

# Children and Grief following Suicide

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# Basic Assumptions about Grief

- Grief is Normal
- Grief is a **WHOLE** body experience
- Grief is cumulative and “unfolds” over the lifespan of an individual.
- Grieving is **NOT** about forgetting - rather about **RE**-membering.

✓ Trauma and Grief are different.  
Trauma overrides Grief.

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# What complicates the normal grief process for children?

- Lack of information or inaccurate information
- Developmentally inappropriate language -

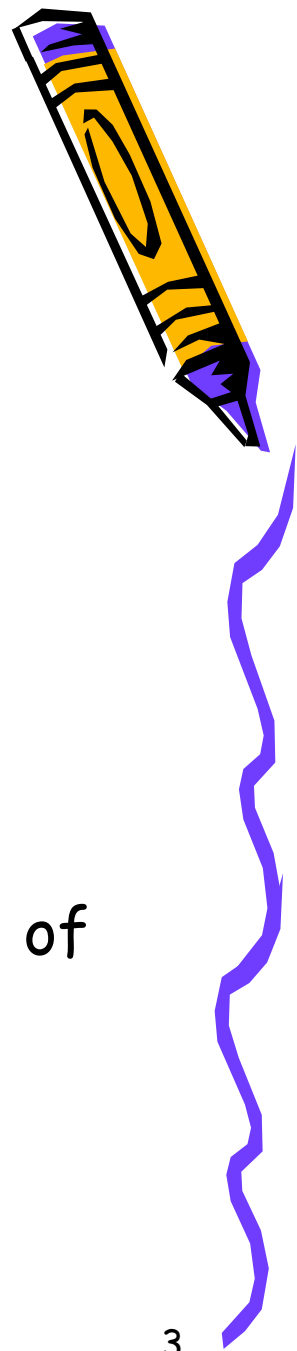
Examples:

Daddy died from sadness or sad disease

Mommy was just very sick and had no other choices

Brother was terribly confused because of all of his problems.

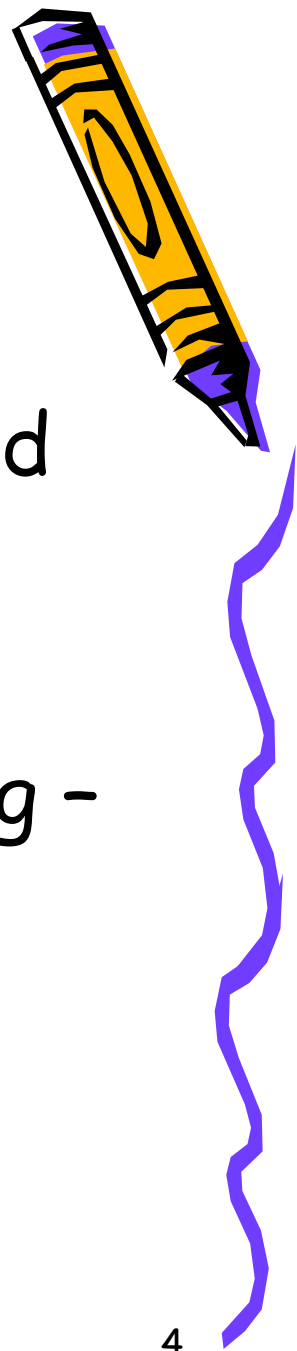
"gone to sleep with God" - "we lost him" etc.



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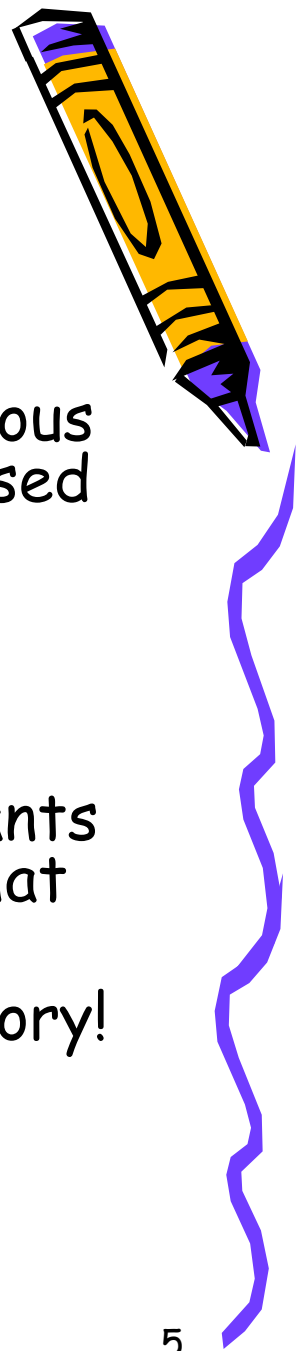
# What complicates grief?

