



Caregivers Guide



*to you from us for
hope and healing*



For more information visit our website at
www.katesheart.org
<https://www.facebook.com/KatesHeartOrg>
©Kates Heart 2022; 2021; 2020

welcome



This caregiver guide is meant to comfort and encourage adults in providing support to the grieving children in their lives.

We are so sorry you are facing the heart-wrenching loss of a loved one. We are glad you are here but not for the reason that brings you here.

Your task is not straightforward or easy, but our hope is this guide and care pack will provide some direction and support for healing for the grieving child in your life. This is not a workbook to go through in a certain order or to accomplish each item, but rather a guide to support children in their grief process. The care pack may be used at any point in the grieving process. The caregivers guide includes sections for children ages 0-18.

We hope these packs and guide will be a blessing to you and your child, or children, as you travel together through the journey of grief and loss.

Kate's Heart Team 

01 How to use this care pack

02 Ways to help grieving kids

03 Using books & activities

04 Ideas for activities

05 Acknowledgements

Sensitivity

What's inside the care pack?



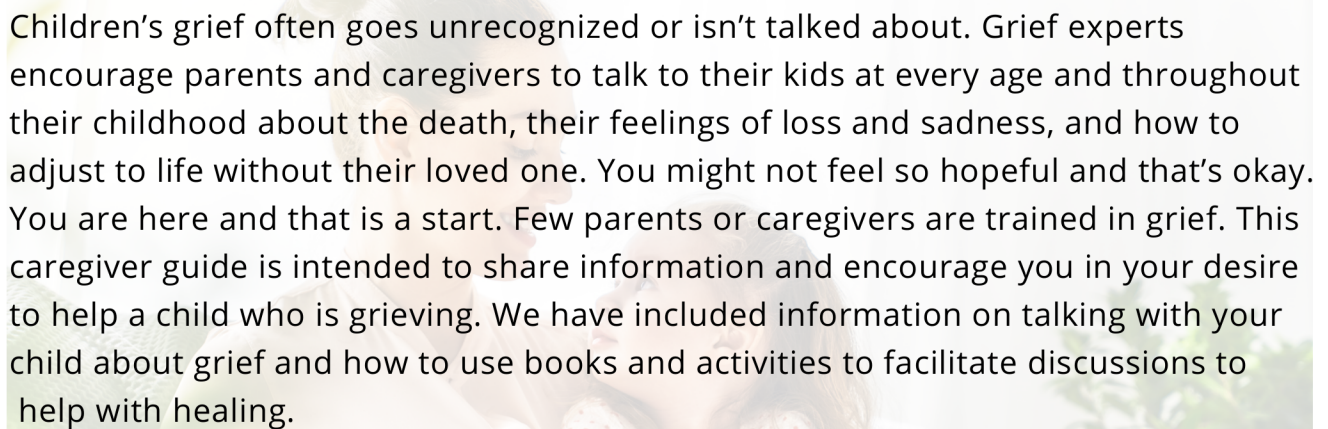
Books to keep

Activities to do

Guides for caregivers



01 HOW TO USE THIS CARE PACK



Children's grief often goes unrecognized or isn't talked about. Grief experts encourage parents and caregivers to talk to their kids at every age and throughout their childhood about the death, their feelings of loss and sadness, and how to adjust to life without their loved one. You might not feel so hopeful and that's okay. You are here and that is a start. Few parents or caregivers are trained in grief. This caregiver guide is intended to share information and encourage you in your desire to help a child who is grieving. We have included information on talking with your child about grief and how to use books and activities to facilitate discussions to help with healing.

We offer a family care pack with books and activities appropriate for different ages process grief and emotions. If your child is not ready for some of the books or activities, they can be useful as the child grows and grieves again in different ways at various developmental stages. There are many ideas to choose from or to inspire your own creations. We offer ways for how to use the books and activities, but only you can decide what to use based on the needs, age, and personality of your child. Please use what is relevant and meaningful for your child.

