



Expressive Arts Activities for Children

Grief is a normal and natural response to loss. Loss can be experienced due to a death of a significant person, but can also be experienced after the loss of relationship, of identity, of community ect. Grief is a mix of feelings and emotions that can be difficult to process and understand. Art can be a very powerful way for children, youth and adults to express and to communicate their feelings.

‘When we create, we give ourselves permission to examine all that is happening within our grieving bodies.’ – Douglass Mitchell, Therapist.

Art can be a great way to communicate with a grieving child or teen. A child may not have the language to verbalize how they are feeling, but they may be able to express their emotions through other mediums.

The beauty of art is that you do not need to be good at it to do it! With the goal being to express yourself, the end result is not as important as the therapeutic act of creating.

Speak with your child and choose a topic to work on (memories, feelings ect.) and choose what type of art you both would like to do together. Once you have decided on which activity you would like to do, prepare the materials needed.

The goal is to encourage the child to talk about their feelings. (Please see below some examples of art projects and discussion questions that may be of some benefit to you). Discuss general topics to start the conversation and then incorporate more grief related questions. If possible, include some conversation around the child’s interests and hobbies or use characters from books or movies to relate to their experiences and emotions.

Activity: Worry Monster (Poem to go with the worry monster)

Use: This is something that is easy to make, can be personalized and is something kids and caregivers can do together. This craft can be used to help children with any worries they may have. Ask children to write down their worries and have the worry monster gobble them up. Talk to your child after and ask them how they feel throwing their worries away.

Supplies Needed:

- Cardboard Tissue Box,
- Googly eyes (if you do not have googly eyes, you can use cut up egg cartons and sharpie),
- Paint, paint brushes, paint trays, water cup
- Paper
- Markers
- Tape
- Scissors
- Whatever you would like to get creative with. Added features would be cardstock for hands, cardboard toilet roll holder for legs and pipe cleaners for antennas.

Directions:

1. Paint the tissue box and let dry.
2. Cut out triangle teeth and tape them to the inside of the tissue box.
3. Get creative with googly eyes, arms and legs. Make the monster as scary or happy as you like.



Discussion Questions:

1. Having worries can sometimes be a scary feeling. Do you have any worries? How do your worries make you feel?
2. Do you know that when you have worries, you can feel them in your body? Where in your body do you feel your worries?
3. Now that we have let the worry monster eat up your worries, how does that make you feel? How does it feel to let your worries go?

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Activity: Memory Book

Use: This is an easy, creative and fun way to preserve your memories of your special person and can be shared with friends and family. This is something that you can add your own artistic and creative touches to by adding photos, drawings, designs or letters.

Supplies needed:

- Keyring or ribbon
- Hole Puncher
- Paper or cardstock
- Pencils/markers/crayons/paint.



Directions:

1. Punch a hole in the top left corner of your paper/cardstock using a hole puncher.
2. Use a different page for each memory. Examples include: What your person smelt like, what they wore, what music they liked, what they liked to eat, their hobbies, what you liked to with them etc. You could laminate the pages at the end if you like. (This is not a must).
3. Stack all the pages together and put a ribbon or key ring holder through the holes created earlier. This will create a book to keep all the pages together.

Discussion Questions:

1. What type of memories do you have of (special person)? Would you like to tell me a memory you have? How does it make you feel thinking/ talking about these memories?
2. Is there anything you wish that you could have said to (special person)? If (special person) was here now, what would you say to them?
3. What was your favorite thing about (special person)? Is there anything that you did not like about (special person)?



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Activity: Coffee Filter Butterflies

Use: An adorable and easy-to-make craft that is great for teaching young children all about butterflies and their life cycle. You can find the accompanying #virtualstorytime “The Amazing Life Cycle of Butterflies” on our FB page.

