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Seasons of Grief

SPRING

WHAT IS GRIEF?

Grief is simply a normal response to loss. But it is not simple and it doesn't feel normal. Grief is a complex experience that impacts every area of life: emotional, physical, mental, spiritual. It can feel very destabilizing, especially after losing a loved one. It's unpredictable; it doesn't follow any particular timetable and is different for each person. Grief can affect us in many and sometimes surprising ways. You may feel that your sense of the world and your place in it has been turned upside down. Grief isn't linear or experienced in stages. Its movement is more circular and uneven, and many reactions and feelings overlap. It may take you on an emotional roller coaster, or come over you again and again like waves.

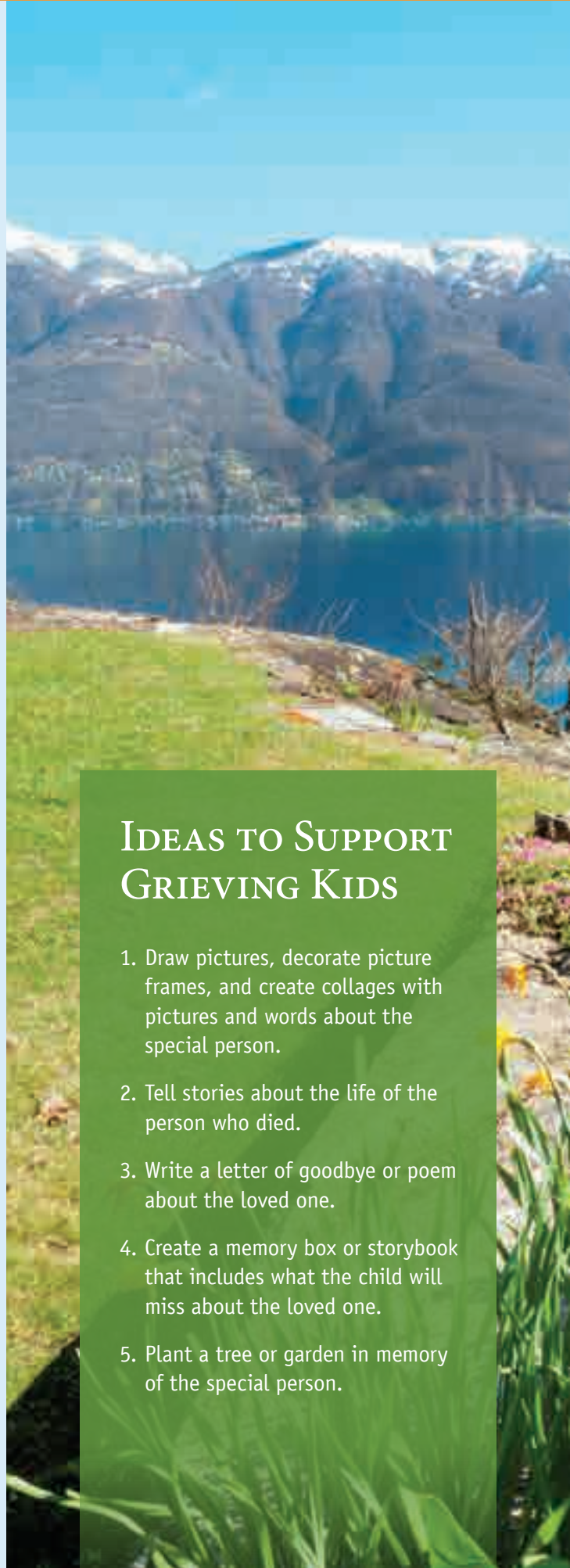
In the early days of grief, it's not unusual to feel numb and unable to fully grasp the impact of your loss. You may be prepared to feel sad, but surprised by feeling angry, guilty, fearful or even relieved. All of these are normal emotional responses and can change from day to day or moment to moment. The stress of grief can create physical symptoms that may include sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, and lack of energy. Grief can disrupt life and create confusion, inability to concentrate, and loss of memory, making daily routine activities challenging to complete. Grief takes time; it can't be rushed. It's important to be patient and gentle with yourself. Give yourself permission to accept help as well as practice good self-care.



KIDS GRIEVE TOO

Just as each adult grieves differently, so does each child. However, there are some special aspects of children's grief—primarily based on a child's age and stage of development. For example, children who experience a death at a young age may have difficulty understanding what death really means. They often don't understand death's finality, its causes, its irreversibility, and its universality. Children frequently grieve in intense, short episodes.

In addition, their grief is often delayed—and they're liable to return and re-process the loss at different stages in their lives. For more information about children's grief and ways to support grieving children, go to GriefSupport@vnacolorado.org.



IDEAS TO SUPPORT GRIEVING KIDS

1. Draw pictures, decorate picture frames, and create collages with pictures and words about the special person.
2. Tell stories about the life of the person who died.
3. Write a letter of goodbye or poem about the loved one.
4. Create a memory box or storybook that includes what the child will miss about the loved one.
5. Plant a tree or garden in memory of the special person.

A Prayer for Spring

By Janis Heil

Like Springtime, let me unfold and grow fresh and anew from this cocoon of grief that has been spun around me.

Help me face the harsh reality of sunshine and renewed life as my bones still creak from the winter of my grief.

Life has dared to go on around me and, as I recover from the insult of life's continuance, I adjust my focus to include healing and growth as possibility in my future.

Give me strength to break out of the cocoon of my grief, but may I never forget it is the place where I grew my wings, becoming a new person because of my loss.

WHAT CAN HELP WHEN YOU ARE GRIEVING?

Springtime is often thought of as the season of renewal, but it can also be a season of ambivalence. Although warmer, sunnier months can be nurturing and inspire new hopefulness, grief does not suddenly go away just because seasons change. Spring can be a time in the year's cycle when people who are grieving may feel powerfully disoriented and out of step. Not only is everyone still living ordinary lives, but the natural world itself appears to be full of hopefulness, lovely new beginnings, and second chances. All things we may not feel.



Here are a few things that can help you when you are grieving:

Sleep, Rest, and Relaxation. Regular sleep and rest are very important. If you have trouble sleeping, try drinking a glass of milk, listening to soothing music, or listening to a guided meditation.

Allow Yourself Time to Grieve. You need time to grieve. This can be time alone or time with others you trust. Grief takes time. If you allow the time you need, it takes less time.

Eat and Drink Well. Try to eat well-balanced meals. Drink plenty of water and herbal teas; try to avoid caffeinated drinks or alcohol.

Access Support. Find people or support groups who are comfortable with your grief and will let you experience your feelings, whether that is crying, telling your story again and again, or sitting with you in silence. Get help with the things that are stressful (i.e., financial matters, parenting, etc.).

Do Something with Your Feelings. Find an outlet for your feelings. Journaling, painting, sculpting, writing, or playing music can be a release. Find what works for you.

Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Self-Care. Grief is exhausting and you need to replenish yourself. Get some exercise. Take a hot bath. Do some yoga or meditation. Take "time outs" and breathe deeply. Connect with your spiritual community and/or the natural world.

Be Gentle with Yourself. Above all, be gentle with yourself. Try to be patient with the process and know that grief can feel like waves, ebbing and flowing, sometimes day by day or moment by moment.