

GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

CURRICULUM - SUPPORTING THOSE WHO GRIEVE



GOALS & OBJECTIVES

To explore how we can grieve together as a faith community by looking at the grief process and considering how to better support those around us who have experienced a loss.

By the end of the session, participants will have:

- learned about the grief process.
- considered how they can support those in your community who grieve a loss.

Setting	Adult Christian Education Forum, small group or committee meeting	
Materials	___ Candle ___ Match ___ Obituaries ___ Computer w/internet connection	___ copies of the grief handouts ___ Paper ___ Pen/Pencil ___ Bibles

opening

- **Read the obituaries** for three different, recent gun violence victims—try to stay as close to the local community as possible. After each is read, **light a candle in memorial of the incident.**

- **Lead the group in this or your own prayer:**

Holy God, we come together today to learn more about our world and your presence in it. We ask that you be with the families and friends of ___ (naming people about whom we have just read) ___. We pray also for the perpetrators, broken people, just like ourselves. Please give us ears to hear and eyes to see your light in the midst of this pain and darkness. Amen.

- **Read** John 11: 17-35

presenting & exploring

- **Watch the video:**

Sesame Street: When Families Grieve: Expressing Emotions

<http://www.sesamestreet.org/parents/topicsandactivities/topics/grief>

and/or

Dr Leeat Granek—Coping With Grief

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nj4lQedaCHI>



- **Review** the Grief handouts together.
- **Lead the group in discussion**, going around the room to answer the following questions.

—Note: allow a moment of silence after each question is asked so that introverts may have the opportunity to consider their answers. It is okay for the discussion to veer from these specific questions as the Spirit leads.—

- o Have you ever grieved a loss? What was helpful to you during this time? What was hurtful?
- o What part of being with someone who is grieving is most uncomfortable for you?
- o What type of unexpected loss has your church as a community experienced? How did you engage it? Would you change anything?
- o Who supports grieving people in your church?
- o How does the congregation talk about death?
- o Are there any rituals or processes for supporting those who grieve?
- o Are there ways that your congregation could be more intentional or proactive in grieving together?

closing

- **Reread** John 11: 17-35
- **Invite the participants to reflect** on what they've learned and how they feel called to move forward in the coming week.
- **Name** a time to come back together for further discussion.
- **End the group in this or your own prayer:**

God, may your life-giving Spirit move through us and inspire us. It is hard to hear about the suffering of our world. We know that you promise a better life, a better way of being together. Help us to find hope in the midst of such sadness and hear your call to action. Amen.

A PRAYER FOR A GRIEVING FAMILY AND SUPPORT NETWORK

O Holy One... I imagine that life feels very chaotic right now for your beloved children ____ and _____. I pray that just as you were able to bring order to the chaos at the beginning of time, and your son was able to calm the chaos of the stormy sea of Galilee, that you can calm the chaos that ____ and _____ are feeling right now. Bring them peace.

Jesus, you know what it means to have experienced loss. When your friend Lazarus died, you too shed tears. May their tears too flow without abandon when they need them to. God, you are always present with us. I give thanks knowing that you cry with them now. They are not alone.

God the range of emotions is great - sadness, anger, comfort, loneliness, thankfulness, bitterness, pain, over-flowing love... and you are big enough to handle it all! Throughout the ages your people have had the confidence in your love to lift up each emotion as it crosses our hearts. Thanks be to you that today is no different. We know that you are a faithful and loving God, you promise to be there for us and we know that you are here because you always have been with us. To you we can shout out, sing, curse, weep, praise... and you love us still.

Author of Life, you brought healing in the world through the raw, beautiful, and mysterious incarnation of your son, Jesus. He touched people - spitting into dirt and rubbing mud into the eyes of a blind man to give him sight, blessing and breaking bread with people called sinners, reaching out to lepers. He laid hands upon those who needed healing and brought them wholeness, connection, encouragement, and comfort. May your faithful community gather around ____ and _____ to help touch and heal them. May your church serve as your hands and feet helping to carry ____ and _____ though the difficult days. We wait in hope for the day when your restoration takes place.

God, you heal the broken-hearted and bind up our wounds. You reckon the number of stars, giving each one its name. God, you are great and full of power, your wisdom is beyond comprehension. Give _____, _____, and their friends and family the courage and hope as they walk down a path different than the one they thought they set out on. When darkness surrounds, may your light make their path a bit brighter.

We give thanks for the blessings you have bestowed on ____ and _____ in their life together, Holy One, and ask that you give them peace and strength as they face new challenges. May they cry as much as they need to without being quieted. May they not feel guilty when they feel the urge to laugh. May they always feel the support and encouragement of loved ones. May they have patience for themselves and for one another as they grieve. May they never lose sight of your love, mercy, grace, care, and comfort. May they always feel hope and love.

All this we ask in your son's precious and holy name. Amen.



