

Contents of this ELetter

- Feature: Helping the Grieving Child in School
- Editor's Journal: Signs of Grief
- Inspirational Story: The Empty Egg
- Poem: There is Spring in Heaven Too
- Understanding Grief Spring Seminar

Helping the Grieving Child in School

*By Linda Goldman,
Certified Grief Therapist and Grief Educator
Center for Loss and Grief Therapy*

Linda was a frequent contributor to the Wings magazine. Excerpts from this article are printed with her permission.

Children's grief should be seen as an ongoing life process that is approachable through words, activities and non-verbal communication. Educators can use this to understand and create a safe environment for parents, teachers, and children to acknowledge and process difficult feelings.

Grief in the nineties

So often adults rely on the prevailing myth that children are too young to grieve. When a child is capable of loving, he is capable of grieving. Yet many of today's children are born into a world of grief issues that await them inside their homes and outside their neighborhoods. Boys and girls become increasingly traumatized by those prevailing social and societal loss issues in their homes, in the schools, and in their communities.

A major percentage of America's children face the loss of the protection of the adult world, as grief issues of homicide, violence and abuse infiltrate their outer and inner worlds. Issues involving shame and secretiveness when death is caused by such occurrences as suicide and the contraction of AIDS create a grieving child that is locked into the pain of isolation—which can be far more damaging than the original loss.

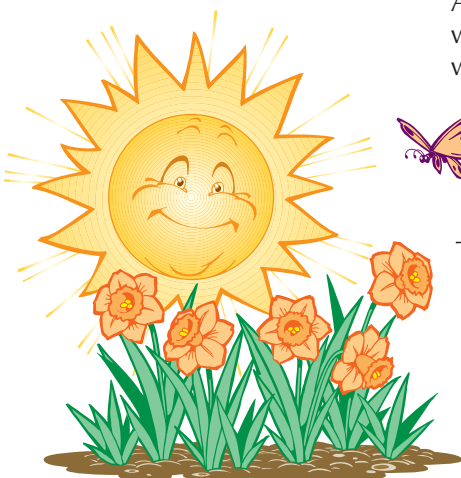
Normal Signs of Grief

Today's educators first need to become familiar with the normal signs of grief in order to normalize them for parents and students. We then can develop ways to work with the grieving child within the school system.

Mary (names have been changed) was a fourth grade client whose dad had committed suicide on her birthday. During the grief therapy session, she told me she was enraged at her teacher. Mary had told her the first week of school that her father committed suicide during the summer. Her teacher never responded to her and never addressed the subject again. Mary was furious and swore never to tell anyone else in school about this death.

I asked Mary what she wished her teacher would have said. She replied, " I wish she

continued on page 2



Helping the grieving child in school

continued from page 1

would have given me a hug and said she was sorry, and promised she would be there if I ever wanted to talk about my dad or the way he died.”

Educators can develop ways to normalize and discuss these delicate issues with children.

Normalizing Grief

Educators need to understand that children don't like to feel different. When they have experienced the death of a parent, they often choose not to talk about it. Not talking about the death allows some kids to feel some control over normalizing their life.

It is normal for a grieving child to:

- Imitate behavior of the deceased
- Want to appear normal
- Need to tell the story over and over again
- Enjoy wearing or holding something of the loved one
- Speak of the loved one in the present
- Tend to worry about health and health of the surviving loved ones.

Interventions for the grieving child

So often adults tell children they “need to move on and get over their loss.” We, in the educational system need to recognize and build into our grief awareness the ongoing process of grief. Each child's grief is unique.

Children gain a greater understanding of themselves when they can express previously hidden emotions. The awareness of unrecognized feelings also allows educators, parents and other caring adults to be more in touch with what is going on in the grief process.

Grief feelings and thoughts are continuous and ever-changing, inundating their lives like waves on an ocean. These thoughts and feelings may arrive without warning, and children feel unprepared for their enormity in a school setting.

- Remember the bereaved child needs to acknowledge a parent or sibling who died by using his or her name or sharing a memory.