- Fear of loss of adult protection and guidance
- Lack of healthy models for grieving - no permission to grieve



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# Talking about "suicide" with children



- Find out what your child already knows - previous information or words may have him/her confused or frightened.
- Use developmentally appropriate language --- "Daddy made his body stop working." "Daddy made himself dead." "Daddy Killed himself."
- Give only as much information as your child wants and asks you to give. Children usually know what they can manage.
- It's never too late to correct an inaccurate story! The sooner the better !!



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# The difficult TRUTH is critical because:

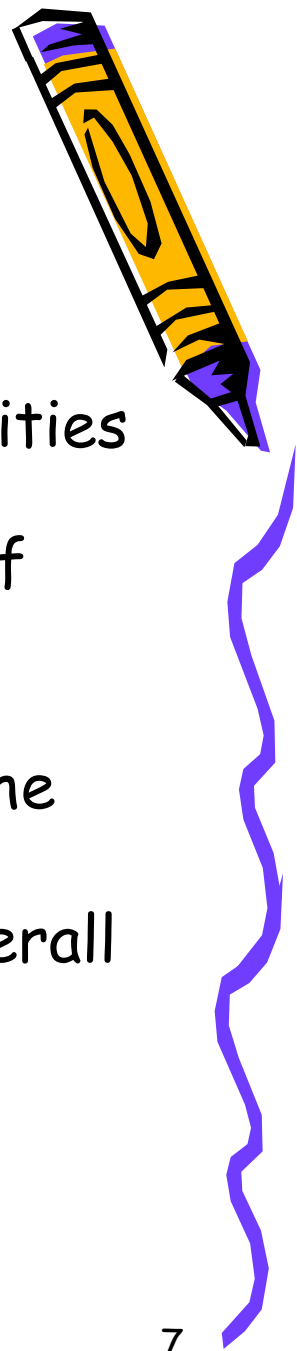


- Children pick up on discomfort and tension and will know that something is happening that they don't know about.
- Because children have such wonderful imaginations they **WILL** fill in gaps in information with their own stories
- Children usually overhear, or are told gory or half-truth stories. When this happens the responsible parent loses control over telling the child in the best way possible. Pre-empt this!



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# Because ....

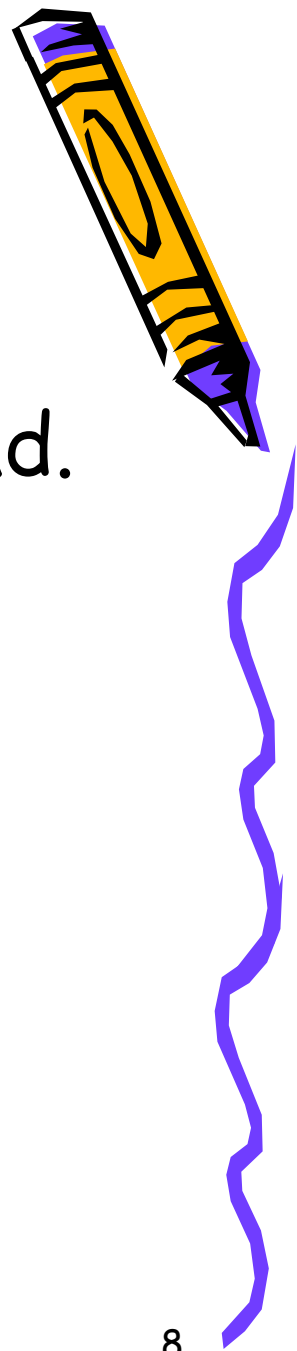


- The process of grief involves lots of opportunities to process the story of how the person died. Without the right information the child's grief process is complicated greatly.
- Information kept from a child will impact the child's ability to trust parents and others in the world.
- Family secrets of any kind compromise the overall health of the families interactions



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# 3 Tasks of Grieving for Children