COPING WITH LOSS

Survivors, the ones left in the wake of death, often experience a wide range of grief reactions, including some or all of the following:

- Shock is a common immediate reaction. You may feel numb or disoriented, and may have trouble concentrating.
- Symptoms of depression, including disturbed sleep, loss of appetite, intense sadness, and lack of energy.
- Anger towards the deceased, another family member, a therapist, or yourself.
- Relief, particularly if there was a suicide following a long and difficult mental illness.
- Guilt, including thinking, "If only I had...."
- These feelings usually diminish over time, as you develop your ability to cope and begin to heal.

WHAT DO I DO NOW?

- You may find that it helps to reach out to family and friends. Because some people may not know what to say, you may need to take the initiative to talk about the suicide, share your feelings, and ask for their help.
- Even though it may seem difficult, maintaining contact with other people is especially important during the stress-filled months after a loved one's death.
- Keep in mind that each person grieves in his or her own way. Some people visit the cemetery weekly; others find it too painful to go at all.
- Each person also grieves at his or her own pace; there is no set rhythm or timeline for healing.
- Anniversaries, birthdays, and holidays may be especially difficult, so you might want to think about whether to continue old traditions or create some new ones. You may also experience unexpected waves of sadness; these are a normal part of the grieving process.
- Children experience many of the feelings of adult grief, and are particularly vulnerable to feeling abandoned and guilty. Reassure them that the death was not their fault. Listen to their questions, and try to offer honest, straightforward, age-appropriate answers.
- Some survivors find comfort in community, religious, or spiritual activities, including talking to a trusted member of the clergy.
- Be kind to yourself. When you feel ready, begin to go on with your life. Eventually starting to enjoy life again is not a betrayal of your loved one, but rather a sign that you've begun to heal.

“One learns to live with the loss, the tragedy, the waste, and the gaping hole in the fabric of one’s life. There is no closure, nor would I want one. I want to remember him all my life, vividly: his laughter, the smell of his sneakers under his bed, his moments of joy, his humility, and his integrity.”

Excerpted from *Surviving Suicide Loss: A Resource and Healing Guide*.

PRACTICAL COPING STRATEGIES

Encourage survivors to think about specific things they can do when intense emotions such as worry or sadness begin to well up, including:

- seeing a therapist
- thinking about how they've coped with difficulties in the past and reminding themselves that they can use those same coping skills now
- engaging in favorite activities or hobbies such as music, talking with a friend, reading, or going to a movie
- simple relaxation and distraction skills, such as taking three deep slow breaths, counting to 10, or picturing themselves in a favorite calm and relaxing place
- exercising
- journaling
- writing a list of people they can turn to for support
- writing a list of things they're looking forward to
- focusing on individual goals, such as returning to a class or church, or spending time with mutual friends



BEING PRESENT WITH THOSE WHO GRIEVE

Suggestions for writing a note:

- Keep it brief and simple
- Communicate your support and care
- Share memories of the bereaved, affirm the grieving process and/or communicate appreciation for their life
- Write what you are feeling in your heart.

EXAMPLES:

Dear _____,

I was so sad to hear about your loss of _____. I can't imagine your pain right now. I hope that with time memories of warmth and joy may rise to the forefront of your mind. Please know that my heart and prayers are with you during this emotional time. If you need any help cooking, answering the phone, carting around the kids, or anything else, please don't hesitate to call. I'll call you in a couple weeks when things have calmed down.

With love,

Dear _____,

I miss _____ so much already. Please know that I am praying for and thinking of you. I'll be by next week with a casserole for the refrigerator, and some company for you if you need it.

With a heavy heart,

Dear _____,

I'm still surprised and saddened by the news of _____'s death. I pray that you feel the presence and love of God and your community.

In Christ,

Reminders about being with those who grieve:

- Be a good listener.
- Affirm the feelings of the bereaved—if they are sad, angry, or happy
- Silence is okay.
- Let them guide you in their needs—they might want to tell a story, hear a joke, or have someone sit with them while they cry
- Offer practical help.

- It doesn't all depend on you—the blessing of living in community is that different people can offer care in different ways.
- Be patient!—everyone goes through their own process in their own time.
- Remember that holidays are hard, as is the first anniversary of the death.
- Keeping checking in with them in the months ahead.

NOTES



**THIS IS A FREE GIFT,
BUT WE NEED YOUR HELP TO CONTINUE THIS WORK.**

Please donate to



*Presbyterian
Peace
Fellowship*

<http://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/two/giving>
and designate the funds to our work with Gun Violence Prevention.

If you would like to get more involved with PPF's work with Gun Violence Prevention, please contact us at gvp@presbypeacefellowship.org.

This curriculum was written and edited by Rev. Margaret Leonard and Sara Dorrien.
Cover photo by Katie Rains.

"A Prayer for a Grieving Family and Support Network" written by Rev. Margaret Leonard for dear friends during a difficult time (used with permission).