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## Grief Small Group Curriculum: Small Group Activities for Upper Elementary Students Dealing with Grief

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Grief Small Group Curriculum: Small Group Activities for  
Upper Elementary Students Dealing with Grief

A Project Presented to  
The Graduate Faculty of  
Minnesota State University Moorhead

By  
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Requirements for the Degree of  
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### **Abstract**

Throughout the Counseling and Student Affairs program, we have been urged to discover areas of concern that may not be addressed to the level they deserve. As a current elementary school teacher who is going through the program, I have noticed a lack of support for our elementary students who are grieving a loss of some manner. Grief has a tremendous impact on our bodies, not only mentally and emotionally, but physically as well. The effects of grief can be significant and possibly even life altering, especially if support is not provided during the grieving process. With this in mind, I have decided to create a small-group curriculum for upper elementary students who are grieving a loss. The curriculum is intended to assist school counselors in providing grief support to their elementary students when needed in order to support and help the students as they go through their grief journey.

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### Introduction

Grief is universal. It is universal in the sense that everyone will experience grief throughout their lives. Despite the fact that everyone will experience some type of loss and grief within their lives, nothing can ever prepare a person for this experience, especially children or adolescents. While there are a myriad of ways that grief will typically affect an individual, everyone will have their own unique grief journey that they will travel through in their own ways and at their own pace. That is okay because there is no right or wrong way to grieve. There is also no timeline for grief. The grieving process is much like the ocean; there are times when your grief is calm and manageable and there are times that your grief is similar to giant waves that are turbulent and difficult to weather.

School-aged children are undergoing crucial developmental years and a loss/grief can have significant impacts on these children and adolescents, as well as their development. Grief can cause not only cognitive struggles in children and adolescents, but physical and behavioral challenges as well. These cognitive, physical, and behavioral struggles due to grief can result in setbacks within their social/emotional health and their academics. Children and adolescents are not far enough along in their development or life experiences to typically be able to successfully process their loss and grief without support. As school counselors, it is our responsibility to ensure that students are successful not only social and emotionally, but academically as well and this may occur through supporting students who are dealing with grief. One way this can be done is through grief small groups. By implementing grief small groups, students have the opportunity to learn about grief and what it does to our bodies and minds, share about their loss, process their grief, and recognize that they are not alone in their grief.

## Literature Review

### **Introduction**

Grief. Grief is a word, a topic, and a feeling that individuals would prefer to avoid. Unfortunately, grief is unavoidable. Each and every human being will experience grief in some capacity throughout their lives and oftentimes will unfortunately experience grief on multiple occurrences. Grief is unpleasant and causes a multitude of reactions within our minds and bodies that can take time to process, in certain situations can be difficult to process, and that will be processed and expressed in a variety of ways. While grief is an unpleasant and a rather difficult topic to discuss, it is imperative that we lean into the discomfort and talk grief. The avoidance of conversing around the topic of grief has a number of implications, such as: a generalized lack of knowledge in understanding grief and its effects, a lack of normalizing individual's grief experiences, and creating overall discomfort around the topic of grief making it difficult to gain knowledge on how to best help someone who is grieving. Grief is painful, scary, overwhelming, and confusing...and those are just a few of the emotions that adults experience with grief. Imagine what grief is like for children.

### **Understanding Grief**

I am not entirely sure that an individual can completely and comprehensively understand grief. Grief will be experienced by each person in unique ways. With this in mind, there are some common findings around understanding grief and the effects it can have. First and foremost, it is important to understand a generalized definition of grief.

Love (2007) defines grief as the: "loss of symbolically important connections and [grief] involves intense emotional reactions and changes to our experiences of self, the world, and the future" (p. 73). Grief can begin prior to the actual loss, however. It is possible for grief to occur

in reaction to an anticipated loss as well (Corless et al., 2014, p. 132). A major consideration to keep in mind is that grief can occur as a reaction to the death of a loved one, as well as the anticipation of loss, however grief can also occur due to types of loss beyond death.

Bereavement is a term associated with the experience of a loss of a significant attachment to someone, as well as a disruption to that attachment (Love, 2007, p. 73). Attachment disruptions can transpire through a variety of situations, especially for children. “A child can experience loss through parental separation, divorce, illness of a loved one, relocation to a new home or school, break-up with a romantic partner, or the loss of a friendship or pet” (Marino et al., 2015, p. 2). Other examples of attachment disruptions that can cause a child to experience grief would be the terminal health diagnosis of a family member or having a loved one, particularly a parent, be required to serve time in jail or prison. It is crucial for adults, particularly adults within the educational system and school counselors, to keep in mind the various circumstances that can elicit a grief reaction within school-aged children.

It is not uncommon for people who are journeying through grief to feel as if they will never emerge from the overwhelming and distressing emotions they are experiencing, however these emotions are a common response to loss and will typically not result in long-term negative results (Love, 2007, p. 73). Nevertheless, there are situations that grief can impact a person to the degree that the person may experience long-term changes within their cognitions and relationships (Corless et al., 2014, p. 132). If the loss occurs suddenly, without warning, or as the result of a traumatic event, there is the possibility for additional complications to arise within the grief, such as feeling overwhelmed, having a difficult time comprehending the loss that occurred, and having the sense that the world is suddenly chaotic and unorganized (Love, 2007, p. 77).



While these may be considered ‘additional complications’ of grief within adults, this is oftentimes how grief is experienced by children.

### **Grief within Children and Adolescents**

While grief is something that every person will experience at some point in time during their lives, an individuals’ reactions to grief and experiences with grief can, and most likely will, be diverse and unique. One thing that has been discovered is that reactions to grief can occur throughout five domains: emotional, cognitive, physical, behavioral, and existential (Love, 2007, p. 74). Grief can be expressed through several modes of expression including: verbal responses, which can be completed through both oral and written means; nonverbal responses, which is when the child remains silent and is participating more in the expression of reflection or ruminating in fear; physical reactions, which is occurring through their body’s responses and may include headaches or stomachaches; as well as physical activities, which may include certain rituals or seeking specific objects for comfort (Corless et al., 2014, p. 134 & 135).

