

Grief Activities

For Parents, Counselors and Teachers

Grief

Grief is what we call the distress we feel when we experience loss. It's painful and complicated and very individual. Healing from grief is a lengthy process and involves exploring our losses, honoring memories, identifying and expressing our unique set of emotions, and creating a hopeful future.

Here are some ideas about how to help children heal from their losses over time.

Grief Activities

Explore Losses & Remember	2
Identify and Express Feelings	3
Mix of Emotions	3
Anger	4
Guilt & Regrets	5
Worries or Fear	6
Create a Hopeful Future	7
Learn Coping Skills	7
Let Go	8
Build Strengths	9
Addendums	
Gossip Game	10
Feelings	11
Worry Wiggle Worms	12

Explore Losses and Honor Memories

Timeline

Create a timeline of what happened – either individually or mural size for the whole group.

Loss Banner

Rip (or cut) a piece of butcher paper into the number of students in the classroom or people in the family. Ask each one to draw something they lost in the fire that was really important to them and then tape the butcher paper back together. Hang it up on a wall.

Mosaic

Ask a local artist to help the students make a mosaic for the school or community to honor their losses from the fires.

Journals

Give kids an empty book so they can keep a writing/art journal of how they are processing their losses and healing.

Discussion/Journal Questions

(see [Discussion Questions - Fire](#) or [Discussion Questions - Death](#))

At school - Give students a few options of reflection questions and let them answer a question of their choice each day.

At home - Take turns choosing a question for the family to discuss at dinner. Write down everyone's response in a blank book if desired. The children will be able to look back on this time to see how much everyone healed over time.

Memory Box

Create memory boxes for kids to store special items, things they don't want to forget, people who helped them, and ways to cope. You could first read the children's book by Joanna Rowland called, *The Memory Box*.

Memory bracelet

Have beads represent things lost in the fire, good memories, and things/people who have helped them since the fire.

Memory Sharing

Let children take turns telling stories about their memories before and/or during the fires.

Scrapbooks

Provide materials for children to create a scrapbook of things they want to remember about their life before the fires, during the evacuation and things that happened since the fires.

Memorial Service for Kids

Memorial services are usually planned by adults and don't often include things that are meaningful to children. Ask the kids what kinds of things they would have liked to do at the service (if there was one) and invite them to have their own service with someone trusted (parent, grandparent, counselor, school staff, grief support group) to do those things.

Family Portraits

Have students draw three pictures of their family; one prior to the fires, one now, and one in the future. Discuss in circle time or family time how the pictures are different.

Rumor Game

Play the rumor game to show students how easily rumors start and spread quickly after bad things happen (see *Gossip Game* on page 10). Discuss where to get factual information after a disaster.

Calendar

Have each child draw a picture of something that helps them when they feel anxious and make it into a class or family calendar.

Identify & Express Feelings

Mix of Emotions

Paper Lunch Bags

- Give each child a sheet of feeling faces (see *Feelings* on page 11), a scissors, crayons and a flat paper lunch bag.
- Ask them to color and then cut out all the feelings they remember feeling since the fire/death.
- Paste the faces onto the lunch bag; on the outside of the bag if it's OK for other people to see the feeling; inside if they want it to be private.
- Sit in a circle to talk about their bags. Ask them to look around to find a bag just like theirs. Then discuss how everyone has different feelings after a death/scary event.

Pizza Cardboard

Give each older student a round cardboard (like those that go under pizza). Have magazines, scissors and glue available to the group. Ask them to cut out words or pictures that represent how they present to others on one side, and ways they really feel on the other side. Sit in a circle and share their cardboard art with each other.

Discussion Questions - Maui Fires (see [Discussion Questions - Maui Fires](#))
and/or

Discussion Questions - Death - (see [Discussion Questions - Death](#))

Musical Chairs - Young

Put chairs in a circle, facing outward, placing a stuffed animal on one of the chairs. Play some music and when it stops, whoever lands on the chair with the animal gets to answer a question from a grab bag of prepared questions about their feelings (see [Discussion Questions - Maui Fires](#)). Then give the other kids a chance to answer the same question.