ACTIVITY SHEETS

There are different types of activities that can be used with the books or alone. More ideas and downloadable sheets can be found on our website at www.katesheart.org.

SUPPLIES

The included supplies can be used with the activities, free art, writing, or drawings.

MEMORY ACTIVITIES

The pack includes a several different craft projects for the children to make to help remember their loved one. All packs include a white box to fold into a memory box that can store special items or photos.

HEART SHAPED STRESS BALL

The heart shape is good for fidgeting, to practice breathing, reduce stress, and anxiety.

Books give words to feelings and share characters with similar experiences to help children feel less alone, making it a safe way for kids to talk about emotions.



Children are more aware and typically know more than we think they do. Honest age appropriate discussion gives them permission to talk about how they are feeling and lets them feel understood. But talking about grief can be difficult for kids. Age appropriate books can help you find ways to talk about grief. Reading books, talking about the characters, their experiences, and behaviors with a trusted adult can facilitate healing in grieving children. There is no one right way to help every grieving child with their grief but we think books and discussions are a good choice for many. Be mindful that children handle grief in different ways than adults and in different periods of time.

You do not have to know the right answer or be perfect in talking with your child. They only need you to be loving, honest, present, and available. Let your child engage with the books and supplies and allow them to choose what they want to read or do. While reading, point out facial expressions and body language that give clues as to what the characters may be feeling. Leisurely read the book giving kids plenty of time to observe the illustrations and ask questions. Children not experiencing grief in the moment may not respond to the questions or to the book you've chosen as you anticipated they would. They may still be listening and processing and that's okay. There are more reading together tips later in this guide.

The next few pages are intended to provide information and support for parents and caregivers as they encourage their child towards hope and healing.

02 WAYS TO HELP GRIEVING KIDS

This short discussion on the next few pages is to help normalize some of what you might experience. Adults do not recover from grief like an injury or illness but healing can happen when we learn to adjust to a new life different than we imagined. Children too will always grieve the loss of a significant person in their lives.

Children will grieve immediately after a loss but also for many years. As children grow and go through different developmental stages grieving is often re-experienced in new ways. It is as if they re-experience the loss as their abilities to understand grow. Your child, and you, likely will experience feelings of grief during holidays, significant life milestones, triggers, and special dates, but also at different points in a routine day.

While it is natural for caregivers to want to protect their children from becoming upset, hiding feelings, or ignoring grief is not recommended as a healthy way to respond to grief.



This guide is not intended to replace counseling or support groups but rather to supplement and provide at home ideas. Consult a professional if you have concerns about your child.

Children's grief can come in spurts and their behavior may seem strange to adults. For example, your child may be sad one moment and then jumps up ready to play soccer the next moment. That is normal. Brief grief spurts and then play is how their brains process what is happening to them and is appropriate for their age.

Many experts recommend that you find pieces of time throughout the day to check in with your children and their feelings. Some of the best opportunities may come while driving, at bedtime, dinnertime, or other opportunities when children can choose how much to engage in face-to-face conversation in a non-pressured and emotionally-safe environment.

All children grieve regardless of age. Here is a quick list of suggestions:

- Talk about emotions and grief
- Let them talk; Listen to them
- Answer questions truthfully and age appropriately
- Respect their emotions
- Acknowledge their pain
- Share your grief and life stories
- Reassure them they are safe
- Be patient
- Help them adjust to changes

The summaries on the next pages are general guidelines and cannot include all possible reactions. Individual experiences may vary among children in the same home, different ages, and different situations.



HOW CHILDREN GRIEVE BY AGE



0-3 YEARS OF AGE

This age group's awareness of death is limited but they do experience death as the absence of a parent or caregiver. It is best to use simple truthful words when talking about death. Even young children can feel distress especially if the death was sudden. Unconsolable crying, trouble sleeping, and clingy behavior could be signs of distress. Cuddling and being present can reassure them that they are safe and loved.



