

HOLDING WHAT HURTS



Reading together
through grief

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Welcome

Welcome to this guide featuring six books to help you and your child navigate the layers of grief. While we can't shield children from pain, we can give them the tools to process it.

Because children mirror our resilience, we recommend starting with our first workbook, *Holding What Hurts: Tools for Living with Grief*, to tend to your own healing first. Once you are properly grounded, you can use this second resource, *Holding What Hurts: Talking with Kids*, to guide these conversations.

How Stories Help

Grief is a personal response to many types of loss – the death of a pet, moving, or changing family dynamics. Picture books act as a bridge, allowing children to explore "big feelings" through a character's experience. You can find read-aloud versions of these titles on *YouTube* for easy access at home.

Reading Together

- *Go at Your Own Pace*: If a story doesn't resonate, set it aside. There is no "right" way or story to read.
- *Follow Their Lead*: You don't need to teach a lesson. Let your child's observations guide the talk.
- *Presence is Key*: The most important part of this process is simply being there.

Trust your instincts and honor your child's pace. If this feels like too much, revisit the first workbook to focus on your own self-care. These stories are here to help you hold each other and heal together.

With Care,



Angela Schilaty
Registered Mental Health Counselor Intern
Supervised by Cheyenne Starczewski MH18469

books

GRIEF IS AN ELEPHANT

AUTHOR: TAMARA ELLIS SMITH | ILLUSTRATOR: NANCY WHITESIDES

Grief is not a static experience, but an evolving process that shifts in weight and shape - from an overwhelming elephant to a small, gentle firefly. We don't need to rush it away; by acknowledging its presence and allowing it to change, we move from being crushed by the experience to holding it softly in our palms.

ACTIVITY

Use clay or playdough to externalize and observe how grief shifts over time.

POTENTIAL CONVERSATION TOPICS

For Kids: Exploring Through Play

- If your grief were an animal today, what would it be?
- What color and texture does your grief have right now?
- If you could whisper to your grief, what would you say to it?

For Adults: Things to Ponder

- What does your grief feel like in this moment? What shape, size, or weight comes to mind?
- Since your loss, have you noticed your grief shifting in shape or size? What prompted that change?

books

SHELTER FOR SADNESS

AUTHOR: ANNE BOOTH | ILLUSTRATOR: DAVID LITCHFIELD

Sadness is not a problem to be solved, but a guest to be welcomed. By building a metaphorical "shelter" for sadness, we provide it with a safe place to exist - whether it needs to be loud, quiet, dark, or light.

The key takeaway is that we don't need to fix or rush away sadness. When we create a secure space for it, we acknowledge its right to be there, ensuring it remains safe while allowing us to engage with life at our own pace.

ACTIVITY

Create a physical representation of a safe space to help externalize and honor feelings of sadness. Materials: A small box, craft supplies, drawings, or small comforting objects.

POTENTIAL CONVERSATION TOPICS

For Kids: Exploring Through Play

- If your sadness had a room of its own, what would you put inside to make it feel cozy?
- Does your sadness like the lights on or off? Does it like to be loud or very quiet?
- If you could visit your sadness in its shelter, would you want to play a game, sit quietly, or have a hug?

For Adults: Things to Ponder

- Where do you currently "house" your sadness in your daily life? Do you allow it space, or do you try to close the door on it?
- What does your internal shelter need to feel "strong" enough to weather difficult seasons?

books

LOST IN THE CLOUDS

AUTHOR: TOM TINN-DISBURY | ILLUSTRATOR: TOM TINN-DISBURY

Through his journey of grief, a young boy discovers that while emotions may mirror changing weather, he is inherently strong and capable of healing when he shares his feelings with those who support him.

ACTIVITY

Create a "Weather Map of Feelings" where different weather patterns represent specific emotional states (e.g., Sunny = Joy, Rainy = Sadness, Stormy = Anger/Frustration, Cloudy = Confusion/Worry).

POTENTIAL CONVERSATION TOPICS

For Kids: Exploring Through Play

- If your feeling today was a rainstorm, would it be a light drizzle or a big thunderstorm?
- What is one thing that helps you feel a little more 'sunny' when your weather is feeling gloomy?
- Who is someone you can talk to when your weather feels too big to handle on your own?

