



Counsellor's Corner

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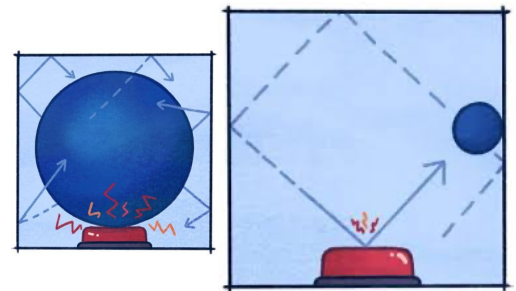


Topic: Grief

Perhaps this is an odd time to be writing about grief – there is really no “right” time, yet it occurs to me that we are likely all in a state of grief as we deal with current world events. Most people are suffering some kind of loss; whether it is a job, financial stability, time with friends, a “normal” way of living, the thought of having to face the Christmas season in a different way.... Some are also struggling with loss of family members or friends as well. For our children, they might be grieving the loss of sleepovers, not getting to see grandparents, regular birthday parties with a house full of friends, running around at recess with whomever they choose instead of having to stick to a cohort, and more.

Grief is a process that we all experience at one time or another. We all process grief in a different manner, and we process it at different rates. The one thing that we all have in common is a loss of control or power over the situation. Whether we are grieving the loss of a loved one or the loss of hope in a given situation, we feel powerless to change our situation. While grief may be a part of life, we need to model to our children how to “move through” grief rather than “get over” it. That may seem like semantics, but the truth is, grief can't be rushed or ignored. We can attempt to suppress it for a time, but eventually it will come back to a surface level...waiting to be addressed.

Perhaps you've heard of the “ball in a box” analogy...comparing grief to a ball in a box. After a loss, the ball takes up the majority of the box. There is a “pain” button inside the box that is triggered every time the ball hits the button. The first image to the right represents new loss. As we move through grief and grow in our experiences, the box gets bigger/the ball gets smaller. The pain/loss button doesn't go away; rather, gets hit less and less as we grow and move through our grief. We need to feel and acknowledge the presence of the pain button to be able to grow.

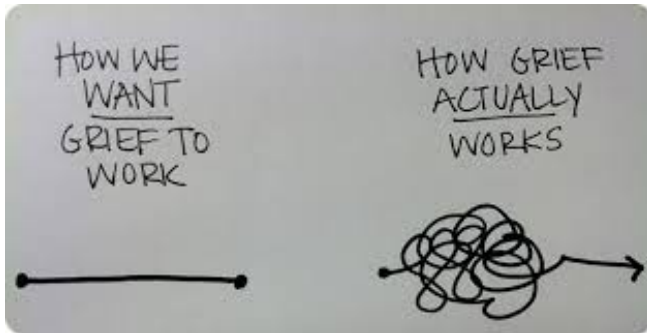


When grief is new, there are reminders everywhere. The first Christmas/birthday/anniversary after the loss/change, the change in routines, the void that is left behind are all constant reminders that something is different from the way things used to be when they were “normal”. It's okay for our children (and ourselves) to feel angry, cry, question...and it's okay for us to grieve in front of our children. By hiding our emotions, we teach our children that they need to hide theirs. Sharing our emotions in grief, as well as our strategies for coping, help children learn to navigate loss. Having some kind of process or event to say goodbye or close a chapter is important too.

Our culture uses funerals or memorial services as an ending, but also as a way of coming together, supporting each other, and beginning the process of moving through life without that person. For children, the death of a pet, divorce of parents, loss of a stuffed animal, move of a friend, etc. can all be significant losses in their lives. Having some kind of ritual that helps the child respect an ending while having supports in place to begin navigating a significant change can be extremely



helpful. Perhaps building a photo journal, a scrapbook, a collage or a memorial book....journaling, drawing, painting....something to memorialize a loss....can be helpful.



Processing grief is also about working towards creating new normals. Simple little things that went unnoticed before the loss now can become constant reminders of what is now different; for example, who turns the outside light off before bed...it always used to be so-and-so. Until a "new normal" is created that feels routine, that outside light will often be a reminder of the loss. Processing grief is not about forgetting the person, or the way things used to be...processing grief is about shifting focus from the loss itself to what was good before the loss and what

is good now. For example, when a grandparent passes away, we focus on endings and our sad feelings about losing them from our lives. As we process grief, we slowly begin to think more and more about the wonderful things from their life and less and less about the day they passed away. It is a slow process and everyone moves through the journey at a different pace. Pictures, journals, scrapbooks, etc. can all help this process.

Similarly, when the loss is due to separation or divorce (or Covid), children best process it when conflict is minimized and positive things are highlighted from the past and created for the future. Reminding children of all the things that were good before the family transition, and working together to create new routines and traditions, help children to process "what was/what could have been" into "what was/what we have to look forward to."

"No rule book.

No time frame.

No judgement.

Grief is as individual as a fingerprint.

Do what is right for you."

—UNKNOWN

For more information, please contact your school or community counsellor.

Supports In the Comox Valley For this Topic

1. **Comox Valley Hospice Society** – Grief and bereavement counselling free of charge.
<https://comoxhospice.com/when-you-lose-someone/>
2. **BC Bereavement Helpline** – 1-877-779-2223 or contact@bcbh.ca

Other Supports

1. **Parenting Through Anxiety** – Free (Funded by Comox Valley Family Services Association) – runs May 27th from 6 – 8 pm for five weeks. Offered to parents who identify as experiencing anxiety and have children aged 5 – 10 years who are also demonstrating signs of anxiety. Space is limited and registration is required. See your school counsellor for a referral form or email info@dvfsa.org.
2. **Healthy Families Program**– Accredited BC Family Resource Program supporting families and caregivers of children birth up to 6 years old, offering drop-in groups, parent-child resources, nurses, a nutritionist, infant development consultants and outreach workers for individual support. Assistance with family development of those facing challenging life circumstances. To register, call 250-871-7577
3. **Kidsport** – Provides financial support to low-income families to get your kids involved in sport. <http://www.kidsportcanada.ca/british-columbia/apply-for-assistance/>
4. **Jumpstart** - Provides financial support to low-income families to get your kids involved in sport. <https://jumpstart.canadiantire.ca/content/microsites/jumpstart/en/apply.html>
5. **Peace Program** – Counselling for children who have witnessed violence. Contact your school counsellor for a referral.
6. **Parenting After Separation Course** – Three-hour online course for parents who are separated/divorced, teaching best practices for co-parenting children.
7. **Orientation to Child, Youth & Family Mental Health and Substance Use Services** – <https://familysmart.ca/files/NORTH-ISLAND-ORIENTATION-GUIDE-WEB-v2.pdf>