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Kaleidoscope Of Grief

When Children Experience the Death of a Loved One



By Joanne Cacciatore

For more information on M.I.S.S. and the Kaleidoscope Project
Please visit our website at
www.misschildren.org

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For more information on the Kindness Project
Visit www.misschildren.org
A place for families to heal from the death of a child

For more information on the Kaleidoscope Project
Email Joanne Cacciatore at joanne@misschildren.org
Or call 623-979-1000

For support after the death of a mother
Visit www.webimaj.com/momshalo

For you, Cheyenne. You are always in our hearts.

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Introduction

This book is for children (& adults) of all ages who have experienced the death of a loved one. It is an interactive book to help children explore their feelings,

accept and embrace the grief, and help them work through the plethora of emotions that face them in the years ahead. We encourage a primary adult to assist younger children in articulating their feelings into words. Parents: For older children, you can use this book as a catalyst for expression and communication. Please allow this to be a tool for open and honest discussion. Children appreciate communicating with the adults in their lives. It is a critical part of their healing.

This book is a journey...it does not need to be completed all at once. The journey is long...and we can only move mountains one stone at a time.

“Some of the most honest, truth-telling in the world is done by children.” Holmes

This book is dedicated to the memory of
Lois Miller, Beloved Mother -
Kenneth Garard, Beloved Father -
Sandy Graham, Beloved Aunt -
Greg Charlton, Beloved Brother~
Zachary Isaac Gatewood, Beloved Brother~
Alesia Dawn Carder, Beloved Sister~

“There are times when sorrow seems to be the only truth.”
DeProfundis

Kaleidoscope...

Ka-lei-do-scope (ke li' de skope), n. Changing form, color, pattern, etc continually shifting from one set of relations to another; extremely complex and varied

This book belongs to

In Loving Memory Of

Unless we remember, we cannot understand.

L ife's T ragedies...

"My father died in a car accident.
The other driver was drunk," said Derek.

"My little sister died at the hospital
when she was born," said Stephanie.

"My mom was very sick.
She died of cancer," said Rene.

"My daddy found my little brother
in the pool. He died," said Sean.



It is very, very sad when someone we love dies. We need to talk about the person who died. Sometimes, others may feel uncomfortable if we talk about them, because it may make us cry. But crying is okay and so is talking about them.
Tell us about the person you love who died.

Draw a picture of yourself or your loved one below

E motions & F eelings

“I feel so angry. My dad was only 54- too young to die,” said Derek.

“I am so sad,” said Stephanie, “because mommy cries a lot and I don’t know what to say to help her.”

“I miss my mom, but I feel at peace with her death. I am glad I had a chance to say goodbye,” said Rene.

“I am not sure how I feel,” said Sean. “Sometimes I wonder if it was my fault.”



Death can cause us to experience many frightening feelings that we have never had before. One day can be very different from the next day.
Feelings about our sadness can change from hour to hour.
How do you feel about your loved ones death right now?

Draw a picture of how you felt before your loved one died & how you feel after

M emories are P recious

“I remember when my dad and I went to our first baseball game together. He let me sit in his seat, because a lady with a big, ugly hat was blocking my view. We had never seen a lady’s hat with so many strange flowers. It made us laugh all the way home,” said Derek.

“I remember the first time I felt my baby sister kick. Mommy yelled out and said that we were growing a soccer player inside our tummy! I said she was a ballerina instead because I wanted a sister, not another brother- since my brothers always pick on me,” said Stephanie.

“My mom and I used to pick flowers from our rose garden together. We would give them to the elderly woman across the street. Mom always felt badly for her since no one ever visited her. The roses made her smile,” said Rene.

“When I had a new toy, my little brother always wanted to play with it first. I tried to give him other toys- even candy, but he always wanted my new toy. Dad made me share. Even though I got mad, his cute smile always cheered me up,” said Sean.