- The bereaved child needs to tell his or her story over and over again.
- The bereaved child needs to use tools such as drawing, writing, role-playing, and reenactment to safely project feelings and thoughts about the loss and present life outside of themselves.
- The bereaved child needs to be allowed to go to a safe place outside the classroom when these unexpected overwhelming feelings arise, without needing to explain why in front of fellow classmates.
- The bereaved child is often preoccupied with his or her own health and the health of loved ones. Providing a reality check—such as allowing the child to phone the surviving parent during the school day or to visit the school nurse—can reassure boys and girls that they and their families are okay.
- The bereaved child needs to use memory work to create a physical way to remember their feelings and share them. Memory books are a good collection of drawn or written feelings and thoughts that allow the child to re-experience memories in a safe way.

Educators can also help intervene the loss in these ways:

- Use a grief and loss inventory as a tool for creating and storing history on the grieving child through his or her academic life. This history includes all losses and important dates.
- Use the concept of teachable moments to create a spontaneous lesson calling upon a life experience that is happening now.

Linda Goldman's full article will be located at our website www.wingsgrief.org under the Section “Articles”. Read about real-life scenarios that teach how to help the grieving child. Get other important advice. And preview messages about grief written by children. There is also a list of books for Teachers and Parents and Children that are excellent resources.



NAN ZASTROW
Co-Founder, Wings--A
Grief Education
Ministry

EDITOR'S JOURNAL

Signs of Grief

Last weekend we were visiting the Twin Cities area to take in their annual Spring Parade of Homes. One of the first houses we wanted to see didn't have a lot of curb appeal, but the description sounded interesting so we decided to stop. No one was there. We roamed the neighborhood and returned 4 times before the realtor was there to show the home. We could easily have just passed it by...but then, this amazing moment would never have happened.

When we went into the house, the realtor asked, "Are you a pilot?" My husband said, "No." We continued to browse; and then, the realtor said, "I asked because I saw your license plates (MY WNGS) and thought perhaps you had a pilot's license." We chuckled at the word association and didn't offer anymore.

Within a few minutes he started to tell us that his brother died and the funeral was on Wednesday (this was Friday). He continued to talk about his brother and the beautiful wake he had. He said, "My brother loved eagles. You know, a strange thing happened. At his funeral, a beautiful bald eagle was visible out the window of the church. When the service was over, others remarked how long the eagle stuck around.."

"I'm not a religious person...I'm kind of a casual church-goer. The one that goes 3-4 times a year on holidays. But, this really made me think about God. My brother's wife was overcome with a moment of joy when she saw the eagle and believed it was a message from her husband that he was okay. I think it was too."

He had our full attention now, and we were intrigued that we could share this very personal moment and the story that honored his brother. His eyes sparkled with a dusting of tears. We told him what our license plates represented...Wings--our grief education ministry organization. We exchanged names, websites, and stories of mystical and magical things. We both were awestruck at the chance meeting that brought us together that day.

Gary and I strongly remind people in our groups the importance of telling the story over and over again. Not only does it heal the pain, but it gives each of us an acute awareness of how special each person is no matter what. Once we get past the pain and agony of "the story", we punctuate our conversations with the humorous moments and the heart-warming anecdotes. These are the stories we want to remember. Stories are fond memories and memories are keepsakes. Cherish them.

We understand now why God encouraged us to drive around and around and around and keep coming back to that house. The house wasn't that spectacular, but the conversation was. God moves in mysterious ways.

Inspirational Story

The Empty Egg

Author Unknown

Jeremy was born with a twisted body and a slow mind. At the age of 12 he was still in second grade, seemingly unable to learn. His teacher, Doris Miller, often became exasperated with him. He would squirm in his seat, drool, and make grunting noises. At other times, he spoke clearly and distinctly, as if a spot of light had penetrated the darkness of his brain. Most of the time, however, Jeremy just irritated his teacher.

One day she called his parents and asked them to come in for a consultation. As the Forresters entered the empty classroom, Doris said to them, "Jeremy really belongs in a special school. It isn't fair to him to be with younger children who don't have learning problems. Why, there is a five year gap between his age and that of the other students."

