

A RESOURCE
FROM
NACG
MEMBERS



SUPPORTING CHILDREN OF ALL ABILITIES WHO ARE GRIEVING

ACTIVITIES



The Drumming Circle

Expressive Art Activity



Purpose

Expression of feelings surrounding loss through music and vibration.

Materials

Drums or other musical instruments (shakers, rainmakers, xylophones, etc.). The use of different instruments creates the opportunity to make unique sounds or vibrations.

Instructions

1. Have each participant pick an instrument.
2. Ask a participant use their instrument to answer one of the discussion questions. (Can you play how ...). Have them repeat their response a few times.
3. Ask the group to play the participant's response. Once they repeat it a few times you can ask the group to play the response softer or louder, slower or faster, etc.
4. Repeat the process with different participants and asking different questions.

The Drumming Circle continued

Discussion Questions

1. How did it feel when you heard that your person died?
2. How do you feel when you think about your person?
3. What does (anger, sadness, fear, loneliness, happiness etc.) feel like?

Variations

Using homemade instruments is a good option. Empty coffee cans, oatmeal containers, chip cans and trash cans can all be used to make drums. Cereal box guitars, paper towel roll rainmakers, and plastic egg shakers are also good DIY options. They can be made in the session and notes can be incorporated into the instruments so that participants can not only express their feelings through their instruments but also communicate messages to their person.

Considerations

The loud noises made by the drums may be triggering for some. Doing the activity outside or in smaller groups may be helpful.

Adaptations:

- Some people find loud noise difficult. This activity can be done outside or in smaller groups.
- Some people wear headphones to help muffle the sound. Let participants know in advance to bring their headphones for this activity.
- Use body movement to indicate prompts, it is often more effective than yelling over the drums!
- Work on modulating the sound, playing loudly and quietly.



Snowstorm/Icicle/Melt

Transition Activity



Purpose

This is a great activity to use as a transition exercise, either in between other activities, or to end a group. It can also be used to support and model self-regulation and co-regulation within a group setting.

Materials

- All you need is your body!
- For a longer version you can use music and a blanket; see variation below.

Instructions

Snowstorm/Expression of big energy:

If there is a lot of energy in the room, physical or emotional, reflect on it and name it for the group. "There is a lot of energy in the room right now! We are going to take all of this energy and use it to create a snowstorm with our bodies. Ready, scoop all of this energy up and really shake it all around – get the snowflakes swirling – like they are in a snow globe maybe – really move them... it's a blizzard – the wind is blowing and it's snowing so hard!"

Snowstorm/Icicle/Melt continued

Icicle/Transition:

"Now it is getting so cold, everything is freezing, your body is becoming so cold you are becoming an icicle – you are frozen – so tall and frozen – clench all of your muscles and take a deep breath in – hold it in, you are frozen solid!"...

Melt/Calming:

"And release your breath, the sun comes out, and you melt to the ground into a little puddle... close your eyes and let yourself breathe and relax as you stay melted in a puddle on the ground." Encourage participants to take a deep breath and slowly move to where they need to be for what is next on the schedule.

Variations

- Long Version: If you have more time and want to consider using this as a longer activity each of the three sections can be extended.
- Expressing big emotions – play a fun song with a good beat and let everyone move and dance their emotions and energy out!
- Transition – challenge everyone to start slowing down, eventually moving as slowly as they can, noticing their breath, their heart beats, the room or environment; finally finding a comfy spot to sit or lie down and wrapping in a blanket if one is available.
- Calming – have participants close their eyes if comfortable, wrap up tight in their blanket, or give themselves a big hug, and take some nice deep breaths together, inhaling and exhaling to the count of 4 and letting their whole bodies relax and 'melt' as they breathe.

Suggestions for Expansion

After doing this activity, participants can be asked to draw or discuss how they felt during each phase of the activity.

Additional Notes

If you are in a warmer climate and snowstorms are not relatable, you can use a variation on the theme: Smoothie/Popsicle/Melt (Or make up your own!)

Adaptations:

- This exercise can be done sitting down, standing up or on the floor.
- Print out the "script" for those who benefit from nonverbal cues.

My Favorite Memory (Child)

Mindfulness Activity

Purpose

The purpose of the activity is to use our five senses to imagine a memory with our person. If you do not have a memory, we are going to imagine a memory we wish we had with our person.

