of life. When someone dies, we may feel lots of different emotions. We also might have a lot of questions about what happens next, and wonder how we’re supposed to act. If you’ve ever lost someone, it’s important to know that there are many ways that you can grieve, and many ways that you can remember your loved one and keep their memory close to you.

EXPERIENCE THE FEELINGS AND EMOTIONAL PAIN ASSOCIATED WITH DEATH AND SEPARATION FROM THE DECEASED

“TEAR SOUP”

Synopsis: *“Tear Soup”* follows the story of Grandy after she experiences the loss of a loved one. The overall message of the story is that the grieving process is different for all people, and though there are many in our lives who can offer support, the path to healing is highly individualized for each person. The book also includes tips and guides for those affected by loss in different capacities, a list of national resources for grief at the end. A seventeen-minute DVD is also available for purchase.

Lesson Objective(s): Students will learn that the grieving process does not have a time limit or fixed rules. They will be able to recognize some of the feelings associated with grief, and what kinds of things are/are not helpful to those who are grieving.

Materials:

- Butcher paper (for making a large group list)
- Index cards (for writing recipes)
- Markers/writing utensils

Key Vocabulary—or concepts: from scratch, grief, assumption, sob, weep, wail, wince, unravel, fumed, sorrow

Pre-Reading

Activities

- Today we are going to read a story called Tear Soup. [Show the group the cover of the book.] By looking at the cover, what do you think that this story is going to be about?
- How do you think tear soup would taste?
- What kinds of things make you cry?
- How do you feel after a long cry?

Post-Reading Discussion

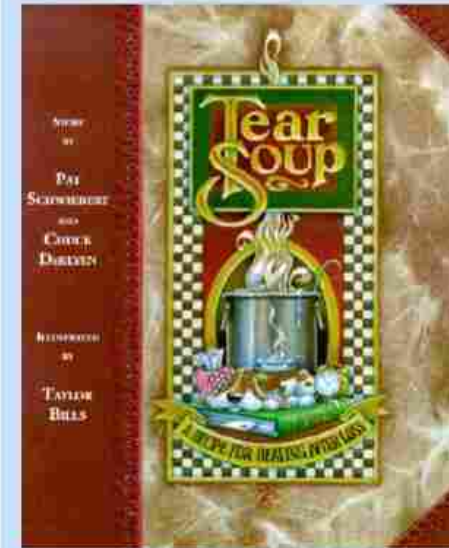
- [Stop periodically to show pictures and ask the following questions.]
- How did Grandy's husband deal with the same loss?
- Why might tear soup “in a can” (i.e. a quick fix) not taste as good as tear soup made from scratch?
- What kinds of sadness or loss might fit into a small pot? What kinds in a big pot?
- Why do you think that some people don't like to be around someone who is crying?
- How is it that Grandy's world seemed to “stop” while outside everything else was going on as usual?
- What were the things that Grandy wanted most as she made her soup? (a knowing look, warm hug, thoughtful ear)
- Why didn't Grandy want to listen to “Mrs. Cries-a-lot”? What kinds of things bothered Grandy? What kinds of things were helpful to Grandy?
- Why did a group of “soup cooks” get together and what did they talk about?
- What are some of the reasons why people need to make tear soup?
- What did Grandy learn by making tear soup?

Post-Reading Activities

- Grocery List/Recipe**
- Make up a grocery list of the deceased's favorite foods. Then, write up a “recipe” of the deceased person's favorite food as though you were going to the grocery store together. List each ingredient as a memory or quality of the deceased person.
 - In order to write a recipe for tear soup, list each ingredient and amount of that ingredient as something that you might do or feel during the grieving process (ie “2 cups hugs from a friend, ½ T loneliness, 1 pinch of questioning” etc).
 - Make a list of stupid things that people say or assume (i.e. if you're laughing and having fun, you must not miss the person, when will you get over it? How long is it going to take? I know exactly how you feel, if you had faith, you wouldn't have to feel such sorrow, etc). Then, make a list of things you can say or do to show support for the grieving person (i.e., listen, be there for the person whenever you are needed, laugh/cry together, spend time together, etc).

Closure:

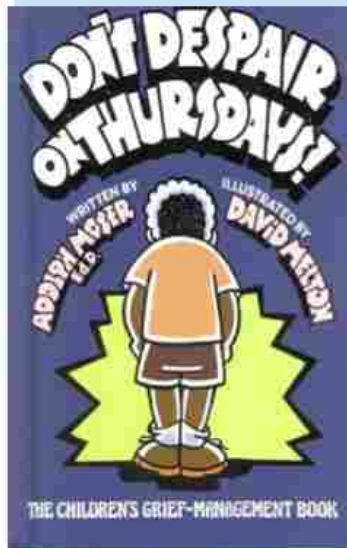
Today we learned about Grandy and her experience in making tear soup. Though it was really difficult for her and it took a long time, as she expressed her feelings she was able to grieve in a healthy and healing way.



Book Title: Tear Soup
Author: Pat Schweibert
Publisher: Grief Watch; 3rd Rev edition
Year & ISBN#: (June 1, 2005) 0961519762; 978-0961519766
Number of Pages: 56 pages
Reading Level: N/A
Interest level: 4-Adult
Available in Spanish: Sopa de Lagrimas: Una Receta Para Sanar Despues de una Perdida

ADJUST TO CHANGES IN AN ALTERED ENVIRONMENT THAT NO LONGER INCLUDES THE DECEASED
“DON'T DESPAIR ON THURSDAYS”

Book Title: *Don't Despair on Thursdays: The Children's Grief-Management Book*
Author: Adolph Moser
Publisher: Landmark Editions; 1 edition
Year & ISBN#: (January 1996) 0933849605; 978-0933849600
Number of Pages: 61 pages
Reading Level: N/A
Interest level: 1-6 Grade



Synopsis: This book informs kids of the grieving process and makes them aware of emotions/reactions that are connected with grief. It also gives them tools to use to address their emotions in a healthy way, with the greatest reminder that there is always hope.