Mrs. Forrester cried softly into a tissue, while her husband spoke. "Miss Miller," he said, "there is no school of that kind nearby. It would be a terrible shock for Jeremy if we had to take him out of this school. We know he really likes it here." Doris sat for a long time after they had left, staring at the snow outside the window. Its coldness seemed to seep into her soul. She wanted to sympathize with the Forresters. After all, their only child had a terminal illness. But it wasn't fair to keep him in her class. She had 18 other youngsters to teach, and Jeremy was a distraction. Furthermore, he would never learn to read and



write. Why waste any more time trying?

As she pondered the situation, guilt washed over her. Here I am complaining when my problems are nothing compared to that poor family, she thought. Lord, please help me to be more patient with Jeremy. From that day on, she tried hard to ignore Jeremy's noises and his blank stares. Then one day, he limped to her desk, dragging his bad leg behind him.

"I love you, Miss Miller," he exclaimed, loud enough for the whole class to hear. The other students snickered, and Doris' face burned red. She stammered, "Wh-why that's very nice, Jeremy. N-now please take your seat."

Spring came, and the children talked excitedly about the coming of Easter. Doris told them the story of Jesus, and then to emphasize the idea of new life springing forth, she gave each of the children a large plastic egg. "Now," she

said to them, "I want you to take this home and bring it back tomorrow with something inside that shows new life. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Miss Miller," the children responded enthusiastically—all except for Jeremy. He listened intently; his eyes never left her face. He did not even make his usual noises. Had he understood what she had said about Jesus' death and resurrection? Did he understand the assignment? Perhaps she should call his parents and explain the project to them.

That evening, Doris' kitchen sink stopped up. She called the landlord and waited an hour for him to come by and unclog it. After that, she still had to shop for groceries, iron a blouse, and prepare a vocabulary test for the next day. She completely forgot about phoning Jeremy's parents.

The next morning, 19 children came to school, laughing and talking as they placed their eggs in the large wicker basket on Miss Miller's desk. After they completed their math lesson, it was time to open the eggs. In the first egg, Doris found a flower. "Oh yes, a flower is certainly a sign of new life," she said. "When plants peek through the ground, we know that spring is here." A small girl in the first row waved her arm. "That's my egg, Miss Miller," she called out. The next egg contained

continued on page 7

There is Spring in Heaven Too!

Dear God, it's spring! Give me the strength to recognize its meaning.
Your harbingers of the season cautiously grace our presence.

Lo! I saw my first robin just a few days ago,
And that bush of pussy willows mysteriously awoke over night.

"Was it only yesterday that you claimed my child to join your celebration?"

Each spring:

When Thy mighty hand reaches down to perform its miracles, I'll remember.

When the dying grass turns from brown to thriving green, I'll remember.

When the barren branches burst forth with blossoms and later fruit, I'll remember.

When the frozen waters flow freely and ripple with delight, I'll remember.

When the hibernating creatures awake and trod the dry ground, I'll remember.

When the birds return with their cheerful songs and melodies, I'll remember.

When the raindrops replenish the earth from its ravenous thirst, I'll remember.

When the daffodils and tulips pop through the crusted ground, I'll remember.

I'll remember, Lord God. Always! But especially every spring.

Your Plan for us is to witness the spiritual awakening and rebirth.

I'll remember that The Resurrection is the message of spring.

I'll remember that in Heaven, other family and my child wait for me.

And I'll remember that in Heaven, the celebration of spring is forever.

©Nan Zastrow 1994

And of course, I had to make the obligatory donation for the church and the organist and all. That was \$500, and I spent another \$500 for the wake, food and drinks, you know. The rest went for the memorial stone."

The friend says, "\$12,500 for the memorial stone? My stars, how big was it?" The widow says, "Three carats!"

Be Good to Yourself — A Care Tip

DEATH –

What A Wonderful Way To Explain It!!!!

A sick man turned to his doctor, as he was preparing to leave the examination room and said, "Doctor, I am afraid to die. Tell me what lies on the other side."

Very quietly, the doctor said, "I don't know."

"You don't know? You, a Christian man, do not know what is on the other side?"

The doctor was holding the handle of the door; on the other side came a sound of scratching and whining, and as he opened the door, a dog sprang into the room and leaped on him with an eager show of gladness.