Five Senses Mindfulness Exercise

1. **Sit in a comfortable, upright position** with your feet planted on the ground. Rest your hands on your thighs. Close your eyes while we start to think of a memory with your person who died.
2. **Notice your breath.** No need to breathe in any particular way. Just bring attention to each part of your breathing – the inhale, exhale, and space in between.
3. **Begin to think of a memory with your person who died.** If you do not have a memory, take this time to think of a memory you would have liked to have had with your person.
4. **Bring awareness to each of your 5 senses.** One at a time, for about one minute each. The point here is to focus on the memory and how each of your senses is being activated to remind yourself of that memory. The order in which you pay attention to each sense does not matter.
5. **See:** As your eyes are closed, observe what you are seeing. Notice the colors, shapes, and textures of that special memory. Notice the place you were with your person. See who else was there or if you were alone together. (Pause, 1-2 minutes. Let them think of their memory).
6. **Hear:** Notice all the sounds you remember from that special memory. Try not to judge the sounds, just notice them. They are not good or bad, they just are. Are you hearing more than you were before you started? You may begin to hear subtle sounds you did not hear before. Can you hear them now? (Pause, 1-2 minutes. Let them think of their memory).
7. **Smell:** Now shift your attention to notice any smells you remember with your person in this moment. Maybe you smell food. You might become aware of the smell of trees or plants. You may remember the smell of books or paper. (Pause, 1-2 minutes. Let them think of their memory).
8. **Taste:** Notice an awareness of your mouth and sense of taste. Do you have a memory of you and your person eating certain food? Notice the taste of the food you were eating together. Were you drinking something? Was it sweet, salty, spicy or tangy? If you do not have a memory of taste, continue paying attention to your breathing. (Pause, 1-2 minutes. Let them think of their memory).
9. **Touch:** Bring your attention to the memory of what you may be feeling. Was it your special person's touch? Remember an embrace, hug, or kiss. Maybe you were holding or feeling something in your hands. Think about that feeling. You might take time to feel the textures that you noticed by sight a few moments ago. (Pause, 1-2 minutes. Let them think of their memory).

My Favorite Memory (Child) continued

10. You may keep your eyes closed or decide to open them now but stay quiet for your friends in the group. Pause to notice how your body feels in this moment. How do you feel now? What has changed to make you feel differently? Next time you are feeling overwhelmed or you miss your person, try this exercise to bring those memories back.

Adaptations

- For those who have difficulty hearing, focus on the lyrics or on the album cover design.
- Focus on strengths. Incorporate movement or dance with the selected songs
- Encourage drawing to the music. Suggest listening to playlist as a coping skill when they are feeling sad/missing their person. Select a song from each playlist to make a group playlist to use during future groups. The use of headphones may be useful for some participants if the music is too loud or overstimulating.



My Favorite Memory (Caregiver)

Mindfulness Activity

Purpose

The purpose of the activity is to use our five senses to imagine a memory with our person. If you do not have a memory, we are going to imagine a memory we wish we had with our person.

Five Senses Mindfulness Exercise (Caregivers)

1. **Sit in a comfortable, upright position** with your feet planted on the ground. Rest your hands on your thighs. Close your eyes while we start to think of a memory with your person who died or a memory of your child with this person.
2. **Notice your breath.** No need to breathe in any particular way. Just bring attention to each part of your breathing – the inhale, exhale, and space in between.
3. **Begin to think of a memory with your person who died.** If you do not have a memory, take this time to think of a memory you would have liked to have with your person or a memory your child has with this person.
4. **Bring awareness to each of your 5 senses.** One at a time, for about one minute each. The point here is to focus on the memory and how each of your senses is being activated to remind yourself of that memory. The order in which you pay attention to each sense does not matter.
5. **See:** As your eyes are closed, observe what you are seeing. Notice the colors, shapes, and textures of that special memory. Notice the place you or your child was with your person. See who else was there or if you or they were alone together. (Pause, 1-2 minutes. Let them think of their memory).
6. **Hear:** Notice all the sounds you remember from that special memory. Try not to judge the sounds, just notice them. They are not good or bad, they just are. Are you hearing more than you were before you started? You may begin to hear subtle sounds you did not hear before. Can you hear them now? (Pause, 1-2 minutes. Let them think of their memory).
7. **Smell:** Now shift your attention to notice any smells you or your child remember with your person in this moment. Maybe you smell food. You might become aware of the smell of trees or plants. You may remember the smell of books or paper. (Pause, 1-2 minutes. Let them think of their memory).
8. **Taste:** Notice an awareness of your mouth and sense of taste. Do you have a memory of you or your child and your person eating certain food? Notice the taste of the food you were eating together. Were you drinking something? Was it sweet, salty, spicy or tangy? If you do not have a memory of taste, continue paying attention to your breathing. (Pause, 1-2 minutes. Let them think of their memory).
9. **Touch:** Bring your attention to the memory of what you may be feeling. Was it your special person's touch? Notice the pressure between you and them. Remember an embrace, hug, or kiss. Maybe you were holding or feeling something in your hands. Think about that feeling. You might take time to feel the textures that you noticed by sight a few moments ago. (Pause, 1-2 minutes. Let them think of their memory).