A child’s reaction to grief is dependent upon their age and typically aligned with their developmental level, as well as influenced by factors that could include, but are not limited to, the child’s culture, socioeconomic conditions, and depth of connection to the lost family member, friend, pet, etc. (Lancaster, 2011, p. 278). As a result of the fact that children, especially younger children, have an emerging and limited verbal capacity, their grief is oftentimes expressed through their behaviors, body, and play rather than through verbalization, especially using complex language (Bugge et al., 2014, p. 36). Research has previously focused on physical, body reactions to grief within children and these reactions include exhaustion, insomnia, restlessness, headaches, stomach aches, lack of an appetite, and muscle tension (Bugge et al., 2014, p. 36). These physical reactions to grief may result in the child frequently visiting

the nurse's office at school due to their headaches or stomach aches (Marino et al., 2015, p. 3). A child may also begin to have nightmares that disrupt their sleep (Marino et al., 2015, p. 3). A child who is grieving may also appear to be frequently and easily distracted, perhaps seeming to be daydreaming and may even withdraw from their friends, peers, and other adults within their life (Marino et al., 2015, p. 3). Withdrawal may be exhibited through a child becoming controlling within their relationships in order to reject others before others can reject or leave them and this is a result of not trusting the permanence of any relationship after experiencing loss (Di Ciacco, 2008, p. 38). An additional way that children may withdraw and fulfill the feeling of emptiness from their grief is through becoming consumed within activities, such as video games, the internet, watching television, or watching or participating in sports (Di Ciacco, 2008, p. 99).

Grief within children can be expressed through their cognitions and emotions as well and may include the child being afraid that other loved ones within their life will also become ill and/or die, separating them from the family and friends that are still present within their lives (Bugge et al., 2014, p. 36). It is not uncommon for the child to be so worried and fearful of other loved ones' potential illnesses or death that the child will try to intervene in their child-like way by scanning faces for signs of sickness or checking younger siblings for any signs of illness through the use of their doctor play set (Bugge et al., 2014, p. 38). Other emotional responses to grief could include: separation anxiety, shame, anger, guilt, hallucinations, helplessness or hopelessness, generalized anxiety, difficulties learning, fantasizing death, as well as having suicidal thoughts (Di Ciacco, 2008, p. 60).

Exhibiting adverse behaviors is another common reaction to grief in children. "Bereaved children are more likely to exhibit conduct disorders and regress to infantile behavior than controls. Such grief reactions can lead to psychological and behavioral disturbances or

complicated grief associated with long-lasting impairment” (Bugge et al., 2014, p. 36). Other adverse behaviors that a child may exhibit in response to grief include: clinginess, agitation, irritation, temper tantrums or explosive outbursts, reduced curiosity and desire to explore, shortened attention span, hyperactivity or hypoactivity, as well as hypervigilance or hypovigilance (Di Ciacco, 2008, p. 61).

Adolescents grieve and react to grief in many of the same ways as listed above. In addition to the reactions already discussed, adolescents may respond to loss and grief by attempting to fill the void and empty feeling, as well as alleviate the guilt, anger, and depression they may be feeling and this may be accomplished through risky behaviors such as an increase in sexual activity, risk-taking behaviors, and use of alcohol and drugs (Di Ciacco, 2008, p. 116).

The reactions to grief within each of the domains and the grief modes of expression are exhibited differently between adults and children and even among each individual child. A bereaved child displays their grief-related emotions in a varied and unique way, causing these emotions to not be as neatly characterized and categorized compared to what occurs within adults (Lancaster, 2011, p. 277). Adults have a couple advantages when it comes to coping with loss: an adult has a brain that is fully developed, allowing them to think and reason abstractly; an adult has also lived through a multitude of experiences throughout their lives, aiding in their development of coping mechanisms when it comes to dealing with loss (Di Ciacco, 2008, p. 27). A child, on the other hand, is still in the process of developing not only cognitively, but also emotionally, morally, and physically as well as having less opportunities for life experiences and the development of coping mechanisms and this all results in a decreased ability to process and handle a significant loss, especially without appropriate support (Di Ciacco, 2008, p. 27). With

that being said, it is imperative that we support children as they journey through the grieving process.

### **Research Around Supporting Children Through Their Grief Journey**

Approximately 11% of children and adolescents within the United States will experience the death of a parent before the age of 20 and approximately 14% will lose a sibling to death before the same age (Tillman & Prazak, 2018, p. 395). These percentages only consist of the loss of a parent or a sibling and do not include the losses of any other close family members or friends, nor do they include the other types of loss and grief that a child can experience within their life.

While school-aged children do not understand and process death in the same ways as adults, they still grieve loss and their emotions are real (Tillman & Prazak, 2018, p. 396). As we learned above, a child's grief is exhibited through a variety of ways that range from cognitive to emotional and behavioral to physical difficulties. Oftentimes young children are unable to assimilate their experiences of loss into their everyday life experiences due to their developmental levels; if the adults around them are also grieving the loss, the adults may be unable to provide the emotional support the children need or explain the situation effectively to help the young child through the grief journey (Horn & Govender, 2019, p.2). Loss and grief are overwhelming and confusing, as are the ways that loss and grief are being processed, making it crucial that we support students in their grief-related struggles and help them to improve their overall well-being (Tillman & Prazak, 2018, p. 396).

Both children and adolescents are inclined to experience more complicated grief reactions than adults, as they have a more difficult time adapting to the loss due to their lack of available coping resources cognitively, emotionally, and socially and as a result will need

support while navigating through the grieving process (Love, 2007, p. 77). As school counselors, we are bound by ASCA to provide counseling in order to encourage and improve the students' social/emotional outcomes, as well as their academic (ASCA, 2012). A child's social/emotional and academic outcomes will potentially be affected by their loss and grief.