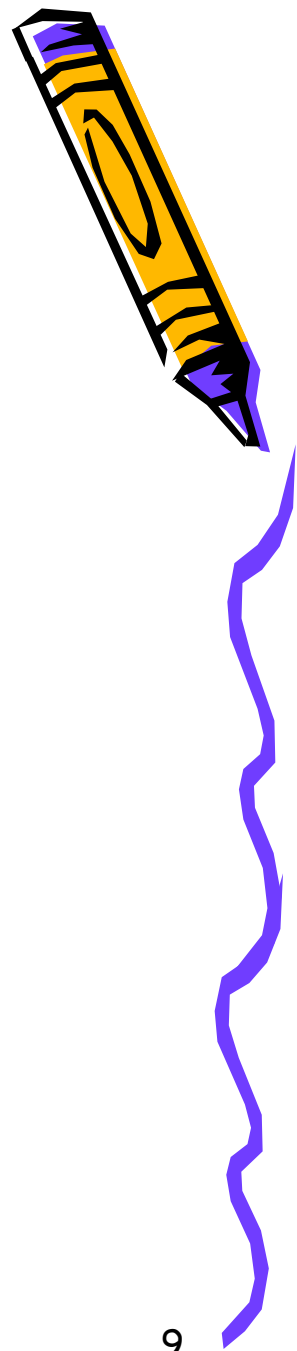


- Understand that the person is dead.
- Feel the feelings about the person dying.
- Go on living and loving after the person has died.






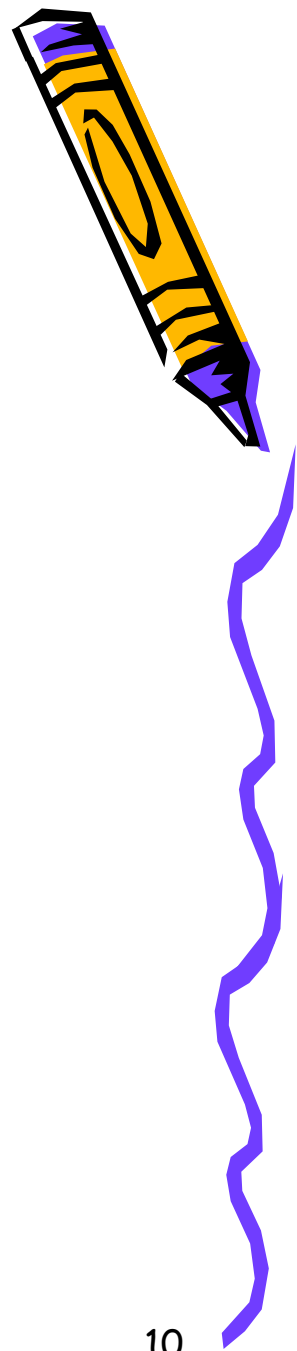
# Characteristics of Children's Grief



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1. Children feel different and isolated when they are grieving.



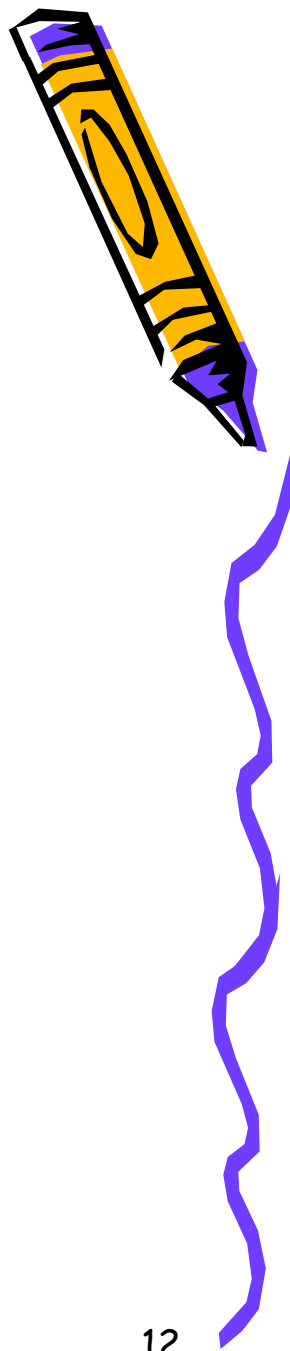
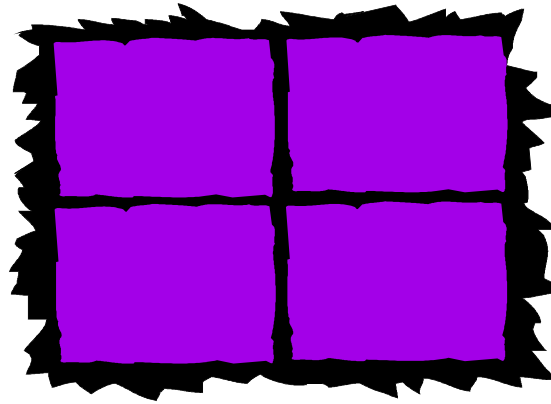
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## 2. Grief is a physical experience for children.