Supplies Needed:

- Round coffee filters (2 per butterfly)
- Colored markers (washable)
- Wooden clothespins
- Pipe cleaners (one half per butterfly)
- Spray bottle with water

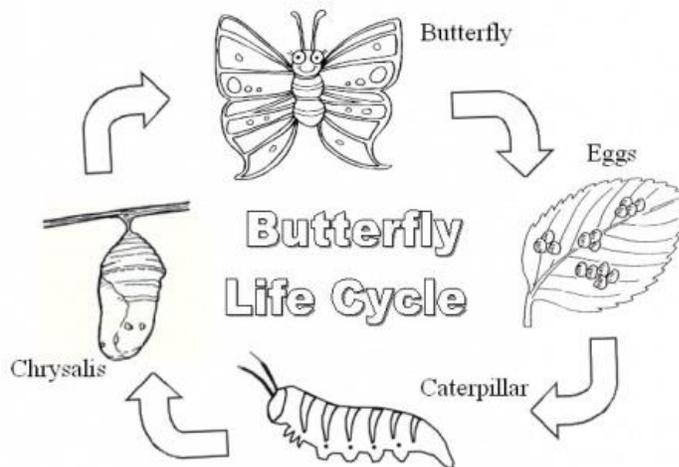


Directions:

1. Place two coffee filters on top of each other on a wipeable surface.
2. Use the markers to color the top filter. You can use one solid color or multiple colors. I recommend using more than one color.
3. Mist the coffee filters with water from the spray bottle until just slightly damp. The ink will run and create a beautiful effect.
4. Allow filters to dry completely.
5. Decorate the clothes pin using markers. You can draw eyes on the top or even glue on googly eyes!
6. Fold the coffee filters together accordion style, then pinch them in the middle and slide the clothes pin in. Spread the filter out to resemble the butterfly wings.
7. Cut a pipe cleaner in half and place inside the clothes pin to resemble the antenna.

Discussion Questions:

1. What colours and designs do you like on a butterfly? Do you think a butterfly gets to choose how they look? Do you think butterflies are like people? How do you think butterflies are like people?
2. Can you tell me the life cycle of a butterfly? Do people have a lifecycle?
3. Can people die before they are old? Do people come back after they die? Where do people go when they die? What does it look like there?



Butterfly Rearing Kits Available 800-405-1497 www.21stCenturyGifts.com

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Activity: Popsicle Stick Bridges

Use: This is a great activity to do with children and youth to help them discover who is a part of their support system.

Supplies Needed:

- Popsicle sticks
- Sharpie marker
- 2 pieces cardstock (one cut in half)
- Scissors
- Glue

Directions:

1. On each Popsicle stick, use a Sharpie marker to write the name of a person or group of people who support you. These names can include caregivers, family members, friends, pastors or spiritual leaders, school counsellors, teachers, coaches etc.

2. Glue Popsicle sticks on a half piece of cardstock, lining them up in a horizontal row, leaving a tiny space between each stick and a half inch piece of cardstock on each side.

3. Bend the half inch piece of cardstock and glue it onto another piece of cardstock. Do this on both sides, slightly bending the cardstock with the sticks on it to create a bridge.

Discussion Questions:

1. If this bridge we make could go anywhere, where would you like it to go? What would you do if you could go there now? What would you do if you had a secret place you could go to?
2. Do you have anyone you feel safe to talk to about your feelings? Who would you like to talk to about your feelings? How do you think you can take care of your feelings?
3. Is there anything you would like to talk to me about?



Activity: Calm Down Jars

Use: This is something that is easy to make, can be personalized and is something kids and caregivers can do together. Calm down jars are a great tool to help children regulate their emotions. How to use: shake vigorously and turn upside down. Watch the glitter float to the bottom while taking deep breaths. Pay attention to how your body feels once all the glitter has fallen to the bottom.

Supplies Needed:

- small glass jar or bottle
- glycerin
- food coloring
- confetti and/or glitter

Directions:

1. Fill the jar/bottle three quarters full of water.
2. Squeeze in 2 Tbsp of glycerin.
3. Add glitter and confetti as desired.
4. Add food coloring to change the Color of the water.
5. Seal with lid. If you don't have a good deal you can use tape or hot glue around the lid.
6. Shake and watch the glitter fall to the bottom. Breathe deeply until all the glitter has fallen.



Discussion Questions:

1. How do you feel when you watch the glitter fall to the bottom of the jar? What colours do you think would be good to use for our jars and why?
2. When do you think it would be a good idea to look at your calm down jar?
3. What do you think is a good way to take care of your feelings? What helps you to feel better when you are experiencing big feelings?