According to Zambelli and DeRosa (1992), in 1992 it was a fairly new phenomenon to use support groups to help support children who were grieving. Almost 15 years later, Ribbens McCarthy (2007) agreed that there is not a significant amount of research around how young children understand grief and the grief experiences of young children on their lives. From my personal research recently I have discovered that there is limited research around the effectiveness of grief groups with school-aged students in the school setting. In 2018, Tillman and Prazak discussed how there was a lack of school-based small groups to address grief and loss within children (p. 396). According to Horn and Govender (2019) of the 423 American public schools that were sampled, it was found that only 17% of these schools were providing and offering grief education programs, despite the resources and support that is available from the National Association of School Psychologists. This could be partly due to the fact that there have been reports that conclude the lack of knowledge and understanding when it comes to grief in learners, which could be resulting due to the fact that grief in young children is affecting just a small part of the population (Horn & Govender, 2019, p.1).

Given the above information around the lack of research, I was able to find a few articles that mentioned trials of grief groups that showed positive outcomes within children after being a participant in a small group grief group. One article in particular said that it has been demonstrated that developing grief support groups for students who are struggling with their grief can potentially effectively reduce their grief-related symptoms and if the grief groups occur

in the school setting, the student's difficulties behaviorally, interpersonally and emotionally may be relieved (Tillman & Prazak, 2018, p. 399). Based on the student's pre- and post-test responses from the study in this article, the students felt the small grief group assisted in their emotional well-being growth, as well as their ability to cope with their loss and grief (Tillman & Prazak, 2018, p. 398). Prior to the grief small group, the students were unable to express their emotions beyond the use of the word 'sad', however after participating in the grief group, they were able to use a wider range of words to describe their emotions more appropriately, which is important to grief expression (Tillman & Prazak, 2018, p. 398). The students also reported a limited response to coping with their grief prior to participating in the group, however they reported that they were able to use a wide variety of coping skills to cope with their loss and grief after participating in the small grief group (Tillman & Prazak, 2018, p. 398 & 399).

Another study's participants shared that their loss and grief began the healing process when they were able to gain understanding of their situation, which occurred through a grief group program at school (Horn & Govender, 2019, p.5). Those same participants shared that they had never received information around death and the grieving process prior to the grief group program and because of that they felt insecure, hopeless, and guilty (Horn & Govender, 2019, p.5). The participants within this study had positive results within the following areas: healing within their grief and from their loss; insight into understanding death and grief; the rebuilding of their relationships that were disrupted due to their grief; their emotional growth which was halted due to their loss and was causing negative behaviors within the classroom; the development of coping skills to allow the participants to feel empowered to handle the grief when it rearises; and the identification of their support systems (Horn & Govender, 2019). Overall, the participants

within this study felt that the small grief group program had many impactful, personal benefits to them and their grief journey (Horn & Govender, 2019, p. 7).

Finally, Yung-Chi Chen & Panebianco (2017) also found evidence that supported the effectiveness of a grief group for children. This grief group provided social support for the students, provided education around death and grief to help normalize the child's grief and loss experiences, as well as provided the facilitation of feeling expression and development of coping skills (Yung-Chi Chen & Panebianco, 2017, p. 165). This children's grief group resulted in significant improvements within the children's relationships, behaviors, and emotions, based on their parent reports (Yung-Chi Chen & Panebianco, 2017, p. 165).

From the above studies and limited available research, we can conclude that "typical tasks of grieving can be identified and supported from resourceful, sensitive others, including well-informed health professionals who can assist this transition [of grief] and facilitate a productive resolution" (Love, 2007, p. 74). However, we can also conclude that there needs to be an enhancement to the existing literature around these topics, which may be done if we can continue to raise new questions around these topics (Ribbens McCarthy, 2007, p. 300).

### **Planning a Grief Group**

There are a number of pieces to consider when planning a grief group with school aged children at school. While the formation of children's support groups tend to mirror the formation of adult support groups based on the fact that both are formed due to a common concern, the children's grief groups will most likely utilize the techniques of creative expressions, game play, sharing of stories (in a therapeutic manner), and discussions (Zambelli & DeRosa, 1992, p. 484). The groups should be sure to address the following areas: death reactions, services to honor the deceased, changes within self and family due to the loss, as well as denial and fear due to the loss

and a future without that loved one (Zambelli & DeRosa, 1992, p. 484). The ability for the child to learn to cope with loss and death depends on the child's understanding of the situation, as well as their social environment and support network rearranging in order to support the child in overcoming this new situation (Zambelli & DeRosa, 1992, p. 485).

In order to have improvement in the area of coping with grief within children, education and information is crucial to aid in the child's understanding (Bugge et al., 2014, p. 41).

Children, especially younger children are fairly concrete and literal in their comprehension and understanding, so it is crucial that they understand the permanence of death (Bugge et al., 2014, p. 41). However, it is vital that this education process happens with an intricate and holistic balance between educating for understanding and scaring the child, while also attempting to create a new life and continuing to treasure the old life (with the deceased individual) (Bugge et al., 2014, p. 42). This can be done through the use of play activities, talking about the loved one, and looking at pictures to help the child maintain memories while understanding the loss and maintaining a relationship with that individual (Bugge et al., 2014, p. 41).

Creative interventions are another effective intervention to use with students to help them explore and express their emotions associated with the loss they are grieving (Marino et al., 2015, p. 4). Creative interventions occur in the form of art therapy, narrative therapy, or bibliotherapy and can help students who may feel uncomfortable directly sharing about the feelings they are feeling as a result of their grief (Marino et al., 2015, p. 4).

The practice of remembering their loved one is another intervention that allows students to introduce their loved one to the other group members and share some of their favorite/most remembered stories of/with that loved one, as well as make a memory card for their loved one to help accept the reality of the loss, say good-bye, while also realizing that just because their loved



one may not physically be present any more does not mean that the relationship with that loved one has to end (Marino et al., 2015, p. 5).