Lesson Objective(s): After reading this book, students will be able to identify what grief is, who grief affects, and what to do when feelings of grief seem overwhelming.

Materials:

- White or colored index cards
- Pens/pencils/markers

Key Vocabulary—or concepts: despair, grief, “grief attack”

Pre-Reading Activities

- We are going to read a story about some boys and girls and some of their feelings. Some of them have had hard things happen in their lives, some have had happy things. You might have experienced some of the same things too. Listen carefully and think about if some of the things these boys and girls do might help you when you feel like despairing.

Post-Reading Discussion

- [Stop periodically to show pictures and ask the following questions.]
- What are some of the changes that happen in your life? What kinds of changes/experiences make you happy? What kinds of changes/experiences make you sad/angry/scared?
- Why might it be helpful for us to cry? Is it okay if all types of people cry?
- What are some of the ways you might feel when you are grieving?
- What are some of the things you could do when you feel grief?
- How long should we grieve?

Post-Reading Activities

• “Don’t Despair on Thursdays” note card

- Give each student an index card and a writing utensil of their choice. Instruct them to write a message to themselves with a key phrase they would like to remember (ie: “Don’t Despair on Thursdays!”). On the other side of the card, have them write the same reminder, and rest of the days of the week. Have them put the note in a place where they can see it daily.

Letter to loved one/ prayer flags

- Distribute pre-cut or small pieces of construction paper or cardstock that has been sprayed with “bio colors” paint and a pen or a marker (preferably non-permanent). Instruct the group to write a letter/message to someone they miss and write some of the nice things they wish they would have said, some of the happy times they had together, their favorite things about them, their latest news you’d like to share, etc and hang outside. When it rains, the water washes the prayer to the person.

Closure:

Today we read about some of the changes that we experience in our lives and some things that make us grieve. We learned that all people grieve differently, and that it’s okay for us to take as much time as we need to grieve and show our feelings. When we are grieving, sometimes we might feel like we don’t have any hope, but we can remind ourselves not to despair, today or any other day!

Find Ways To Remember And Memorialize The Deceased

“The Tenth Good Thing About Barney” Lesson Plan

Synopsis: This book is about the experience of a little boy when his pet cat, Barney, dies. It depicts and validates the sadness and emotions/responses that follow a loss, the uncertainty of what happens after death, and encourages memorializing and remembering those who have passed away as the little boy tries to make a list of “ten good things about Barney.”

Lesson Objective(s): After reading this book, students will be able to identify some of the key feelings of grief, understand the meaning behind funerals, and recognize some things that can be done to memorialize the deceased.

Materials:

- 1 gallon plastic nursery pots (1 per child) (or if planting one bulb each, a small pot)
- Daffodil (or paperwhites, tulips, etc) bulbs (can fit up to 5 per pot)
- Potting Soil
- Slow Release fertilizer (1 bag should be plenty for 30 pots.)
- A place to store the pots outdoors over winter
- Construction paper, pens, glue, glitter
- Cards with care instructions

Key Vocabulary—or concepts: funeral

Pre-Reading Activities This is a story about a boy whose pet cat named Barney died. As we read the story, I want you to think about how the boy is feeling, and notice some of the things he does after Barney dies.

Post-Reading Discussion

- [Stop periodically to show pictures and ask the following questions.]
- Have you ever been so sad you didn't want to do your favorite things (like watch TV or eat)?
- What is a funeral? What happens at a funeral?
- Why might the boy and Annie wonder if Barney is in heaven or not?
- What does the boy's father tell him about change as they plant seeds in the garden? How did this make the boy feel?
- What kinds of things could you do to remember important people/things in your life when they are not with you anymore?

Post-Reading Activities

Paper Chain

- Create a paper chain of memories (can be built over months or even color coded by season) by cutting out strips of colored construction paper (roughly 2" x 5"). Ask, "What reminds you of...[the person or animal]?" "When did you feel happy with...?" "What is one of your favorite memories with...?" "What do you want to remember about...?" "How would you describe [name of person or pet] to a friend, what would you say?"

Planting Bulbs

- Fill the soil to 6 inches below the top of the pot.
- Sprinkle about a teaspoon of slow-release fertilizer into the soil.
- Place the bulbs, pointed end up, on top of the soil. (Spacing isn't too important)
- Cover the bulbs with about 6 inches of soil.
- Water just enough to moisten the soil.

(Instructions to include with the Blooming Daffodils)

- Place the pot in a sunny location.
- Water as needed when the soil is dry.
- Transplant the bulbs with the foliage intact to the garden after the blooms fade. Plant in a sunny spot with good drainage. Allow the leaves to die back on their own; this will give the bulb energy for blooming next year.

Closure: Discuss that though, like Barney the cat, loved ones may die, we can find ways to remember them by thinking of good memories and sharing them with others.

Book Title: *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney*

Author: Judith Viorst

Publisher: Atheneum Books for Young Readers; 1 edition

Year & ISBN#: (September 1987) 0689712030, 978-0689712036

Number of Pages: 25

Reading Level: 2.1

Interest level: Kindergarten - Grade 2