4-8 YEARS OF AGE

Not until about age 7 or 8 do kids begin to understand death as final. They want details about the death and even feel responsible. Concerns about who will take care of them are common. Many kids will feel anxious, embarrassed, and different from friends. Signs of distress are sadness, anger, physical complaints, nightmares, overactive to avoid thinking about the loss, rejection of others, and behavior problems.

HOW CHILDREN GRIEVE BY AGE

9-12 YEARS OF AGE



These kids have a better understanding of death as universal. They might ask specific questions about the death wanting detailed answers. They are starting to understand mourning, but can become aloof and appear reticent to express grief. They might still feel embarrassed and different from friends. Signs of distress are anger, denial, depression, suicidal thoughts, sadness, repression, role confusion, and physical complaints.

13-18 YEARS OF AGE



Teens understand death in similar ways to adults. Many have experienced deaths of others from multiple causes. Teens have complex emotions and might experience sadness, anger, stress, regret, fatigue, headaches, or an upset stomach. Many of the behaviors of teens are a normal part of teenage development and look similar to grief expressions. Most importantly be available to listen, encourage them to talk to journal, support their independence, and encourage positive activities.

This is only a summary of possible reactions. There are additional grief feelings and behaviors your child might experience, many which could be normal. Please consult a trained professional if you notice behaviors that are concerning to you.

SELF CARE

You are broken-hearted and self care can be a hard task to accomplish with both the old and new responsibilities and demands on your life. Taking care of yourself and taking time for your own grieving is critical for your personal well-being, but also for the well being of your child. Grieving children need healthy, supportive, encouraging, and positive role models around them. Think of self care as both a gift for you and a gift for your child. Children need to see your grief to know it is okay to grieve themselves. If children see adults doing their own grief work they will more likely be able to grieve in healthy ways. When grieving is hidden or not allowed, children of all ages are likely to do the same, potentially causing negative behavior and poor emotional health.

Grieving is a personal experience and one that can be grueling and difficult. Try to give yourself some grace and space to grieve. Personal care like good nutrition, sleep, regular routines, spending time with others in supportive relationships, writing or journaling, massage, yoga, sports, and exercise are critically important to your own well-being. Seek out support from local agencies, churches, family, and friends for help and activities. Self care is vital for you and your child.



Giving yourself time to grieve with your children as well as alone will create an environment of trust and understanding.