While some of these interventions are specific to the loss of a loved one through death, they could each be adapted to accommodate the types of loss and grief the students within the grief group have experienced within their lives. These are just a few intervention ideas that can be used within a school-aged student grief group.

### **Conclusion**

Death. Loss. Grief. These are all words and experiences that provide discomfort for all involved. Loss and grief are difficult for adults to navigate and even more challenging and confusing for children. “When a child’s psychological development is interrupted by death...the grief process begins a long journey of repairing the mind, body, and spirit” (Di Ciacco, 2008, p. 25). This is a journey that children and adolescents cannot attempt on their own. They will need support in order to properly repair their mind, body, and spirit. “Learning to negotiate grief is like trying to climb out of a deep well. Children cannot do it alone” (Di Ciacco, 2008, p. 25). Thankfully, we know that: “with time and the support of their social networks, most people adjust their worlds, making sense of the loss and pain, and reshape understanding their lives” (Love, 2007, p. 74). It is imperative that as school counselors, we do what we can to help make the grieving process easier for children and adolescents.

## Group Overview

### **Type of Group**

The following 10-week group curriculum will be used with upper elementary students who are grieving a loss of some manner. It is to be taken into consideration that grief occurs as a result of a variety of losses. A group format was used with the intention of bringing students together who are experiencing grief in order for the school counselor to support them, but also for the students to understand they are not alone and they have peer support as well. With this in mind, the curriculum has been designed to be used with a small group of students, nevertheless the majority of activities from the curriculum can be taken and adapted to be used with an individual child.

### **Purpose of Group**

The small grief group was designed for the purpose of supporting upper elementary aged students during their grief journey. It seems that oftentimes many do not know how to support students while they are grieving and thus the students do not receive the support they deserve during their difficult time. This group will provide students with a space to share their grief story, process their grief, learn coping mechanisms to handle their emotions resulting from their grief, and hopefully offset any traumatic grief reactions and/or complicated grief that could occur if the grief is left unattended.

### **Facilitator Qualifications**

The facilitator of this group will be a licensed school counselor who has obtained their master's degree from an accredited program. A school counselor intern may also run this group under the supervision of a licensed school counselor. A mental health professional who has obtained their degree from an accredited program could also implement this group.

### **Group Procedures**

Group members will be determined based on parent recommendation, teacher recommendation, and/or the school counselor's gained knowledge around a student's recent loss/difficulties with loss. A consent form signed by a legal guardian will be required to be a part of the group (Appendix A). The group should consist of no more than 6 members. This will be a closed group, to ensure continued group cohesion and comfort among group members. The first group session will consist of the creation of group norms to also assist with group cohesion and comfort for all members.

At the beginning of the group, a self-assessment will be provided to the students to determine their current responses to their loss/grief, as well as if they feel these responses are appropriate and if they feel they have support. This same assessment will be used at the end of the 10-week small group to assist in determining where the student is at with their response(s) to their grief and their ways to cope with it and to conclude the effectiveness of the small grief group for that student.

### **Group Sessions**

The small grief group will meet for 10-weeks. Each session will be approximately 30-45 minutes, depending on a variety of factors. Each group session will begin with a check-in around how each participant's week has been going. The session will proceed with some sort of discussion topic around a component of grief, as well as an activity that aligns. Each session will end with a quick debrief check-in before dismissing the students back to class.

## Group Manual

**Small Group Sessions Layout****Session 1: Establishing Group Norms & Introductions****ASCA Alignment:** PS:A1.2, PS:A1.9, PS:A2.7, & PS:A2.6**Session Components:**

1. Introduction: welcome students to the group, explain why everyone is a part of this group, what the purpose and goals of the group are, and how long group is for. Work collaboratively to create group norms.
2. Activity: Introduce the “Get to Know You” Skittles activity (Appendix B)
  - a. Display the questions (Appendix B) and provide each group member with a small cup of skittles. Go around the circle, giving each group member a chance to pull a skittle out of their cup and then the group member will choose and answer a question based on the color skittle they grabbed.
3. Have the group members take turns sharing who they have lost recently.
  - a. If a group member does not feel quite comfortable to do this yet, offer them to go last or they can wait to share until they are comfortable.
4. Have the group members complete the “Grief Self-Assessment” (Appendix C)
5. Discuss what next week’s session will consist of and check-in with how the group members are feeling about this group so far.

**Session 2: All About Grief****ASCA Alignment:** PS:A1.5, PS:A1.9, PS:A2.3, PS:A2.7, & PS:A2.6**Session Components:**

1. Welcome group members back and review the group norms.
2. Have each group member share a “Peak and Valley” (high and low) of their week.
3. Define Grief
  - a. Grief is the response an individual has after a loss or death of someone.
    - i. Discuss how these responses can be physical, mental, and/or emotional and all the ways these responses can affect them.
      1. Discuss the various ways we exhibit grief, such as: stomach aches, difficulties sleeping, easily frustrated/angry, isolating self from peers, etc.
  - b. Grief is unique to each individual person and thus everyone will experience grief differently.
4. Puzzle Piece Activity (Appendix D)
  - a. Have students decorate their puzzle piece to demonstrate how grief feels for them.
  - b. Once students have decorated their puzzle pieces, ask students to share about what they put on their puzzle piece and why. Then attach student’s puzzle pieces together with band-aids and have a discussion around what grief does to our hearts, but how we can remember our loved ones and honor them in special ways to help our hearts.
5. Debrief: Discuss what group members are thinking/feeling after today’s session and give a brief overview of what we will be doing next session.

