

Haven Herald



The Special Needs of the Grieving Child by Yvonne Herbst

Bereaved children may display changes in behavior and eating patterns, as well as clinginess or separation anxiety.

When a loved one dies, the surviving family members, friends and colleagues can be overwhelmed by a surge of emotions and the practical demands of dealing with the aftermath of a death.

Shock, sadness, loneliness, worry, fear, despair, grief, anger, and guilt are just a few of the emotions that can consume us in the wake of a loved one's death.

When a spouse or child dies, the surviving parent(s) may be unable to offer emotional or practical support to younger children while they grapple with the overwhelming challenges of their own grief.

Sadly, the needs of bereaved children are often neglected, overlooked and unrecognized, leaving the bereaved child alone and adrift during a traumatic time in their life.

Unresolved childhood grief can lead to mental health and behavioral problems in adulthood. This is why it's important for bereaved children to receive love and support from a caring adult or adults who can help them process their feelings and their loss in an age-appropriate way.

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Letter From The Executive Director

The fall is a busy season at Haven with volunteers returning from vacations and planning for our fall programs to include a golf tournament fundraiser this October.

The cooler, colorful days of fall are a welcome change from the summer heat.

This newsletter focuses on helping children through the grief process. Children grieve differently than adults but it is important for adults who are supporting a child who is grieving to be aware of how they should approach topics and conversations. Care, honesty and consideration of the child's age can go a long way to help them with their grief. For young children, play is their work so plenty of opportunities to play should be structured into their day as well as time to rest and talk. Older children and teens may need additional support to deal with the trauma of the loss. Children of all ages might demonstrate unusual behaviors that are not the norm. Though no one can change what happened, children's feelings need validation and expression during this difficult time.

Jill Bellacicco



What Worked for Us

by Toni Petersen

Nearly six years ago, my husband and best friend of 37 years died suddenly of a heart attack. Our then 4-year-old granddaughter, Anne, and 18-month-old grandson, Joey, were with us at the time. Ken and I had been babysitting for the weekend, as our son and his wife were away at a wedding.

Ten years earlier, Ken and I lost both our daughter and our niece in a car accident, so I could not believe this could possibly be happening to my 59-year-old husband. I was, as one might expect, distraught and nearly hysterical.

I was able to quickly get a friend to come over and take the children while I waited for the ambulance, but not before our precious grandchildren were witness to a highly traumatic event.

Joey was too young to remember anything of that day, but I have always had my antennae up for signs that Anne might be deeply affected. I consider myself extremely fortunate that I watch my grandchildren full-time, so I have been able to see them daily, and be a big part of their lives.

Children grieve differently from adults. They may have a burst of tears one minute and skip off playing the next, so it can be easy to underestimate the effect that a loss has on a child. However, there are some very good resources available to help navigate their pain and loss, and here are some that worked for our family.

TALK - I researched ways to answer the many questions they had; Where is Grampy now? Why did he die? Is someone else going to die now too? The responses to these questions will vary based on a family's belief systems, but the point is to talk openly and often from the beginning. Once you begin the habit of NOT mentioning the deceased person, or the loss, the harder it will be to talk at all. We talk about Ken's hobbies, his love of Corvettes, the Yankees, and cooking. I remind Anne and Joey of how much fun he had playing with his grandchildren and how he would let Anne put bows in his hair if that's what she wanted. Telling funny stories is one of our favorite things to do.

SESAME STREET - Some of the most helpful and simplest information on the topic of grief for younger children we found was at <https://sesameworkshop.org/topics/grief/> Watching the videos together sparked many a tender conversation, and the familiar characters made the topic less scary.



BOOKS - I found several books written for children on the topic of grief, but one of the best was *The Memory Box: A Book About Grief* by Joanna Rowland and Thea Baker. It tells the story of a child who is grieving a loss, and creates a Memory Box to fill with mementos of her loved one. Creating the box was an artistic activity in which Anne could remember Grampy and keep him 'nearby'.

PERSONAL AND FUN RITUALS – We celebrate Ken's birthday each year by going out to one of his favorite restaurants, where we each order something he loved to eat. We say this is a table of Grampy's favorites, both people and food.

MODEL/MAINTAIN ROUTINES - Children take their cues from the adults in their lives. Life does continue after loss, and while we are very sad, we are also very fortunate to have each other, and will be able to live life (albeit differently) again. To that end, I tried to maintain as many routines as possible. Routines are very important to children; they give them a sense of security, especially important when life is turned upside down.