Tangled Balls of Emotions

This can be done with colored pencils or crayons, various colored rubber bands, strips of fabric, thread or ribbons. Ask the kids to list a collective group of emotions they have been feeling (see **Feelings** on page 11) and assign each emotion a color (e.g., anger-red; sad-blue; depressed-black, etc.). Then have the kids either draw or create a big, tangled ball using all the emotions they have personally been feeling. Sit in a circle and talk about their balls.

Group Mural

Every day when the students enter the room, ask them to pick their current feeling and write it on Our Feelings Mural. There could be a list of emotions available to help them explore their feelings (see **Feelings** on page 11). Over time, they will see the variety of emotions that disasters bring.

Child Directed Play (for parents or grandparents) - Dedicate a certain amount of time each week for playing alone with each child. When the time comes, let the child direct every minute of the play. Don't make any suggestions; just do exactly what they tell you to do. This helps to empower them after experiencing so many things out of their control.

Fizz in the bottle

Use an empty soda bottle and start adding soda to it as you describe various circumstances that can cause our bodies, emotions & thoughts to feel under pressure. The more that is added, the more explosive it will be when it shakes and then bursts. Discuss how letting out the fizz gradually will prevent the explosion. Discuss ways of gently letting out emotions, thoughts and body tension in order to take care of ourselves.

How Does the Grief Body Feel?

- Have a student lie on a piece of butcher paper and draw around the body loosely.
- Hang it up on the wall.
- One at a time, talk about common grief emotions (anger, guilt, fear, sadness, etc.).
- Normalize all the emotions
- Ask students to choose a piece of construction paper (I cut various colors into quarters) that represents a particular emotion to them. Invite them to rip it into a shape of that emotion and paste it onto the body where they feel it.
- Repeat for the other emotions.

- At the end, sit back and talk about how this body must feel with all those emotions inside.
- Discuss the mind-body connection and ideas for calming their bodies (see [Calming Exercises](#)).

Anger

Grief almost always involves anger, which then leads to irritability, blaming, arguments or fighting in schools. Our job as adults is to help kids discover what helps them calm their own bodies and minds when they feel angry.

After each anger activity, talk about healthy and unhealthy ways of expressing anger.

Cool Down Corner

Have a place for students to go when they know they need to calm down. Have a list of calming exercises there (see [Calming Exercises](#)) for them to try. Self-calming is an important skill to develop.

Read Books About Expressing Anger in Healthy Ways

Draw/Paint Pictures of What Anger Feels Like

Have lots of red & black markers/paints/crayons in the box. Then talk about self-calming strategies that help them (see [Calming Exercises](#)).

Strenuous Exercise

Have a contest to see how many laps the kids can cumulatively run/swim in a given week. Give them a goal. "If the group runs/swims the distance from here to _____ in a week, we'll have an ice cream party on Friday."

Dance with energizing music until the students are tired

Do jumping jacks together or have them run around the building as many times as they can. Then use math to figure out how many jumping jacks or laps you did all together (math stimulates the "thinking brain").

Scream But Don't Laugh

Take the kids outside to a distant place on the school yard and let them scream as loud and long as they can, but strictly forbid them from laughing. This will undoubtedly stimulate laughter, which is the goal. Tell them if they laugh, they need to continue laughing as long as they can.

Ripping Paper

Divide into teams and give the students a pile of scrap paper. Have them work as teams to rip as much paper as possible in a certain amount of time. Use the strips for something artistic.

or

Have each child rip various colors of paper into different shapes. When they are finished, give them glue and scissors and ask them to each make a picture that makes them smile with the shredded shapes.

or

Have each child rip the paper into narrow strips as slowly as possible.

Wet Toilet Paper Toss

Draw several large targets on sturdy butcher paper and have teams of kids write down things they feel angry about on their target. Tack the targets onto a wall of the janitor's choosing. Get a bucket of water and a few rolls of toilet paper for each team. When you say "Go," the first student on each team unrolls a wad of toilet paper, dips it into the water and throws it at the target. Let them take turns to see how close to the center they can throw.

Guilt & Regrets

After all guilt & regrets activities, talk about how everyone feels guilty about something after bad things happen, but it doesn't mean they've done anything wrong. Those guilty thoughts are just part of the grieving process and they can be released as time passes.

