

# **Grief Support Groups for Children, Teens and Parents**

**Center for Good Mourning  
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Good Mourning Grief Support Groups are for children and teens who have experienced the death of a family member or friend. The goal of the Grief Support Groups is to assist children and teens with the grieving process by providing support and education about death, grief, and coping. There is no charge for group members as the program is provided at no charge due to the generous support of the Arkansas Children's Hospital Auxiliary, statewide Circle of Friends, and the Harvey and Bernice Jones Foundation.

Grief Support Groups run for eight weekly sessions. Each session is about 90 minutes in length. Children and teens meet in small groups with others of similar age, and all group members have had the experience of the death of a family member or friend. Each group is led by a team of leaders who work at Arkansas Children's Hospital. The group leaders come from different backgrounds including Child Life, Nursing, Pastoral Care, Psychology, and Social Work. All group leaders have received special training in order to work in the Good Mourning program.

Parents and adult caregivers of children in the Grief Support Groups are invited to participate in an optional adult group. The adult group meets at the same time and building as the groups for children and teens.

Prior to the start of the program, parents and adult caregivers meet for a parent orientation. During the orientation, parents have an opportunity to learn more about the program and how they can support their children in their grief and mourning. Parents and caregivers also meet with the group leaders for their child's group in order to learn more about what their child will do and learn in the program. The parent orientation helps the group leaders better prepare for the unique needs of the children and teens with whom they will be working.

The children and teen groups will follow the same basic outline. Because group sharing and bonding will be very important, no new group members may enter the program after the second session. Activities are specially planned for each age group in order to meet the developmental needs of the children and teens. Older groups will have more discussion and younger groups will have more activities. A summary of the outline for the eight sessions is as follows:

- Session 1:** The group will begin with activities to "break the ice" and help the group members get to know each other. Group members will be asked to share about the death of the family member or friend who died. The concept of the life cycle may be discussed.
- Session 2:** This session will focus on feelings--what they are and how they are expressed. Both pleasant and unpleasant feelings will be discussed.
- Session 3:** Groups members will be helped to share a description or story of the person who died. This sharing will include what the group member liked and disliked about the person.
- Session 4:** The major topic for this session will be how the death has affected the family. Memory objects will be brought to the session and discussed. The group will begin to prepare for Session 5, which includes discussion about what happens at funerals and memorial services.
- Session 5:** The funeral of the person who died and what happens at funerals will be discussed this session. A photo album of a funeral home and a funeral director will be available as resources for the group discussion. One goal of the session is to decrease the fear and mystery about what happens when a person dies (imagination is much scarier than reality).
- Session 6:** Special times of the year such as birthdays and holidays will be the focus for activities and discussion. The whole family will be invited to come together to create and share a "family banner" of their own design.
- Session 7:** For this session, adults and children meet together to create a "Family Banner" to represent their family. Adults in the family are invited to participate even if they have not been in an adult support group.
- Session 8:** "Looking back and facing forward" will be the theme for this final session. It will also be a time to see the progress everyone has made. Parents and children will meet together for a joint closing ceremony with a reception following.

A **Reunion** meeting is offered approximately 3 months following the end of the seven-week series. This meeting allows for additional support to help with positive changes begun during the eight-week sessions. More details about the Reunion meeting are given to group members at the last session.

If you would like more information about Center for Good Mourning programs and Grief Support Groups, please call 501-364-7000 or email [adamsjg@archildrens.org](mailto:adamsjg@archildrens.org).