My grandchildren are 10 and 7 today. Joey, who was too young at the time to have any recollection of that event, is aware that his grandfather died and he does still have questions, as we all do, about death. Anne seems to have come through well – she talks openly and happily about her grandfather now, though we still shed a tear or two together now and then.

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Younger children may need help understanding that their loved one is not coming back. Older children and teens may need to be lovingly encouraged to feel all their feelings, to be reassured that their feelings can be expressed and heard without judgment or shame, and to talk about their feelings towards their loved one so that they can move on with their lives in a healthy way.

How to Help a Grieving Child

Evermore's website (<https://evermore.org/bereaved-children/>) offers the following suggestions for supporting a grieving child:

1. **Talk about the death and grief.** Don't avoid the subject. Provide age-appropriate and truthful information about death. Don't say that a loved one has "passed away," "gone to sleep," is "lost" or has "crossed over," (because) children can interpret these words in a literal way.
2. **Explain the meaning of grief and how people react to death.** Grief is a natural process that everyone experiences after a loved one dies. Grief is not a single emotion. It's like a backpack carrying many different thought, feelings, and behaviors. Our grief backpack may stay with us through the rest of our life. Sometimes it is heavier than others, and sometimes we need people to help us carry it.
3. **Be consistent with daily routines.** Routines provide structure and familiarity and offer comfort to children. Regular mealtimes, naps and bedtime stories are more important than ever.
4. **Be emotionally available.** Find the help you need to grieve, so you can be emotionally available to support the bereaved child. If providing the needed support is more than you can bear or handle, ask other trusted family members or friends to step in and help.
5. **Let them play.** If your child is ready to return to school, friends and activities, let them. Even when they are grieving, they are still kids and need to be with their friends and teachers.
6. **Encourage expressions of grief.** Whether it's a hug, snuggling and crying or drawing a picture of a favorite memory with their loved one, provide plenty of opportunities for your grieving child to articulate their sadness and emotions.
7. **Consider whether they should attend the funeral.** Attending the funeral will depend on the age of the child and their own comfort level, but it shouldn't be a requirement. If they want to attend, prepare them for what they may see and hear.

Most children will find healthy ways to navigate their grief and, eventually, find happiness in life. But some young people can develop maladaptive behaviors, especially those without adult support, who have limited resources, have had other traumatic experiences or who are mourning a loved one who was murdered or died by suicide. New fears, developmental delays, extreme clinginess and risk-taking behaviors are signs that it's time to seek help from a doctor or therapist.



Suggested Reading / Additional Resources <https://bookshop.org/lists/children-s-grief-books-in-english?>



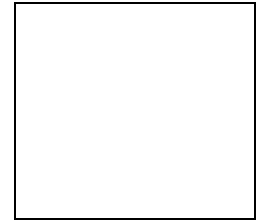
HOW HAVEN IS FUNDED

Haven is classified by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. It is funded mainly by donations from individuals in the community who wish to support our work and by those who donate in memory of a loved one. Donations are tax deductible. If you are interested in making a donation, please contact Haven at (703) 941-7000 or at havenofnova@verizon.net

Haven of Northern Virginia, Inc.

4606 Ravensworth Road

Annandale, Virginia 22003



Fall Schedule

Haven of Northern Virginia Fundraiser

Golf Tournament at Herndon Centennial Golf Course

Shot Gun start Monday October 21, 2024 at 10 AM

To register go to <HTTPS://BIRDEASE.COM/HAVENGOLF>

or email <GOLF.HAVENOFNOVA@GMAIL.COM>

for all information.

Navigating Grief during the Holiday Season

Saturday, November 9, 2024

2:00 – 4:00 pm

ZOOM Drop-in Suicide Loss Support Group

1st and 3rd Saturdays of each month

11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

In-person Suicide Loss Support Group

2nd Saturdays of each month

11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Haven also offers individual support by phone and in person; please call to schedule an appointment. For immediate support without an appointment, a volunteer is available on a walk-in basis Monday through Friday between 10:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.

Contact Information

Haven of Northern Virginia

4606 Ravensworth Road

Annandale, Virginia 22003

Phone: (703) 941-7000

E-mail: havenofnova@verizon.net

Hours of Operation

Monday through Friday

9:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.

www.havenofnova.org

Messages may be left on our voicemail after hours