Puppets – Young

If there are things the kids wish would have happened differently, use puppets to have them act out would have happened instead.

Clay, Model Magic or Play-Dough

Ask the youth to create an object that represents something they feel guilty about. Share the object with the group and then let the youth decide what they need to do with it.

Closure - Older

At the end of each session, you could have a candle lighting or some other ritual to allow the youth to release a regret or something for which they feel guilty. Talk about the power guilt has over us if we hide it inside.

Worries or Fear

Worry Wall

Hang a piece of butcher paper in the nurse or counselor's office. Have students write a worry on a sticky and put it on the worry wall. Let the students read the other worries so they feel normal for having worries.

Make Worry Bags

Make some kind of bag for each student to hold their worries (separate little cards for each worry). Then have them write a coping skill on the back of each card that could help loosen the power of the worry

Worry Cloud (see [Imagination Activities](#))

Worry Rock

Have students choose and carry a special rock (or something else) in their pocket to remind them they are loved and there are people to help them through hard things.

Worry Wiggle Worms - Young

Hide worry wiggle worms (see *Worry Wiggle Worms* on page 12) around the room and have young students look for them. When they find one, have them write a worry on it and put it on the bulletin board with the other worries. Then discuss positive coping skills for each worry.

Superpowers

Do some superpower brainstorming about imaginative ways kids could give themselves superpowers to conquer their fears (e.g., quicksand for the bad guys, laser guns to shoot scary things to the moon, superpower strength to throw the bad thing into the middle of the ocean, etc.). Have them each choose a superpower for their own fear and then act out/draw a picture/create something to show the group how their superpower will work. Have them rehearse their imagination superpower over and over in their mind, especially before bed if they get nightmares (this works for adults too).

Group Fear Mural

Make a group mural (drawings, paintings, collage, etc.) of all the things the kids are afraid of since the fire and add something to the mural that protects them from the fears

Skits or Mimes - Group

Have the kids write several worries or fears on separate pieces of paper and put them all into a hat. Take turns grabbing one out of the hat (anonymously) and choosing people to help them do a skit or mime about the worry/fear and how to conquer it.

Create a Hopeful Future

Learn Coping Skills

Calming Exercises (see [Calming Exercises](#))

Polish Rocks

Go pick up rocks to polish and put them into the polishing container. Let the kids know that grief is like the process of polishing rocks. There are sharp edges to start with but after a very long time, the edges are worn smooth. Rocks usually take about a month to finish polishing and that will seem like a long time to kids. Let them each choose one to remember that grief takes a long time.

Create a playlist of songs that have been helpful during their grief.

Go outside to find something that makes their bodies feel good.

Feelings First Aid Kit

Talk about what first aid kits are for and how a first aid kit for painful emotions could be used. Create the kits using a variety of art supplies. Ask the kids to talk about what kinds of things might go into their kit. Ideas could include:

Balloon Breaths (see [Calming Exercises](#)) - Listen to music - Snuggle with a family member, a pet or a stuffed animal - Sing - Laugh - Do an imagination exercise (see [Imagination Exercises](#)) - Go outside - Run - Jump - Swim - Surf - Talk to someone - Draw or paint - Build something - Write in a gratitude journal - Say you're sorry - Bake some cookies - Dance - Paint rocks - Lie down with a favorite item - Take a nap - Write in a journal - Help someone - Ride a bicycle - Read - Write poems - Do summersaults or cartwheels - Read a joke book - Put on a weighted blanket - Eat a crunchy apple - Call a grandparent - Etc.

Group sculpture - Older

Ask the class to develop family sculptures to represent how their family is coping with their grief. Have each student pick others in the class to represent each person in their family, telling them what position to be in and how far to be from the others. When everyone is in place, take a photo and then let the student describe their sculpture. (Note: Only do this in a group where the students trust each other).

Yuck Bag - Young

Grieving people often feel hurt by rude or insensitive comments from others. Sometimes the comments are intentional and other times people just don't know any better. A yuck bag is the perfect place for those comments to land.