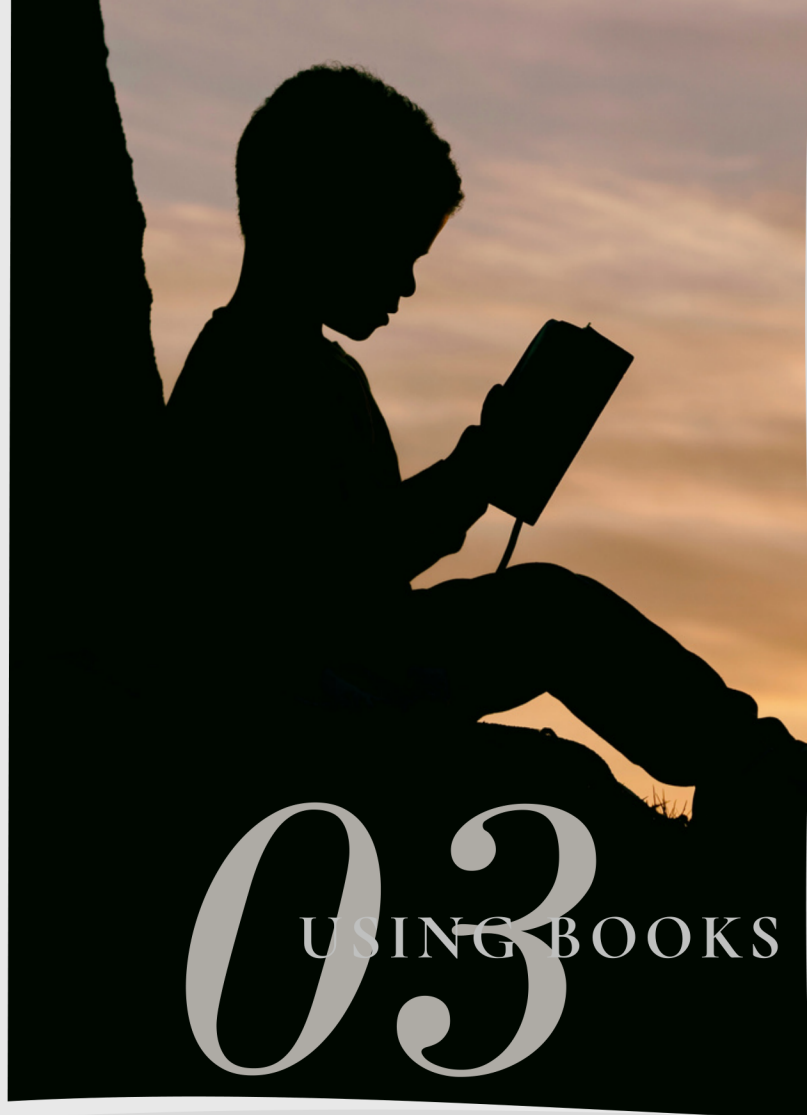
CONTINUING BONDS

Don't push yourself or your child to "get over it" or avoid the sadness. Grief needs to be felt to heal. Everyone heals in their own way at their own pace with no one right way or time frame for going through grief.

In time you will want to find ways to develop a different kind of relationship with the deceased through memories. Research studies about grief supports finding a new appropriate way to stay connected to the deceased as you continue to live your life and adapt to a new kind of normal.

There are many ways to create different but continuing bonds with the deceased that can give you and your child joy. These can be healthy and meaningful. When you feel ready, create some new rituals with your family. Find ways to continue a healthy attachment to the deceased at the same time your life continues to move on. Some examples of continuing bonds in healthy ways are displaying photos, keeping memory boxes, visits to a gravesite, wearing a special piece of jewelry, keeping a book or piece of clothing loved by the deceased.





03

USING BOOKS AND ACTIVITIES

Books help children process their grief and feel less alone by showing characters who have experienced something similar. Books can also help children understand complex feelings or help them connect with memories of their deceased loved one. The art and activities in this family care pack further help children express their thoughts and feelings, especially when they would prefer not to talk about it.

The age, emotional state, and even the environment can affect the response you get to the questions or to the book itself. This may be similar or different to what responses you anticipated. Allow that to be okay and follow their lead. Don't force a discussion. Take cues from the child on their level of interest and when they are ready to be done.

On the following pages we have put together ideas to help you prepare for reading, answering questions, and engaging children with the book. As said before, these are ideas to adapt to your family and the age of your child.

QUICK

tips

As you prepare to interact with the books and activities in the pack, here are a few quick tips. The pack includes a few books that have been selected based on recommendations from multiple national and local organizations supporting grieving children. These are some of our favorites we hope you and your children will benefit from and enjoy many times.

There are several types of activities included in the pack. Choose from activities to support the books that include freestyle art, guided activities, creative play, or writing, or make up your own. Some materials are included in the pack and others you likely have available at home.

You may choose to use one item at a time or share the contents of the pack with your children, considering the age and personality of each of your children. Many children will respond well to being able to see everything before selecting what they want to do. Other children might feel overwhelmed by the choices. You know your children so do what is best for them.

We have included a variety of different options for different ages. We have included questions to ask younger children and journal prompts to share with older children, which may also be helpful for adults.

The suggestions may not be appropriate for your individual child but perhaps will spur your own ideas of how to talk about the books you are reading together.

