

Theme 6: Turning Challenges into Opportunities

Sub-theme 6: Dealing with LOSS

Children's reactions towards loss depend on their developmental level, their cultural background, the reaction to the loss of the adults around them, and on the type of loss they have experienced. In addition to these factors, children also deal with loss in their own unique ways. Children in their preschool years may link magical thinking with the causes of death. For instance, children may think they can cause someone's death just by thinking about it or that death can be reversed. School age children, on the other hand, start to comprehend the idea that death is final. At this age, death can be perceived as something that happens to others but not to oneself or one's family. In children who are older, the finality of death starts to be understood. During times of loss, children should be given permission to grieve and shown that it is normal to experience different feelings when experiencing a loss. It is also best that caregivers are direct and honest about what happened, and answer the child's questions to help understanding. Children should be encouraged to try out creative means to express their emotions and when possible should keep to their usual daily routines. Lastly, when children are experiencing some sort of loss, the adults that take care of them should reassure them that they will be there for them, and that support is always available (NASP, 2003). The different stages that children go through when experiencing loss and the best ways that adults and peers can help them have been kept in mind in the design of these activities.

Learning Goals

By the end of this unit, children will be able to:

Early Years

- Mention people they can go to when upset
- Describe who can help them if they lose a pet or a favourite toy
- Describe and illustrate the persons in their support system

Early Primary

- Identify and discuss what children can go through when they experience loss
- Discuss and illustrate how they felt when they experienced loss
- Identify and illustrate a special memory that was shared

Late Primary

- Discuss their experience of loss and how they dealt with it
- Describe ways in which children deal with loss
- Write a story about loss describing what made it difficult and what helped the character deal with the loss

Tips for Teachers

1. Give children the opportunity to tell their story and be a good listener. When you get to know of a child in your class who has just lost someone they love, meet with the children, inform them about what's going on (if the parents and child wish so) and together discuss some things they can do to help. Be careful to allow adequate time for each child to grieve in the manner that works for that child.

2. You may ask the children to make a collage to celebrate the memory of that person, or anything special that they may have lost.

3. As a way of sharing and reminiscing on special memories, ask the children to get something that reminds them of a special time. It could be a photo, an object, an image etc. The children can share their special memories during circle time.

Activity 1: The people that love me

Learning Goal

Children will be able to mention the people they can go to when upset.

Learning Outcome. By the end of this study unit, I will be able to:

Know which persons I can go to when I am upset.

Age Group

Early Years

Level

Basic

Materials needed

Hand or finger puppets.

Activity Steps

1. Start the lesson with a Mindfulness activity.
2. Read this story to the children using hand or finger puppets:

Zelda the hedgehog and Sherlock the squirrel had a special friend- Freddie. Freddie was a frog who lived in the lake of the forest. Every afternoon Zelda and Sherlock would meet Freddie near the biggest tree by the lake. Zelda, Sherlock and Freddie had a lot of fun together. They swam, splashed and jumped in the lake. They held competitions of who would swim the fastest and Freddie would always win. One day Freddie told Zelda and Sherlock that his family had to go live in another lake, because there wasn't any food left for them in this lake. That meant he had to go live in another forest far far away. Zelda and Sherlock could not see Freddie again. They would not be able to swim with him in the lake anymore and have competitions of who would swim the fastest. Zelda was shocked by the news and couldn't believe that she would not see Freddie again. Sherlock was very very sad that he would not be seeing his best friend anymore. Zelda and Sherlock felt they would never be the same without ever seeing Freddie again. In this hard time, Zelda and Sherlock's families helped them by listening to them, and giving them a big hug when they needed it. That evening, Zelda and Sherlock visited Freddie's family. Together, they remembered all the funny and fun things Zelda, Sherlock and Freddie used to do together. Zelda and Sherlock also gave Freddie a special gift that they had made for him- a beautiful leaf that Freddie could use to float on in the new lake. These stories and gifts helped Zelda, Sherlock and Freddie realize

that each one of them would always have a special place in their hearts. After Freddie had moved to the forest far far away, Zelda and Sherlock met by the biggest tree near the lake every afternoon and swam in the lake. Zelda and Sherlock talked about Freddie often and laughed at the memories they had with him. Zelda and Sherlock were happier now as they knew that Freddie would always be in their hearts forever.