Memories of your loved one can help you get through the darkest times of sadness.
Remembering the times you had together is good.
Share your favorite memory-

Draw a picture of your favorite memory or the feelings you had then

T ears & L aughter

“I think of my dad every time I see a red mustang. His was a 1968 and he washed it more than he washed himself,” said Derek.

“I think of my baby sister every time I see two little girls. I wish that we could have played together just a little while,” said Stephanie.

“I think of my mother every time I see the sunrise. She loved waking up early to watch it light up the sky,” remembered Rene.

“I don’t like to think about it alot. But screaming kids in the store do remind me of him,” said Sean, “He always drove my mom crazy at the grocery store.”



Reminders can be bitter and they can be sweet.
Sometimes they will make us laugh. Sometimes they will make us cry.
What reminds you of your loved one?

Draw a picture of what reminds you of your loved one

S support & S ympathy

“It helped a lot when the hospital counselor spent time with us after dad died. She hugged mom and said she knew dad was special because we love him so much,” said Derek.

“My teachers at school were nice but they didn’t really want to talk about it. So I talked to my friends instead. Talking to them helped! They were sad with me,” said Stephanie.

“My brothers and sisters agreed to keep mom’s spirit alive by talking about her all the time- holidays and everyday. It really helps,” said Rene.

“I just wanted to sit in his room and cry. Sometimes I slept in his bed because it smelled like him. My grandma didn’t think it was good for me but mom said she didn’t mind. Mom helped me be close to him,” said Sean.



Others can help us in our saddest times. We need to find someone we really feel comfortable with to share our feelings.
Who makes you feel the most comfortable and how do they help?

Draw a picture of a person (or people) who helps make you feel good

W ords that H elp

“My best friend sat and cried with me,” said Derek.

“He said he was really sorry and that he loved my dad just like he was his own.”

“The lady at the library asked me if I had any brothers or sisters. I told her I had two brothers and a sister in heaven. She was surprised and was real quiet for a minute,” shared Stephanie.

“Then she said that she was very sorry and that it is sad when little children die. She told me that when people we love die, they always stay in our heart.”

“My teacher came up and said she was very sorry. Then she sat down at lunchtime with me and let me talk about mom for the entire hour. She just listened and looked sad for me,” said Rene.

“This lady across the street bakes cookies for me. She lets me sit at her table and just think. Sometimes she give me a big hug. I think she knows I am thinking of my brother,” said Sean.



People can be very kind to us when we are sad. It is good to tell them when
they have been nice to us.

What was the most helpful thing someone said to you?

Draw a picture of how you felt when someone said something nice that helped

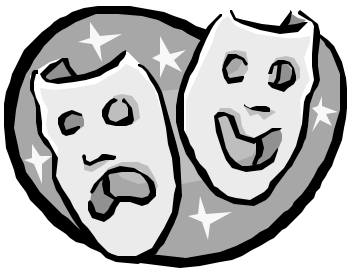
C onfused

“My aunt said that dad was in a better place. I got mad and walked out. I just miss him,” said Derek.

“This woman at church told me that God took my sister because he needed an angel,” said Stephanie. “I don’t understand why God would need another angel when He has so many.”

“The doctor told me it was better because mom wasn’t in pain anymore. I know that is true, but it didn’t help my own sadness,” said Rene.

“A lot of people told me that he was asleep. It took a long time for the counselor to explain to me that he wasn’t going to wake up like he used to,” said Sean. “Why do people say things like that if they aren’t true?”



Sometimes adults say things that confuse or hurt us. They are really trying to help. It is okay to nicely tell them if they have said something that hurts you or to ask them to explain if you don't understand what they are trying to say.

Has anyone said confusing or hurtful things to you? If so, what did they say? How did it make you feel? What did you say to them at the time and what would you have said now?

Draw a picture of how you felt when you were confused or hurt by words

C hanges

“Grandma came over every day because she and grandpa were fighting. She wanted to talk about dad but was mostly angry at the man who caused the car accident,” said Derek.