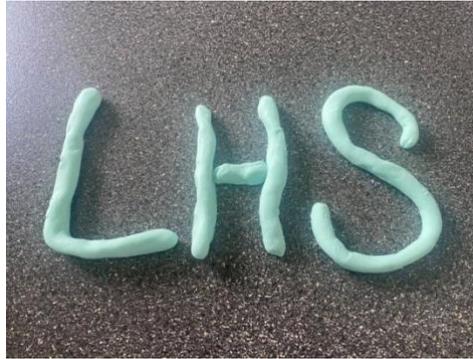
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Activity: Play dough

Use: Play dough is an easy craft to do that can be personalized by using scents, glitter and food coloring and is a great sensory activity for kids. We use play dough as a tool for children and teens to express their feelings in a healthy way. Play dough is great for feelings like anger or frustration because it can be pounded, punched or squished. Children can create figurines with the dough and use it to tell stories. Creative storytelling can help a child make sense of the loss and provides opportunities for exploring feelings regarding the death.

Supplies Needed:

- 2.5c flour
- 5cup salt
- 1.5c boiling water
- 2 Tbsp. Baby oil
- 2 Tbsp. Cream of tartar
- food coloring
- 3-5 drops glycerin
- glitter (optional)



Directions:

1. Combine dry ingredients in a box and mix well.
2. Add food coloring to boiling water and combine that in the bowl along with baby oil and glycerin. Add dry ingredients and mix well.
3. Continue mixing until dough is formed, then knead dough with hands for several minutes. Add more food coloring and glitter if needed.
4. Enjoy! Store in an airtight container when not in use.

Discussion Questions:

1. When do you think is a good time to use playdough? Do you like how the playdough feels?
2. Playdough can be used when we are feeling big emotions like anger or frustration. Can you try to squeeze and bang the playdough and tell me how it makes you feel? This is something you can do that will not hurt anyone when you are feeling big emotions.
3. Can you tell any other feelings that you may feel? How do you think you can take care of those feelings?



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Activity: Cookie Decorating

Use: I love sugar cookies because they are really easy to make, taste delicious and are fun to decorate! Sugar cookie dough can be pre-made and refrigerated if needed. This activity is great to do with kids because they can roll out the dough and use cookie cutters to make fun shapes. Once the cookies are fully cooled, use different colored icing to decorate the cookies. At Hospice, we ask children to choose colors that represent their grief feelings. We mix up purple, blue, red, orange, green and yellow icing and ask kids to name their grief feelings and choose a color that best represents their feelings. For example: the color blue may represent sadness, while red represents anger and purple represents fear. I love baking with kids because it's an activity you can do side by side while having a conversation that may be more difficult to have face to face. This is also excellent way for children to be able to identify and acknowledge their emotions.

Supplies Needed for sugar cookies:

- 2 ¾ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- 1 cup butter, softened
- 1 ½ cups white sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract



Directions :

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees F (190 degrees C). In a small bowl, stir together flour, baking soda, and baking powder. Set aside.
2. In a large bowl, cream together the butter and sugar until smooth. Beat in egg and vanilla. Gradually blend in the dry ingredients. Roll rounded teaspoonful's of dough into balls, and place onto ungreased cookie sheets.
3. Bake 8 to 10 minutes in the preheated oven, or until golden. Let stand on cookie sheet two minutes before removing to cool on wire racks. Yields 48 cookies.

Supplies Needed For Icing:

- 1 cup confectioners' sugar
- 2 teaspoons milk
- 2 teaspoons light corn syrup
- 1/4 teaspoon almond extract

Directions:

1. In a small bowl, stir together confectioners' sugar and milk until smooth. Beat in corn syrup and almond extract until icing is smooth and glossy. If icing is too thick, add more corn syrup.
2. Divide into separate bowls, and add food coloring. Dip cookies, or paint them with a brush.

Discussion Questions:

1. What feelings have you been experiencing since (special person) died? If you were to describe that feeling in a color, what color would you choose and why?
2. What has been the hardest feeling for you since (special person) died? What do you do when you are feeling that emotion? How would you like me to support you when you are feeling that way?
3. Do you think you can feel many different feelings at the same time? Do you think it is ok to feel happy and excited when you are grieving?

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Activity: Shrinkydinks hanging ornament.