- Decorate a large paper bag with all the yucky things your kids can imagine.
- Invite anyone in the family or classroom to put hurtful things into the yuck bag as needed. Everyone else cheers when the comment goes in.
- A family can have a contest to see who heard the yuckiest comment each week.
- This can almost make family members hope they win instead of taking rude comments to heart.

Q & A Time

Let kids anonymously ask questions they still have related to the fire and/or a death. Write the questions on index cards so you can look at them first. Invite a guest to the group if there are questions you don't know the answers to. Ask the students their thoughts on the questions before you give answers so you can gauge their current understanding. Let the parents know what kinds of questions the kids are asking.

Invite a musician who can help kids write songs about their hopes and dreams.

Read books on grief or coping

Create disaster preparedness kits - Families

Have children research what should go into a family disaster kit and build them.

I Wonder - I Wish - I Hope

For a writing assignment, have the students write something about their wonders, wishes and hopes related to the community.

Let Go

Letting go doesn't mean forgetting – it means releasing the hold something has on us.

Balloon Release

Give kids a biodegradable balloon and invite them to write down something they are ready to let go of. Release the balloons together and watch them till they are out of sight. Then talk about what it felt like to let go of something troublesome.

Light candles

Sit in a circle and let each youth tell the group what they are ready to let go of. Then light a candle (that's inside a safe candle holder). Playing a carefully chosen song can make this experience even more powerful.

Float the Boat

Make some kind of little floatable boat with paper or wood (a local artist can help with this) and put a note into it related to things the students are ready to let go of. Take the boats to a river and let them go. Watch them float away. Then discuss the experience.

Goodbye letters

Students may want to write a letter to themselves, a special support person, or a person who died, to talk about what they need to release and how they will do it. The letters can be saved, sent, ripped up, drowned, etc. Let each student decide what they need.

Build Strengths

Strength/Kindness Bulletin Board

Do an art project of each child's strengths or kindness skills that will help the group stay hopeful and patient during this time of waiting. Put all the pictures on a bulletin board and name it something like, We Are Helping Lahaina.

Help Each Other

Feeling helpful rather than helpless can be healing. Create ideas together of things kids can do to help the school, family or community right now.

Honor Losses

With a local artist, create something interesting or useful for the community that will honor their losses. Brainstorm with the students what that should be.

Art or Writing about the Future

Create or write about:

- *Something I'm looking forward to later this year*
- *Positive ways in which I have changed this year*
- *Good things coming out of our tragedy*
- *Something I would like to see built into our new town*
- *Etc.*

Addendums

The Gossip Game

Choose 3 people to go out of the room and tell the remaining group a story something like this.

I heard that two houses got broken into on Saturday night and Miguel's mom thinks the people who did it were high school kids. I think there was some money stolen and a bike and maybe some other things. I know Anna was talking about needing a bike and I saw her on one yesterday and maybe it was her that took it. I'm not going to tell the police because Anna's brother is mean and he would kill me if he ever found out that I'm the one who told.

Invite the first person to come back into the room and ask someone to repeat the story.

Invite person #2 back to the room and ask person #1 to tell the story.

Invite person #3 back to the room and ask person #2 to repeat the story.

Ask person #3 to tell the story to the whole group.

Read the original story out loud and compare it to the story now being told.

Identify the facts in the story and discuss how rumors quickly become hurtful.

Feelings



Happy



Sad



Worried



Angry



Scared



Lonely



Bored



Guilty



Surprised



Confused



Shy



Frustrated



Hurt



Mean



Jealous



Sleepy



Depressed



Sick



Determined



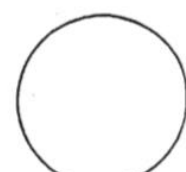
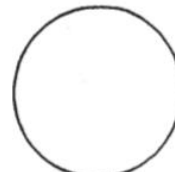
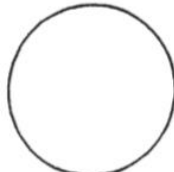
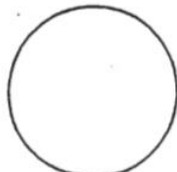
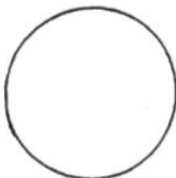
Excited



Confident



Horrible



Worry Wiggle Worms