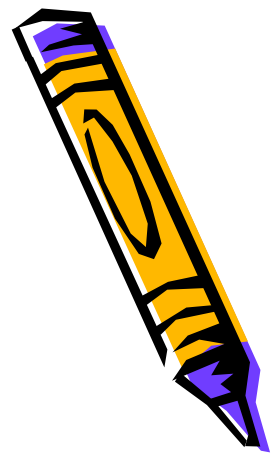
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### 3. Children grieve in "windows" of time.



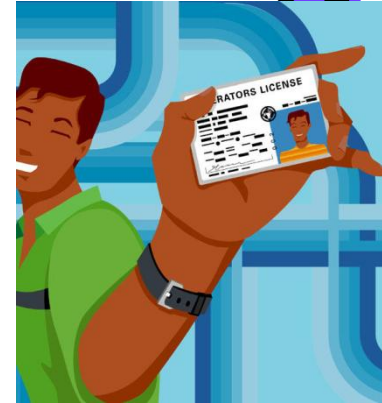
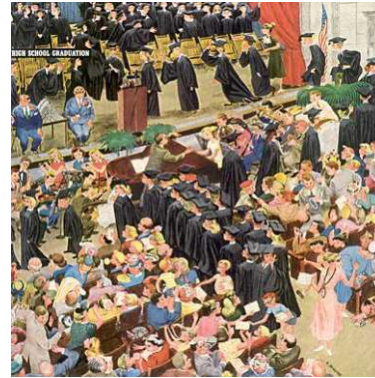
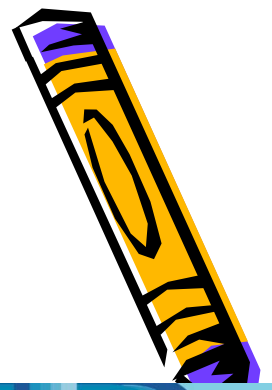
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# 4. Children understand death and grief according to their particular developmental phase.



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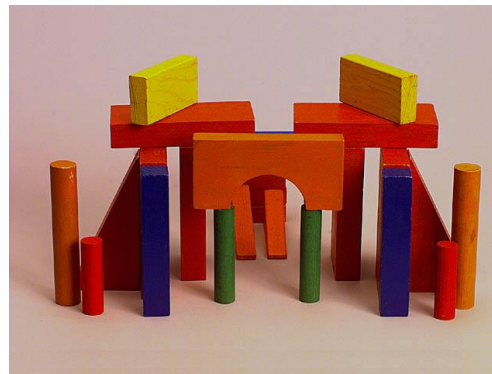
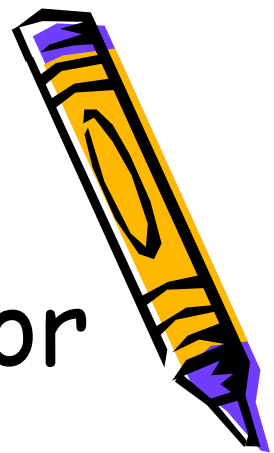
# 5. Children revisit losses over their lifespan.



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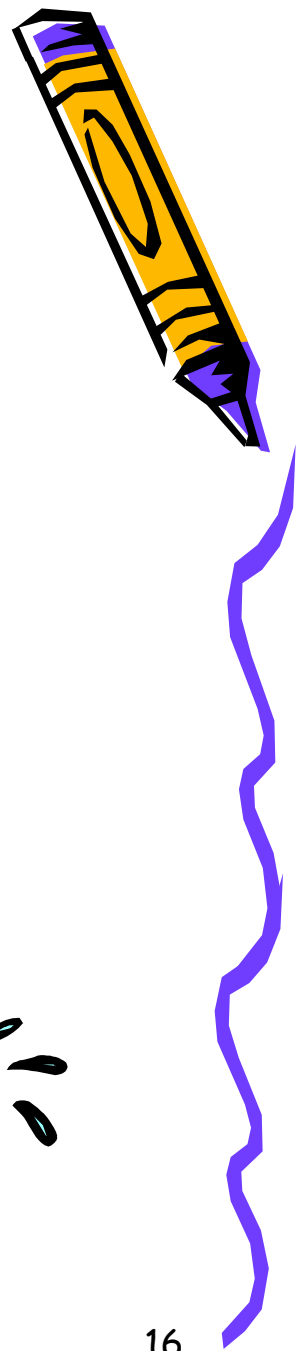