Allow children to complete the activities at their own pace and in their own ways. There is no right or wrong way or timeframe. Try not to judge their work or comment on how to do it better or different. Let them tell you about it if they want. Most of all they need love, kindness, and patience from adults.

As your child plays with trusted family and friends, don't be afraid to let them "play dead" or act out scenes that relate to death. Expressing through play can be an important way for children to process experiences and explore their emotions, even though it may feel uncomfortable and difficult for adults.

Reading together

Date:

No:

BEFORE

Starting out-

- Start with reading the author and illustrator names.
- Preview the book together. Look through the pages slowly.
- Take turns sharing what the book might be about before you read.

DURING

As you read -

- Stop to share ideas and talk about what might happen next.
- As you read, point out facial expressions and body language that give clues as to what the characters could be feeling.
- Give children plenty of time to observe the illustrations in addition to reading the text.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

These questions are appropriate for children when reading together. Prompts for older children as they read on their own can be found later in the guide .

- It can be confusing to feel a lot of feelings at once. What are some feelings that a person can have?
- Have you felt many emotions at one time?
- It is hard to feel big feelings. How did the characters in the book feel?
- What did they do or act like when they were feeling these emotions?
- What would you like to say to them?
- Are there certain things that you do when you feel sad, angry, or confused?
- What things did other characters say or do that were the most helpful to the others? What would be helpful to you if you were the character?

AFTER

- Ask, "I wonder..." questions like "I wonder why...", I wonder what... "I wonder who, etc.
- Would you like to talk about, write about, or draw any of your favorite memories of (name of the person who died)?
- Is there another way you would like to remember or celebrate that person?



My Path

FOR OLDER CHILDREN



Prompts for reading on your own

These prompts are intended for teens and adults

1. Which character did you most identify with and why?
2. Did you feel frustrated or annoyed by any of the characters and why?
3. How did you feel about the other characters?
4. How were the characters affected by their emotions and feelings?
5. How did they respond or behave in response to their emotions?
6. How did the other characters respond or help the character who was grieving?
7. What strategies did the character use to cope with their feelings? Which ones were most helpful? Would these strategies be helpful to others?
8. How have your friends and family tried to help you in your grief? What has been helpful and why? What do you wish they would not do or say?
9. Did the characters find ways to remember and feel connected to their loved one? What ways can you stay connected and remember?
10. As you reflect on the book, what is the key idea that you found most helpful or interesting?

04 IDEAS & ACTIVITIES





Letting kids spend time doing activities like art, crafts, and writing can help them process their grief and bring some peace. However, they can also feel shy or uncomfortable sharing their work. Encourage freedom of expression and their own thinking. Don't judge, compliment, or analyze and instead ask questions or make statements or what you notice or see. Rather than commenting on if it is good or bad, try asking these types of questions, or making these kinds of comments:

- What can you tell me about your art (activity)?
- How did you feel as you were working on it (activity)?
- What would you like to do with it now that it is finished?
- Thank you for sharing this with me.
- I am pleased you trusted me with this.
- I see you used a lot of colors here.
- I see you used different shapes to draw.
- Can you tell me how you decided on those colors (or shapes)?

Art, writing, and craft projects can help express feelings when kids can't or don't want to talk. It can soothe some children and bring some calmness.

MORE IDEAS



FREESTYLE ART

Water color painting - paint a picture. Share with your child that like emotions, the paints will blend together and that's ok. Let them out, express them, share them with others.

Draw, color or paint a picture of your family before the death. Then draw a picture of your family now.



PHOTO ART

Print a stack of photos for your child. Let them keep the photos in a box, to use for art projects or tape them to your walls using wall-safe tape. Let your child use them when and how they feel like to make art, tell stories. or just look at them.



GUIDED ACTIVITIES-FAVORITES

- Draw a favorite day you spent with the person who died.
- Ask your child about their favorite place and remind her to think of this place when she is sad or angry or lonely.
- Share ideas of favorite foods of the person who died. Engage the child in helping make one or two and have an indoor picnic.