My Favorite Memory (Caregiver) continued

You may keep your eyes closed or decide to open them now but stay quiet for the others in the group. Pause to notice how your body feels in this moment. How do you feel now? What has changed to make you feel differently? Next time you are feeling overwhelmed, you miss your person, or your child is overwhelmed and missing their person, try this exercise to bring those sweet memories back.



Grief Playlist & Album Covers

Identify and Practice Coping Strategies Activity

Purpose

The idea of creating a grief playlist gives grieving children and teens the opportunity to recognize music as a coping tool and helps them to reflect on their time with the person who died in their lives.

Materials

You can do this activity two ways – one works with little supplies and the other would be another way to facilitate it.

1. Spotify Playlist & Blank Paper with Crayons/Markers.
2. Blank CDs with their Cases and Blank Paper with Crayons/Markers.

Instructions

Discuss as a group the importance of healthy coping in the grief journey. Have the group talk about different ways to cope with difficult emotions. Introduce music as a healthy coping tool, and let the group know you will be creating a grief playlist that they can listen to when they are having a hard day or to remember their special person who died.

1. Have each group member brainstorm 2 songs that:
 - (a) Bring them hope in their grief journey or make them feel better on a bad day. That may be a song that is upbeat and helps bring them “up” when they are feeling down, or a song that is slow and emotional that they can cry with.
 - (b) Remind them of their person who died. Maybe it is a song they sang together in the car or a song that’s lyrics remind them of their person who died.Have them write down their songs on a blank sheet of paper.
2. Go around the circle and discuss each of the music selections each group member wrote down. Talk about what makes each song meaningful to them. Do you connect with the lyrics? Is there a way the music sounds that makes you feel a certain way? Play some of the songs for the group, if time allows.
3. Let the group know you will be compiling their grief songs into a grief playlist. If you have physical CDs, let the group members know you will burn the list of songs onto the CD for them. If you don’t have physical CDs, have a facilitator or staff member compile the songs into a Spotify or YouTube playlist to be sent via link to the group members in an email after group.
4. To go with the playlist, the final step is to create grief “album covers.” Ask the group members to each decorate their own design. If you have physical CDs, each group member can decorate a piece of paper that can go on the inside of the CD case. If you don’t have physical CDs, each group member can do their design on a blank sheet of paper. Let them know that they can decorate their album cover with anything they want, and give them a few ideas if they need them:

Grief Playlist & Album Covers continued

(a) Draw a memory you cherish with the person who died.

(b) Draw or color what your grief looks like to you. That may be abstract.

Remind the group at the end of group that they can listen to these songs when they are feeling down, and they can think of their group and know they are supported in their grief journey.

Discussion Questions

- What makes each song meaningful for you?
- Do you connect more with the lyrics or the sound of the song?

Variations

If you have someone in your group who has difficulty hearing, you could modify this activity to focus more on lyrics than on the actual music for this activity.

Additional Notes

Once you have your playlist compiled, you can use the songs from the list as “background” music during group activities or memorial services.



Activities Checklist

Name of Activity:

Materials needed including adaptive materials:

Timeline / Schedule for activities:

This schedule can be shared with participants (emailed before the group, displayed in the room, posted in the chat for virtual sessions or distributed on clipboards at the beginning of the group to ALL participants). Sample:

- Introductions and Warm-Up
- Group Discussion
- Art Activity/Movement Activity
- Break
- Closing Activity/Compliment Circle
- Good-Byes

Adaptations:

- How are we making this activity accessible to all?
- Do we have the materials we need?
- Do we have choices within the activity that are accessible to all?

Reflections:

Which activities or parts of the group helped ALL of our participants feel...

- **RESPECTED:** Each person feels seen, heard and witnessed. We are working to preserve the dignity of each participant.
- **INFORMED:** Each person learns that there is no timeline for grief, there are many emotions with grief, and that each person grieves in their own way.
- **CONNECTED:** Each person learns that they are not alone in their grief.
- **EMPOWERED:** Each person's strengths are recognized and validated.

This toolkit was made possible with the support of:



NEW YORK LIFE
FOUNDATION

This toolkit was created by members of the NACG to support professionals who are working with children of all abilities who are grieving. The NACG has a range of free resources available on our website to support professionals and caregivers. You can access them at www.childrengrieve.org/resources.

The staff of the National Alliance for Children's Grief would like to thank the following organizations and individuals who contributed ideas and/or activities for this toolkit:

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A note on the use of the term "all abilities". We chose to use the term "all abilities" in this toolkit to promote a welcoming and inclusive message to all our participants and their families. This also reflects the current thinking that it is helpful to use person-first language, in other words, that we acknowledge the person first, and not their condition. So, we would say, "a child with a disability" rather than "a disabled child". In using the term "all abilities" we acknowledge our common humanity and that we are all people first! Please see our FAQ section for more information on use of language when working with people of all abilities with grief.

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