**Session 3: Beliefs About Grief****ASCA Alignment:** PS:A1.2, PS:A1.5, PS:A1.9, PS:A1.3, PS:A2. 4, & PS:A2.6**Session Components:**

1. Welcome group members back and review the group norms.
2. Review what effects grief can have on our minds and bodies (learned last week). Have each group member share any thoughts or feelings that came to them after our last group session. If they do not have much to share on that topic, then have each group member share a “Peak and Valley” (high and low) of their week.
3. Discuss what death means and how death occurs when an individual’s heart stops beating and when their body is no longer functioning both physically and mentally. Continue the discussion by talking about how each family has their own beliefs (based on familial, cultural, religious, and/or spiritual beliefs) about what happens after death.
4. Activity #1: Provide the group members with a piece of blank paper and direct them to draw and/or write their beliefs around what happens when someone dies.
5. Activity #2: Have the group members fill out the “My Beliefs” page (Appendix E).
6. After the group members complete the two activities, invite them to share their beliefs, if they feel comfortable.
7. Debrief: Discuss what group members are thinking/feeling after today’s session and give a brief overview of what we will be doing next session.

**Session 4: Remembering Our Loved Ones****ASCA Alignment:** PS:A1.5, PS:A1.9, & PS:A2.6**Session Components:**

1. Welcome group members back and review the group norms.
2. Review what effects grief can have on our minds and bodies (learned 2 weeks ago). Have each group member share any thoughts or feelings that came to them after our last group session. If they do not have much to share on that topic, then have each group member share a “Peak and Valley” (high and low) of their week.
3. Read: *The Memory Box: A Book About Grief* by Joanna Rowland
  - a. While this book is recommended up to age 8, many upper elementary students still enjoy picture books and it has a great message.
4. Activity: Provide small boxes or jars for the group members to decorate. Once they finish decorating their memory box or memory jar, have them start writing down memories of their loved one to put in their memory box/jar.
  - a. You can encourage the group members to also put any special items they may have received from their loved one in their memory box/jar as well, if they so wish.
5. Once group members are beginning to finish up this activity, invite them to share one or two of their memories with the group (if they feel comfortable doing so).
6. Debrief: Discuss what group members are thinking/feeling after today’s session and give a brief overview of what we will be doing next session.

**Session 5: Changes Within Life****ASCA Alignment:** PS:A1.4, PS:A1.5, PS:A1.9, PS:A1.11, PS:A1.12, PS:A2.5, & PS:A2.6**Session Components:**

1. Welcome group members back and review the group norms.
2. Have each group member share any thoughts or feelings that came to them after our last group session or a memory of their loved one that came to them between sessions. If they do not have much to share on that topic, then have each group member share a “Peak and Valley” (high and low) of their week.
3. Begin today’s discussion by talking about things that change, such as the seasons and the weather that goes along with each season, how trees lose leaves, etc. Continue discussing other things around us that change.
4. After a few examples and discussion of the previous question occur, talk about how loss and grief causes change as well. Have the group members think about the following question: In what ways has your loss and/or grief caused change within our life?”
5. Activity: Have the group members complete the “Leaf Worksheet”(Appendix F).
6. Share: Invite group members to share what they wrote down on their leaves, if they feel comfortable doing so.
7. Read: *The Invisible String* by Patricia Karst
  - a. While this book is recommended for ages 4-8, it may still be appropriate for the students in this group. It is up to the discretion of the group leader(s).
8. Discussion: Talk about things we can do to help with change.
  - a. Talk about what we are thinking and feeling with a trusted adult
  - b. Try to keep a normal routine whenever possible.



- c. Attempt a normal, decent bedtime and eating schedule.
  - d. Try to think of a positive thing that happened each day.
9. Discussion: Talk about how just like loss and grief can change our lives, our grief will also change. Grief never goes away, but it does change and get easier with time.
10. Introduce, begin discussing, and begin preparing for termination.
11. Debrief: Discuss what group members are thinking/feeling after today's session and give a brief overview of what we will be doing next session.

**Session 6: Saying What is Left Unsaid****ASCA Alignment:** PS:A1.5, PS:A1.9, & PS:A2.6**Session Components:**

1. Welcome group members back and review the group norms.
2. Have each group member share any thoughts or feelings that came to them after our last group session. If they do not have much to share on that topic, then have each group member share a “Peak and Valley” (high and low) of their week.
3. Discussion: Ask the students if they have ever wanted to tell someone something but didn’t get to because they had to leave right away or because they got interrupted, etc. Talk about how that felt. Then talk about how sometimes we still have things we want to tell our loved one that we lost, but feel like we can’t because they aren’t here anymore. Talk about how some people find writing/journaling to be helpful in many ways. Then discuss how one way that we can still “talk” to our loved one is through writing.
4. Activity: Provide the group members with an envelope to decorate (ideas: have them write “What was left unsaid”). Then pass out pieces of paper and have the group members write a letter (or draw) to tell their loved one what they need or want to say to them and put their letter(s) in the envelopes.
  - a. The group members may choose to seal the envelope right away or keep it open so they can continue to add to it. Perhaps they want to keep their envelope with their memory boxes or in another safe spot.
5. Termination: Continue discussing what to expect with termination and when that is.
6. Debrief: Discuss what group members are thinking/feeling after today’s session and give a brief overview of what we will be doing next session.

**Session 7: Feelings****ASCA Alignment:** PS:A1.5, PS:A1.9, PS:A2.3, & PS:A2.6**Session Components:**

1. Welcome group members back and review the group norms.
2. Have each group member share any thoughts or feelings that came to them after our last group session. If they do not have much to share on that topic, then have each group member share a “Peak and Valley” (high and low) of their week.
3. Discussion: Ask the group members if any of them would be willing to share some of the feelings they have felt during their grief journey. Introduce other feeling words that may not have been used (such as: overwhelmed, numb, abandoned, empty, guilty, irritable, lonely, grateful, hopeful, calm, scared, etc.). Talk about how it is normal to feel MANY feelings all the time, but especially after losing a loved one.
4. Discussion Point: Remind students that their grief will never go away, but it will change. Grief is like an ocean, sometimes the waves are calm (just like our grief is calm) and sometimes the waves are big, scary, and crashing (just like our grief). Sometimes we will think that our grief is getting easier and then all of a sudden a certain memory will pop into our heads or we will smell a certain smell or a special day or holiday will come and cause our grief to feel hard again. This is normal. Remember, our grief is like the waves of an ocean.
5. Activity: Have the students complete Appendix G.
6. Termination: Continue discussing what to expect with termination and when that is.
7. Debrief: Discuss what group members are thinking/feeling after today’s session and give a brief overview of what we will be doing next session.