For Adults: Things to Ponder

- When you are experiencing this 'weather,' what is one small thing you have done in the past that helped the clouds clear just a little bit?
- If we could look ahead to a time when this current emotional weather shifts, what would be the first sign that the forecast is improving?
- What is one strength or resource you possess that acts like an umbrella, keeping you sheltered even when the emotional storm is at its peak?

books

THE RABBIT LISTENED

AUTHOR: CORI DOERRFELD | ILLUSTRATOR: CORI DOERRFELD

When faced with difficult emotions, a young child discovers that attempting to "fix" the problem is less effective than simply being present; true support is found in listening without judgment and letting others feel heard.

ACTIVITY

This activity uses physical play to practice intentional listening: one person acts as the builder, constructing a tower to represent their feelings while sharing a story, while the other takes on the role of "The Rabbit." The listener wears homemade "Rabbit Ears" to help them focus entirely on the builder, offering quiet presence through gentle eye contact and nodding. Once the tower is complete, the pair discusses their experience before switching roles to ensure everyone has a turn to be fully heard.

POTENTIAL CONVERSATION TOPICS

For Kids: Exploring Through Play

- What was it like to have someone listen closely to your story?
- What does someone do that makes you feel really heard?
- Is it easy to just to others, or do you find yourself wanting to help fix their 'tower'?

For Adults: Things to Ponder

- When others have feelings, is it hard for you to just listen?
- Do you find yourself wanting to 'fix' things for them?
- What is it like for you to simply listen instead of trying to fix the problem?



THE MEMORY TREE

AUTHOR: BRITTA TECKENTRUP | ILLUSTRATOR: BRITTA TECKENTRUP

After Fox passes away, his forest friends gather to share their favorite stories and memories of him. A beautiful tree begins to grow from these stories, becoming the tallest and strongest tree in the woods. The story shows how our love for others keeps them with us even after they are gone.

ACTIVITY

Create a "Memory Tree" by drawing a bare tree or placing branches in a jar. Use paper leaves to record favorite memories, funny stories, or special qualities of your loved one. Decorate the branches together to create a growing, visual tribute that honors their ongoing presence in your lives.

POTENTIAL CONVERSATION TOPICS

For Kids: Exploring Through Play

- What is one thing that always made [Name] laugh, and why did that make them happy?
- If you had to pick one adventure you shared with [Name], which one would you put on a leaf?
- What is a special 'thing' or hobby [Name] loved that you like to do too?

For Adults: Things to Ponder

- When you feel the weight of missing your lost loved one, which memory brings you the most comfort?
- What positive trait of your lost loved one do you see flourishing in yourself or your child today?
- How can we nurture this tree together to keep our connection strong?



THE INVISIBLE STRING

AUTHOR: PATRICE KARST | ILLUSTRATOR: JOANNE LEW-VRIETHOFF

This story introduces the comforting idea of an "invisible string" made of love that connects us to everyone we care about, no matter where they are. It reassures us that our bonds are never broken by distance or absence, as this invisible connection remains strong and present in our hearts. By recognizing this link, we can feel secure in the knowledge that we are always held and supported by those we love.

ACTIVITY

Create a "web of connection" using a ball of yarn. Gather family members in a circle and pass the yarn back and forth, holding onto a piece of the string as it moves from person to person. Once the web is woven, emphasize that the string also connects to the person you are missing, reminding everyone that this invisible tie remains unbroken and present in your shared space.

POTENTIAL CONVERSATION TOPICS

For Kids: Exploring Through Play

- What is one memory of a fun time we had together that makes our invisible string feel really strong?
- If we could send a 'thank you' through our string for something we love about [Name], what would we send?
- When we are having a busy day, how can we remember that our strings are still connected to each other?

For Adults: Things to Ponder

- In moments when you feel disconnected, what helps you remember that the 'string' is still there?
- How does it change your perspective to think of your relationships as a web rather than a single line?
- What is one way we can 'tug' on our string today to feel closer to one another?

NEXT STEPS IN YOUR HEALING

Thank you for choosing to work through this workbook. By prioritizing these practices, you are meeting your child exactly where they are. Through your calm presence and honest communication, you are building a safe harbor where their emotions are always welcome and held with care.

Taking Care of Yourself

The best way to support your child is to make sure you are supported too. You are navigating big life changes, and you are doing an incredible job. Please know that you do not have to walk this path alone.

Support Designed for You

As a counselor, I specialize in helping people navigate life's big shifts and build lasting resilience. Whether you are looking for in-person support or the convenience of telehealth, I am here to help you find your footing.

I provide services throughout Florida and accept insurance to ensure you can get the care you need. If you are ready for a little extra support to process your journey, I would be honored to walk alongside you. Please reach out if you are looking for a supportive space to grow.

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