Use: Shrinkable plastic. I love using Shrinkydinks because it's inexpensive, easy and can be used for so many beautiful crafts! Please note that this craft can be made for any special person in your life.

Supplies Needed:

- Shrinkable plastic
- Baking sheet
- Oven mitts
- Parchment paper
- Permanent markers (Sharpies)
- Single hole punch
- String/ribbon/chain/thread
- Scissors
- Tracer (if needed)
- Tape



Directions:

1. If desired, print design to use as a tracer.
2. Tape shrinkable plastic sheet over top of tracer. Trace image using permanent markers (remember that this will shrink by about 75% so choose a larger image). As you can see, the color's darken during baking so you may want to use lighter colors than I did. I find dark greens and blues don't turn out as nicely.
3. Cut out and hole punch before baking.
4. Bake for 2-3 minutes at 325. I recommend folding a piece of parchment paper in half and placing the shrinkydinks inside like an envelope prior to baking to prevent it from curling.
5. Let cool and thread string/ribbon/chain/thread through the hole.

Discussion Questions:

1. Where would you like to hang your ornament for your special person? Is there anything else you would like to do to remember them?
2. What is your favorite memory of your special person? What memories do you have that are painful to remember?
3. If you had a friend who was grieving, what would you say to them to support them? How would you like me to support you?



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Activity: Slime

Use: Slime is one of the sensory crafts we make that children can use to help express their emotions. Slime can be punched, squished, stretched and even thrown, which is a great way for children to be able to get out their anger. For a lot of children, anger is a big part of their grief and we find that being able to release anger in a safe, but physical way is very helpful for a lot of children. Slime is very easy to make, only requires a few ingredients and is really fun to play with!

Supplies Needed:

- 5c white glue
- 5Tbsp baking soda
- food coloring-as needed
- loose glitter-as needed
- 1Tbsp contact lens solution



Directions:

1. In a large bowl, mix all ingredients together except the contact lens solution. Food coloring and loose glitter are optional, but it is fun to make your slime sparkly and colorful!
2. Mix in the contact lens solution, which activates the slime. Kids usually need help to mix in the solution.
3. Slime sticks to itself, so use the slime to get all the little pieces off the inside of the bowl. Take out of the bowl and knead in your hands like dough a few times until the slime is less sticky.
4. Enjoy! Be sure not to play with it on carpet or in the car.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some big feelings that you may feel after experiencing the death of someone close to you? What do you do with those big feelings? Where do you feel those feelings in your body?
2. How does it feel when you punch or squish the slime? What else do you think you could do to take care of big feelings like anger?
3. How do you think I can support you when you are experiencing big feelings?



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Activity: Flower Pot Painting & Planting

Use: This is an activity I use to teach children about the cycle of life and it's a fun activity that is enjoyable for all ages and can be done individually or as a group!

At the beginning of the life cycle, the flower starts off as a seed. In order for it to grow, it must be planted in good soil, watered and placed in a safe environment where it will thrive. Once planted and cared-for, the seed will begin to sprout into a tiny plant. With continued love and attention, the little sprout will bloom into a beautiful flower. Near the end of the flower's life, it will start to wither and then it will die and that is its life cycle. How are we similar to the sunflower?

Supplies Needed:

- (I purchased the pots, seeds and soil at Walmart and the paint at Dollarama)
- small terra cotta pots
- acrylic paints, paint trays and brushes
- water cups for cleaning brushes
- newspaper or paper towel
- soil
- container sunflower seeds

Directions:

1. Place your pot on newspaper or paper towel for easy clean up. Paint your pot in the style and color's of your choosing. To personalize it, consider painting the name of your special person, their favorite flower, a quote or saying that reminds you of them or use their favorite colors. You are going to want to paint 2-3 coats so the color of the pot doesn't show through.

2. Once your pot is dry, fill to the bottom of the inside rim with fresh soil. Take two or three seeds and gently push them an inch or so into the soil.

3. Remember to water your sunflower and to place somewhere where it will be exposed to sunlight!

I first noticed a little sprout after 6 days of planting. After two more days, both seeds I planted had sprouted! Happy planting!



Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think people are like plants? What similarities are there between people and plants?
2. Some plants grow back every year. Do you think that people can come back after they have died?
3. Where do you think people go when they die? What is it like there? Can we visit? Can we talk to the person who died?

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