

Activities to help young children with complicated grief

1. Read stories to children that allow them to project their feelings onto the story characters. This opens a dialogue with a child in a way that is not threatening.
2. Allow children to visualize their hurt, fear or pain. Then can then draw, make use clay, or imagine these symbolic feelings being able to talk. If the hurt could talk, eight year old Nancy explained, it would say "Why me?" Nancy had experienced multiple losses, including the death of her younger sister. Feelings of having bad luck or being punished began to emerge.
3. Invite children to make a Loss Timeline, filling it in with people and dates in chronological order according to when they died. This Loss Timeline becomes a concrete representation of all the losses one has experienced.
4. Create with children a geneogram of family tree using a circle and square to represent those people still living and those people who have died in their life. Kids can not only see the extent of the losses they've had, but the support system of the people that are still remaining.

By helping children put their feelings outside of themselves we can facilitate their healing. Sharing feelings diminishes the hurt.

Karen S. Headlee

kheadlee@ufl.edu