# 6. Grief interrupts or stalls the age- appropriate developmental tasks.



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7. Children secretly blame themselves. This is especially important when the death has happened by suicide.



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8. Children often experience their world as out of control. This too is amplified when a loved one dies by suicide.



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# 9. Children grieve as a part of a family system.



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# Therapeutic Interventions



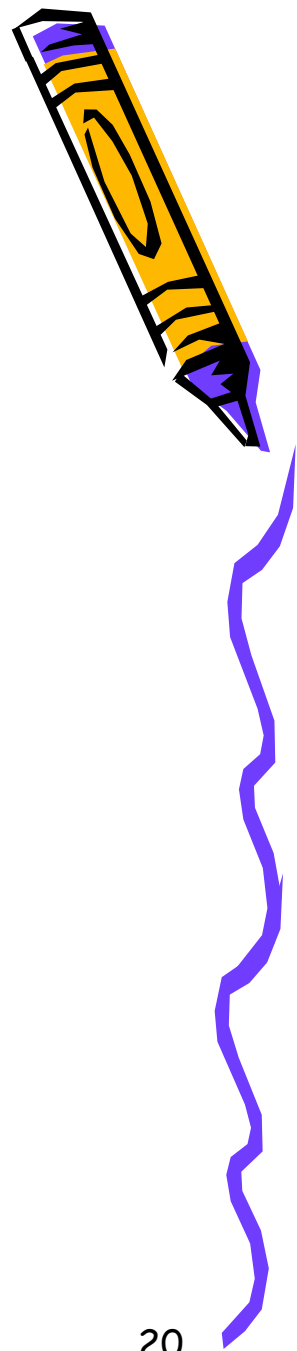
- Group Experience is important if possible
- Themes to explore in therapy:
  - Telling the story
  - Remembering
  - Changes
  - Feelings in Grief - especially fear, guilt, and anger
  - Self-Esteem/Identity
  - Getting What I Need
  - Ongoing Connection
  - Legacies of the Loss
  - Thinking About the Future
  - Good-byes



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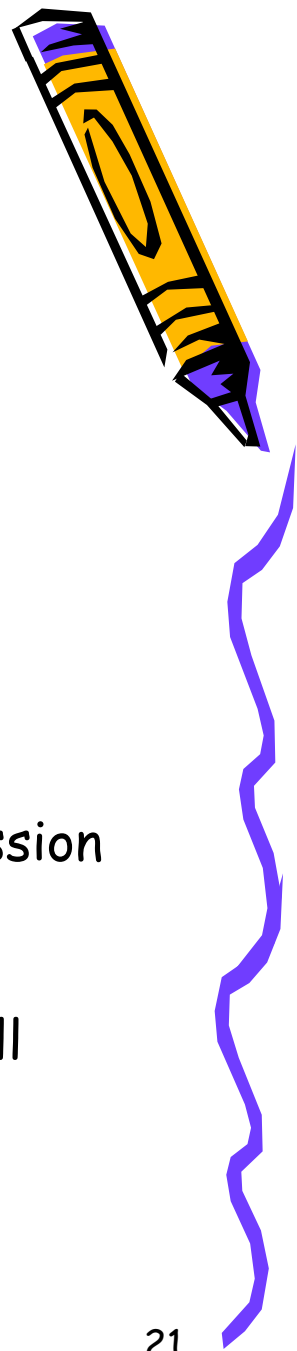
# In Children's Grief Therapy - Remember -

- Consistent Structure - Container
- Validation of feelings - exploration with a "safety net"
- Full exploration of feelings of guilt and responsibility



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# Grief Therapy Reminders:



- Use movement and tactile activities
- Goodbyes are especially important
- Ritualize the process
- Remember that grief is a unique experience and expression for every child --- respect the individual's time table
- Remind the child that this is a lifelong process --- it will come up for them again.



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