**Session 8: Coping Strategies****ASCA Alignment:** PS:A1.5, PS:A1.6, PS:A1.8, PS:A1.9, PS:A2.3, & PS:B1.4**Session Components:**

1. Welcome group members back and review the group norms.
2. Have each group member share any thoughts or feelings that came to them after our last group session. If they do not have much to share on that topic, then have each group member share a “Peak and Valley” (high and low) of their week.
3. Discussion: Talk about how last week we discussed the different feelings we have experienced since losing our loved one. Talk about how sometimes our feelings and emotions can be really big and we don’t always know how to calm down or control those feelings/emotions. Discuss what happens when we feel these big emotions but we don’t know how to control them. Coping Skills are different and healthy things we can do to help us control and even out our emotions/feelings. As a group, come up with different coping skills (such as: taking deep breaths, drawing, riding bike, dancing, listen to music, talking to a trusted person, etc.).
4. Activity: Have students complete the “Coping Skills Plan” worksheet (Appendix H).
5. Allow the students to share their Coping Skills Plan with the other group members, if they so choose
6. Discuss where would be good places for the group members to keep their coping plans so they can be revisited whenever needed.
7. Termination: Continue discussing termination.
8. Debrief: Discuss what group members are thinking/feeling after today’s session and give a brief overview of what we will be doing next session.

**Session 9: Grief Support After Group**

**ASCA Alignment:** PS:A1.2, PS:A1.5, PS:A1.6, PS:A1.8, PS:A1.9, PS:A1.10, PS:A2.6,

PS:B1.1, PS:B1.3, PS:B1.4, & PS:B1.5

**Session Components:**

1. Welcome group members back and review the group norms.
2. Have each group member share any thoughts or feelings that came to them after our last group session. If they do not have much to share on that topic, then have each group member share a “Peak and Valley” (high and low) of their week.
3. Discussion: Review our conversations around feelings and negative/positive ways to cope with those feelings. Talk about how group is almost finished. Discuss how everyone is feeling about group being almost done. Talk about how they have learned many ways to cope with their loss and grief, but it might not always be easy. Discuss some possible “struggles” that could come up after group during their grief journey and ways we can cope with those “struggles”.
4. Activity: Create a “Strategy Plan” for after group (Appendix I).
5. Share their Strategy Plans with their group members, if they so choose to.
6. Termination: Next session is the last session. Check-in with how everyone is doing with that. Address any concerns or questions that need to be addressed.
7. Debrief: Discuss what group members are thinking/feeling after today’s session and give a brief overview of what we will be doing next session.

**Session 10: Group Finale****ASCA Alignment:** PS:A1.5, PS:A1.6, PS:A1.8, PS:A1.9, & PS:A2.6**Session Components:**

1. Welcome group members back for the last time.
2. Have each group member share any thoughts or feelings that came to them after our last group session. If they do not have much to share on that topic, then have each group member share a “Peak and Valley” (high and low) of their week.
3. Have students share what we have discussed, learned, and taken away from the small group sessions.
4. Post-Assessment: Have each of the group members complete the “Grief Self-Assessment” (Appendix C).
5. Discussion: Have group members take turns sharing how they are feeling about this being our last group session. Address any worries, concerns, questions, etc. that may come up during this discussion.
6. Activity: Talk about how sometimes we all need to hear a positive statement to help us gain courage, boost our self-esteem, or level out our emotions. Come up with various statements that would be encouraging. Pass out popsicle sticks, markers/Sharpies, and a jar to each student. Have them create their own “Courage Jar” that is filled with popsicle sticks that have positive statements on it. Encourage them to keep their “Courage Jar” handy and to pull out one of the positive statement popsicle sticks when they need a mood-booster.
7. Say Good-Bye and remind everyone that we are all here to support each other at any time, even though group is finished.

## Appendix A

**Informed Consent Example**

Hello Parent/Guardian,

My name is [insert school counselor's name] and I am the School Counselor at [insert school name]. Part of my role as School Counselor is to provide small group counseling to students in order to help them succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. I will be providing a small group counseling option to students who are experiencing grief and/or loss of various types. This small group counseling will occur once a week during their school day.

As you may be aware, loss and grief can have effects on the whole child: physically, emotionally, socially, and even academically. Support during a time of loss and grief can help offset the severities of grief reactions and effects. If you feel that this small group would be beneficial for your child, I ask that you sign and return this form by: [insert due date].

The group will abide by the ethical guidelines in place for all counseling. Because group is based on trusting relationships between the facilitator and participants, the group leader will keep the information shared in group confidential, except in certain circumstances where there is an ethical obligation to notify parents/administration. These circumstances include if a student reveals they are planning to harm themselves or others, if the student discloses child abuse, or if the counselor is subpoenaed by the courts.

By signing this form, I give my consent for my child to participate in the Grief and Loss Small Group.

Parent/Guardian \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Sincerely,

[Insert School Counselor's Name]

[Insert School Name]






[Insert Phone Number]

[Insert Email Address]



## Appendix B

## Get to Know You Skittles Activity

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
	What is your favourite ice-cream flavor?	What is your favourite book?	What veggies do you like to eat?	What is your favourite day of the week and why?	Do you prefer reading or writing? Why?	What is your favourite farm animal?
	What was the best thing about school last year?	What is the BEST movie you've ever seen?	What is your favourite fruit?	What is your favourite pizza topping?	What qualities do you look for in a friend?	What is your favourite sport?
	What is your favourite colour?	Do you prefer cats or dogs? Why?	Would you rather play video games or play outside?	What makes a 'good teacher'?	Tell us about your pets at home?	Where were you born?
	Share your best memory from the holidays	Share something NEW about yourself	Tell us one thing you remember from last year.	What is your favourite singer or band?	Tell us about your family	What is your favourite school subject?
	Do you prefer soccer, AFL or basketball?	What is your favourite TV show	Who is your favourite teacher of all time?	What is your favourite outdoor activity?	What is your ultimate holiday?	If you could have anything for dinner, what would it be?