“My mommy cried every day for a long time. At first, it scared me. She cried in the shower, in the kitchen, in the baby’s room...for a long time, she didn’t smile. It seemed like she wasn’t even my mom at times. But then she said it helped just to hug her so I did,” said Stephanie.

“Dad spent a lot of time at the cemetery. He was the only one who didn’t really want to talk about mom. He missed her so much that it was too painful. I think he didn’t want us to see him cry,” said Rene.

“Everyone acted crazy for weeks. Even me. Dad worked all the time- mommy cried and cried. Grandma and Grandpa were worried about everyone. Sometimes now they don’t ask how I feel or how I’m doing. They just talk to each other,” said Sean.



People can change a lot when someone important to us dies. Some people feel like they will never be the same. It is normal for people to cry a lot even though it can concern others. It can seem like everything has changed. Normal day to day activities can even be different.

How have the people you love changed? How have you changed?

Draw a picture of how you felt before your loved one died, & how you feel now
Before After

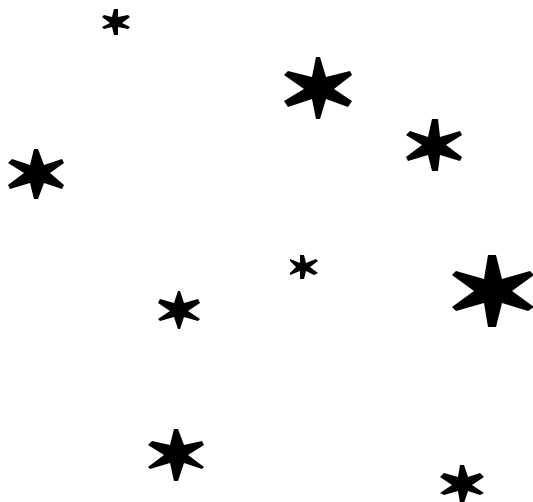
I f O nly...

“I wish I had told my dad that I loved him. I think he knew- but I wish I had said it. I just never expected him to die,” said Derek.

“My mommy wasn’t feeling good the day my sister was born. I had a bad feeling in my stomach and knew there was something wrong. Maybe if I would have told the doctor they could have helped my sister,” cried Stephanie.

“Mom never complained about anything. I didn’t even know she was really sick until her doctor called. I wish she would have talked to us all. Maybe we could have helped more,” said Rene.

“I yelled at my brother the morning he drowned. I told mom I wanted to tell him that I wasn’t mad anymore. Mom let me hold him after he died at the hospital and I so told him I loved him,” cried Sean.



Most people wonder if things could have been different. A lot of people wish they would have said or done something different.
If you could say or do anything different, what would it be?

Draw a picture of yourself talking to your loved one

Q uestions ?

“Why did God take my father?” said Derek.

“Babies are not supposed to die,” said Stephanie.
“Why did God let her die?”

“Mom was so healthy. How could she have gotten cancer?” said Rene.

“Why did this happen to my little brother?” said Sean.



There are many questions about life and death that no one understands. These questions are unanswerable and can cause great misunderstanding and confusion.

Sometimes people will try to answer them for you, but usually
you will find peace within your own heart in time.

What is the most important question you have that seems unanswerable?

Draw a picture of the way you feel when you are confused about death

H ealing

“When I am really down I go for a hike. It seems to help me think about dad and clear my mind. Sometimes, I don’t like to cry in front of others, so it helps me do that too,” said Derek.

“My mom and I look at her pictures together when we are sad. We talk about her a lot. We cry a lot, too, but after we are done, it feels much better- then we laugh and play again,” said Stephanie.

“A group called M.I.S.S. started the Kindness Project. I like to do something nice for the Kindness Project to honor mom’s memory. It helps us keep her alive in our hearts and others won’t forget her,” said Rene.