Turning to the patient, the doctor said, "Did you notice my dog? He's never been in this room before. He didn't know what was inside. He knew nothing except that his master was here, and when the door opened, he sprang in without fear.

I know little of what is on the other side of death, but I do know one thing... I know my Master is there and that is enough.

Humor for the Healing Heart

After everything is done at the funeral home and cemetery, she tells her closest friend that there is no money left.

The friend says, "How can that be? You told me he had \$20,000 a few days before he died. How could you be broke?"

The widow says, "Well, the funeral cost me \$6,500.



Understanding Grief Spring Seminar

Alicia Sims Franklin

LICSW, GMS, DAPA

Seminars will be held at The Plaza Hotel and Suites
201 North 17th Avenue, Wausau, WI

Thursday, April 17, 2008

7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

No charge

“If You Really Loved Me, You’d Know Just How to Help Me in My Grief”

Community Seminar for Grieving Families

In this light, informative program, you will learn how to respect each other’s differences in grief. Understand how we communicate during parent/child interactions as well as spousal/partner interactions. This will help you break down the barriers of “If you really loved me, you’d know how to help me through this”– and create a healing environment within relationships.

Friday, April 18, 2008

9:00 - Noon

\$40.00

“Coping with the Tornado Within”

A professional seminar for clergy, educators, hospice and others who care or work with the bereaved

This program will provide information on the role anger plays in the grief process as experienced by children and teens and examine the differences between chronic and grief-related anger. Special attention will be focused on the connections between unresolved grief and the increasing violence in our society, and how the lack of adequate coping skills and support can lead to escalating violence among our children. Strategic interventions will be provided for working with grief-related anger and unexpressed grief.

Presented by



Key Sponsor



For information or a program brochure: Contact Nan Zastrow 715.845.3424

CCHS-217 (jul 1/22/08) draft

The Empty Egg

continued from page 4

a plastic butterfly, which looked very real. Doris held it up. "We all know that a caterpillar changes and grows into a beautiful butterfly. Yes, that's new life, too." Little Judy smiled proudly and said, "Miss Miller, that one is mine." Next, Doris found a rock with moss on it. She explained that moss, too, showed life. Billy spoke up from the back of the classroom, "My daddy helped me," he beamed.

Then Doris opened the fourth egg. She gasped. The egg was empty. Surely it must be Jeremy's she thought, and of course, he did not understand her instructions. If only she had not forgotten to phone his parents. Because she did not want to embarrass him, she quietly set the egg aside and reached for another. Suddenly, Jeremy spoke up. "Miss Miller,

aren't you going to talk about my egg?" Flustered, Doris replied, "But Jeremy, your egg is empty." He looked into her eyes and said softly, "Yes, but Jesus' tomb was empty, too."

Time stopped. When she could speak again, Doris asked him, "Do you know why the tomb was empty?" "Oh, yes," Jeremy said, "Jesus was killed and put in there. Then His Father raised Him up."

The recess bell rang. While the children excitedly ran out to the schoolyard, Doris cried. The cold inside her melted completely away.

Three months later, Jeremy died. Those who paid their respects at the mortuary were surprised to see 19 eggs on top of his casket..... all of them empty.

Would you like to help support the

ministry of Wings? Memorial gifts and donations are greatly appreciated. Your donation is tax deductible. Wings—a Grief Education Ministry is a non-profit, charitable organization.

Your name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

and/or Phone: _____

Yes. Please accept this donation in the amount of:

In Memory of: _____

To support the Wings Ministry

Please list my name as a sponsor at the program.

Mail donation to: Wings, P.O. Box 1051,
Wausau, WI 54402-1051

Please read our
ELetter and pass it on!

If you are not a subscriber and would like to subscribe to the Wings ELetter, contact Nan Zastrow at wings1@charter.net or subscribe (unsubscribe) at www.wingsgrief.org. Articles and stories may be reproduced providing you include the Author Source, and Permissions.

Wings is a non-profit, charitable organization dedicated to grief awareness through education. We welcome your donations, in any amount, to support the ministry of Wings.