Resource Retrieved From: <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Getting-to-Know-You-Skittles-4819310>



## Appendix C

**Pre- and Post-Assessment**Self-Assessment

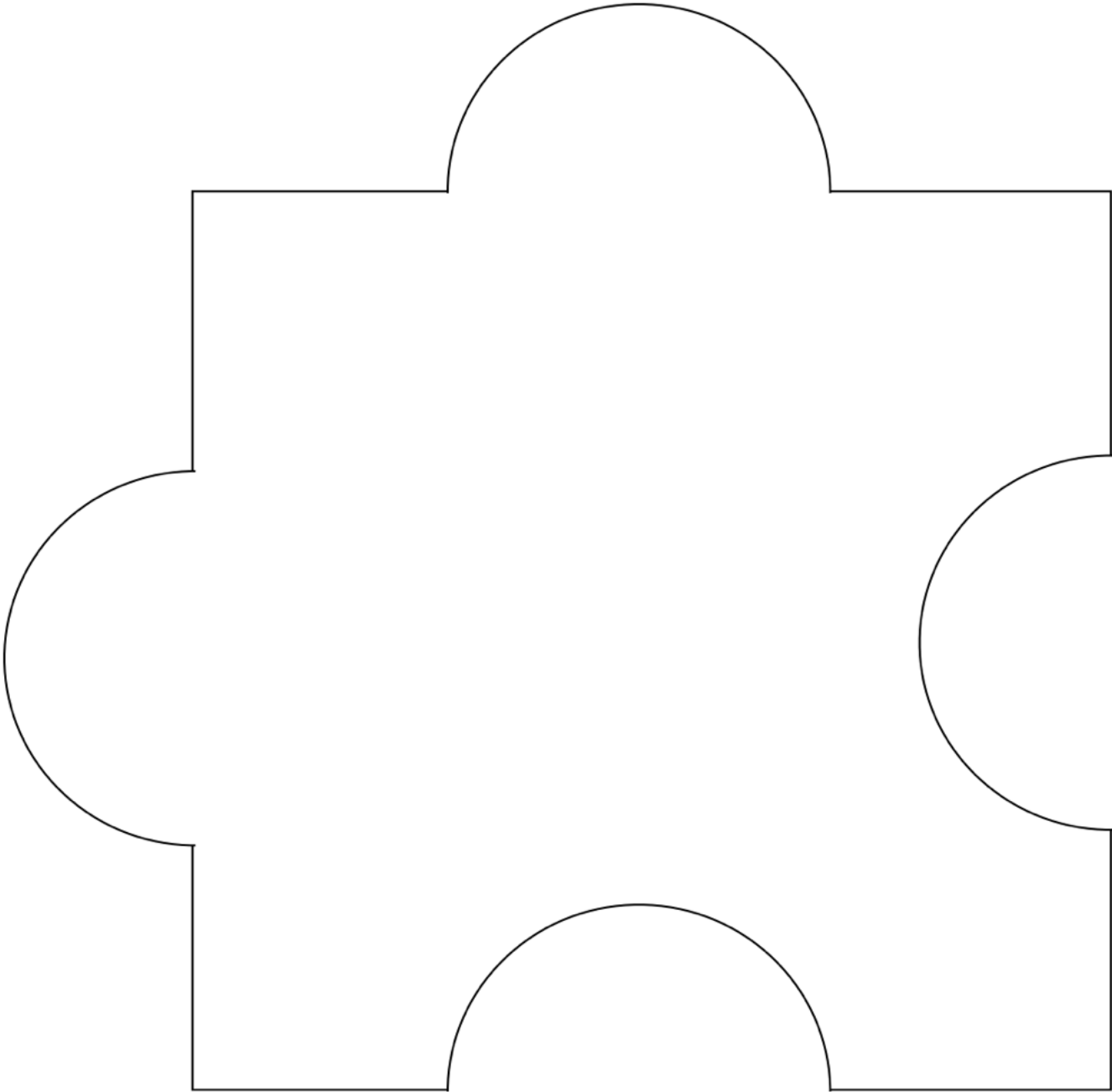
Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Circle the answer that best fits you and what you think 😊

- |  |              |         |           |             |
|--|--------------|---------|-----------|-------------|
| 1.) I feel sad:  | Almost Daily | Often   | Sometimes | Hardly Ever |
| 2.) I feel angry:  | Almost Daily | Often   | Sometimes | Hardly Ever |
| 3.) I know how to cope with my strong emotions:          | Definitely   | Kind Of | Maybe     | Not at All  |
| 4.) It is okay to feel sad and/or mad:                   | Definitely   | Kind Of | Maybe     | Not at All  |
| 5.) I know what grief is:                                | Definitely   | Kind Of | Maybe     | Not at All  |
| 6.) I know people I can talk to when I am feeling upset: | Definitely   | Kind Of | Maybe     | Not at All  |

Appendix D  
**Puzzle Piece Activity**



Resource Retrieved From: <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Blank-Puzzle-Piece-291154?st=5aa14e5569902cd136a417ddb04a0617>

Appendix E

**My Beliefs Worksheet**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**My Beliefs**

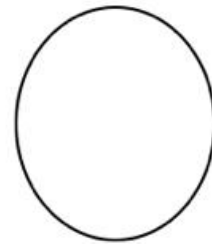
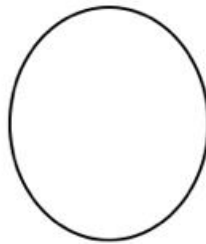
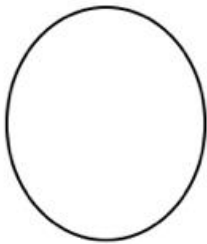
We all have beliefs about what happens when someone dies. These beliefs are formed by our families, culture, religion, or spiritual beliefs. Our beliefs guide us on what we do to honor the person who died. We might honor the person's life in similar ways as others or in different ways as others. There is no right or wrong way to honor a person's life, just like there is no right or wrong way to grieve our loss.