“Dad, mom, and I all go to the cemetery once a week to leave flowers and clean his grave. I like to bring him special toys and cars that I know he would like. Sometimes, I write him letters and send balloons to heaven for him,” said Sean.



G ifts

“Dad was the strongest man on earth. I feel he gave me the gift of courage because since his death, I have had to face feelings that are very frightening,” said Derek.

“Mommy says that she taught our family about compassion. I didn’t know what that big word meant, so mom explained it. She said that my sister showed us how important it is to be nice to other people when they are sad and that we need to help them feel sad and cry,” said Stephanie.

“My mom gave me the gift of example. Through her love, I understand how to be a good mother to my own children one day. I want to grow up and be just like my mother,” said Rene.

“I learned about being gentle from my little brother,” said Sean. “I never thought I would want to hug and kiss a little brother, but when he was born, I did. Now that he died, I am glad for all the times he would crawl on my lap and hug me. He taught me to be nice with my words too. He didn’t like it when I got mad and yelled, so I try not to do that anymore.”



Our loved ones teach us a lot about life and death. Often they leave us wondrous gifts to discover as we go through life without them.
Think about the gifts you feel your loved one gave to you.

Draw a picture of the “gift” you feel your loved one gave to you

N otes from my H eart

How to Help Yourself

Keep a Journal

Draw your feelings



Exercise or join a class such as karate or gymnastics

Make and play with puppets

Talk to someone who helps

Remember your loved one

Do nice things for others in memory of your loved one
(The Kindness Project at www.misschildren.org)

Share photographs with your family

Cry if you feel like you need to

Try to take care of yourself

Read a lot of books

Re-read this journal every month to see how far you have come



Stay in touch with other kids you have met who help you

Visit online kids resources for grief

Participate in rituals such as balloon releasing, tree or flower planting, scrapbooking, and anything else your family feels is helpful.

How Others Can Help a Child in Grief

A family member should inform the child and share information, not strangers

Consider the child's age and maturity level when talking to them



K.I.S.S. ~ Keep in Short & Simple. Avoid euphemisms.

Be honest and direct when answering questions

Allow the child to grieve. Listen and do not try to 'fix' them

Encourage the child to actively participate in and make decisions for any rituals.

Tell them they can write letters or draw pictures for their loved one. Offer to deliver it to the cemetery (or memorial service).

Allow them some private time when they need it, but check on them frequently. Listen to them. Do not speak, just listen and give them hugs.

Read books together. Share memories. Spend a lot of quality time. Address and validate their feelings and assure them it was not their fault.

Participate in the Kindness Project together (www.misschildren.org)

Draw pictures together. Use play-doh or another age appropriate toy, music, art, exercise, dance, or anything else to help them express their grief.

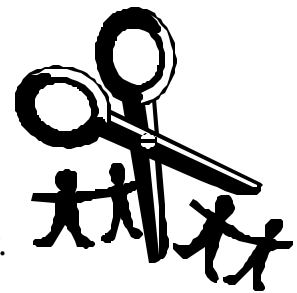
Try not to be harsh in judging a child's minor behavior changes such as dropping grades in school. As long as they do not hurt themselves or others, it is probably temporary.

If possible, postpone major decisions or changes for at least one year.

Allow the child to keep a few mementos from their loved one.

Seek support and help for yourself or the grieving adult family members. It is overwhelming to try to help the child when the adults are not first helping themselves.

Note to adults: If your child experiences:



1. Extended periods of depression in which he or she loses interest in daily activities and events
2. Inability to sleep, loss of appetite, prolonged fear of being alone
3. Acting much younger for extended periods of time
4. Withdraws from friends at school
5. Sharp drop in performance or refusal to attend school

These are signs which may indicate that professional intervention may be needed. Please seek a therapist who specialized in child grief and trauma.

If you are a child experiencing these things, please let an adult know immediately.