STILL MORE IDEAS



MINDFULNESS

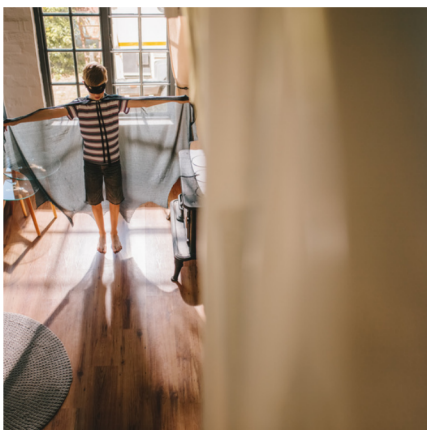
Teach your child to breathe slowly and deeply to help calm themselves. Blow out a big puff of air to get ready to breathe. Inhale for a count of ten, exhale for a count of 10. Repeat 5 times.

Take a walk and identify things you see, smell, hear, touch, and taste.



CREATIVE PLAY

- Use story cubes and tell a story.
- Think of three people or animals you know and make up a story, song, or skit.
- Create a puppet show and tell the story about a special time you remember with the person who died. For younger children, show them how by sharing one of your own memories.



PRETEND PLAY

- Imagine having an invisible shield to protect you from the world, including the hurtful words of others. What does the shield look like? Draw or make it out of cardboard, paper, sticks or your own ideas. What or who helps protect you? What gives you power?
- Build a fort out of blankets, towels, or other items around the house



ACTIVITIES HELP TO PROCESS GRIEF AND GIVE COMFORT

In the care pack you will find more activities and coloring pages intended to be for any age child old enough to complete on their own or can be used with younger children and the help of an adult guiding the child as they complete the activity. Let the child do the creative work of the activity but take time to listen and talk. Adjust the activities as needed to fit your child's age and personality.

**Grief is hard. We wish you
peace and comfort as you
journey through your grief.
For additional resources
please visit our website at
www.katesheart.org**

05 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

About this guide

This caregivers guide was written, designed, and compiled by Board Members and volunteers of Kate's Heart.

Susan Marie Bartel has a doctorate in educational leadership and earned certification in children and adolescent grief counseling with a focus on education. She has been a university professor and educator for more than 30 years. Susan is Kate's mother and is committed to keeping Kate's spirit working for good as she would have done herself.

Jennifer Lindsay Kromann has degrees in journalism and French, which led to a career focused on communication and international marketing. She was Kate's best friend since childhood and now the step-mother of her children. She is passionate about helping children process their grief through reading books together, actively engaging in activities, and spending time together talking and playing.

Kate's Heart is a 501(c)3 nonprofit whose mission is to provide K.A.T.E. (Kids Activities To Empower) packs to facilitate literacy in many areas. The care pack for grieving children focuses on social-emotional literacy for kids through reading, art, activities, and a caregiver guide. Our packs allow exploring thoughts and feelings, fostering self-awareness, kindness, empathy, and increasing self-esteem.

Resources used to inform this guide

1. 35 ways to helping a grieving child. The Dougy Center. Portland, OR
2. Ciacco, J.A., 2008. The colors of grief: Understanding a child's journey through loss from birth to adulthood; Kingsley. London.
3. Karst, P & Wyss, D. (2019). The invisible string workbook. Little Brown & Company. New York
4. National Alliance for Grieving Children: www.childrengrieve.org
5. Scherrer K., 2019. First Book. Using books to support students. First Book. Washington, DC
6. Smith, H.I. (2012). When a child you love is grieving. Beacon Hill. Kansas City, MO
7. Trozzi, M. (1999). Talking with children about loss. Berkley Publishing: New York.
8. Wolfelt, A.D. (2012) Companioning the grieving child. Companion Press; Fort Collins, CO.