**Share what you did to honor your loved one's life after they died:**

When \_\_\_\_\_ died, my family and I did this \_\_\_\_\_  
(write their name) (write how you honored them)

to honor their life.

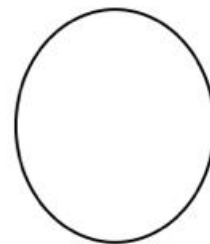
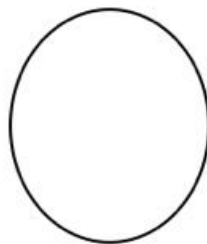
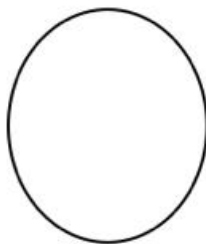
**How did you feel during that time of honoring their life? Draw faces below. You can draw more than one, because we feel many emotions at one time sometimes, especially when grieving.**



\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Appendix F

**Life Changes Worksheet**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Just like trees change throughout the seasons, losing leaves and forming new leaves, our lives change when we experience a loss. On each leaf, write down a way that your life has changed because of your loss and/or grief.



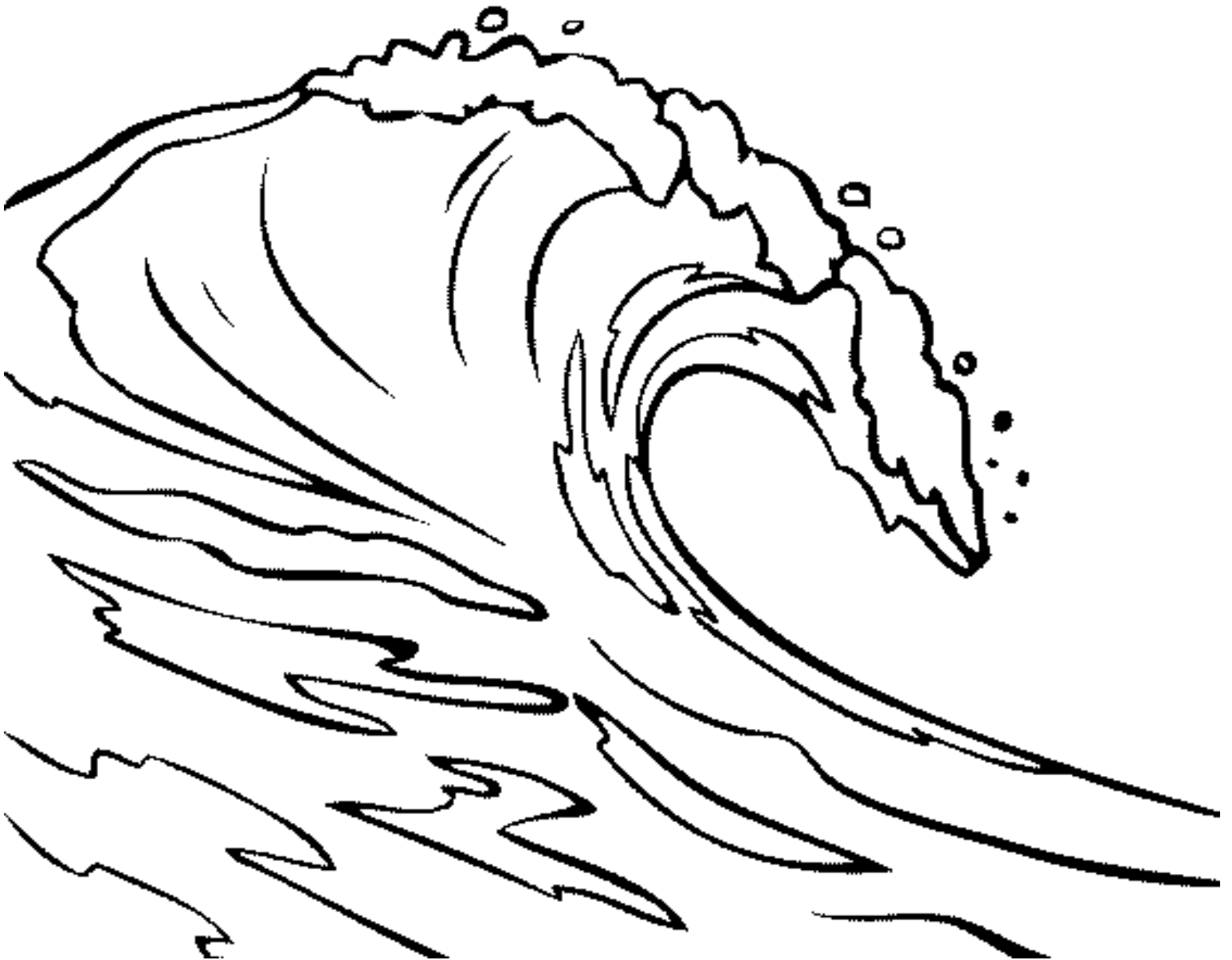
Appendix G

**Ocean Wave Feelings**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_







Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Our grief and grief feelings are like the waves of an ocean. Sometimes they are small, calm, and peaceful and sometimes they are big, loud, and powerful. In the wave below, color and label the emotions you have felt so far.



Appendix H

# \_\_\_\_\_ 's Coping Skills Plan

<p><b>Favorite Skills:</b></p> 	<p><b>People Who Care About Me:</b></p>   <p><b><u>Tips for My Body:</u></b></p> 
<p><b>My Helpful, Happy Thoughts:</b></p> 	<p><b><u>Imagine My Happy Relaxing Place:</u></b></p>  <p>www.WholeChildCounseling.com</p>

Appendix I

\_\_\_\_\_’s Strategy Plan

Possible Problem

My Strategy

Possible Problem

My Strategy

Who Can Help

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