3. First, help the children to process the story by asking them:

- Why were Zelda and Sherlock very upset?
- Who helped Zelda and Sherlock during this hard time?
- Did things get better after a while?

4. Then relate the story to the children's own experiences:

- Have you ever gone through a hard time like Zelda and Sherlock did?
- Have you ever lost something or someone that you really loved, like a pet?
- When children lose something or someone they really love, how might they feel?

5. Tell the children that when children lose something or someone they really love, it's important that grown-ups are there for them and take care of them. On the board draw an outline of your hand, and on top of every finger write down all the persons you would go to for help if you lost someone or something you love. Alternatively, you could use Zelda or Sherlock's situation. This could be done in the form of a web or a tree as well.

6. Next ask the children:

- If you feel upset, who are the persons you can go to for help?

Take Home Activity

At home children may be asked to think about some activities that they would like to do with the persons they mentioned. The parent may choose an activity that the child wishes to do with the family member and works towards doing that activity with the child. This activity may serve as an important reminder that there are persons that can support them in their lives.

Activity 2: Who can help me?

Learning Goal

Children will be able to describe and draw a picture of who can help them if they lose a pet or a favourite toy.

Learning Outcome. By the end of this unit, I will be able to:

Describe and draw a picture of who can help me if I lose a pet or a favourite toy.

Age Group

Early Years

Level

Intermediate

Materials needed

Hand or finger puppets, A4 charts or papers, crayons or markers.

Activity Steps

1. Start the lesson with a Mindfulness activity.
2. Read the story in Activity 1 to the children using hand or finger puppets.
3. First, help the children to process the story by asking them:
 - Why were Zelda and Sherlock very upset?
 - Who helped Zelda and Sherlock during this hard time?
 - What did their families and friends do to help them?
 - Did things get better after a while?
4. Then relate the story to the children's own experiences:
 - Have you ever gone through a hard time like Zelda and Sherlock did?
 - Have you ever lost something or someone that you really loved, like a pet?
 - When children lose something or someone they really love, how might they feel?
5. Tell the children that when children lose something or someone they really love, it's important that grown-ups are there for them and take care of them. On the board draw an

outline of your hand, and on top of every finger write down all the persons you would go to for help if you lost someone or something you love. Alternatively, you could use Zelda or Sherlock's situation. This could be done in the form of a web or a tree as well.

6. Next ask the children:

- Who are the persons that can help you if you lose something that you love like a pet or a favourite toy?
- How do these persons show you they love you and support you during hard times? (If children find this difficult, give examples. You may say that adults may show children love and support by taking care of them, preparing food for them, and listening when they have a problem. Children might show they care by playing a game with them etc.)

7. Ask the children to draw a picture of a person that can help them if they lose a pet or a favourite toy.

Take Home Activity

The parents can ask the children: 'what would the person in the drawing do to show you they love and support you?' Children can try to think of ways of how persons show their support when someone is going through a hard time. Children may also think of whom and what they would need during a hard time. The children may then draw (a) person/s in the collage doing something to show their love and support for them. For example, a child may draw their best friend playing with them, or including them in an activity, or a family member taking them to the playground.

Activity 3: My support system

Learning Goal

Children will be able to describe and illustrate the persons in their support system.

Learning Outcome. By the end of this unit, I will be able to:

Know the people I can go to for support if I experience loss.

Age Group

Early Years

Level

Advanced

Materials needed

Hand or finger puppets, A3 coloured charts or papers, photos of loved ones, magazine cut-outs, paints, crayons or markers, glue, decorations.

Activity Steps

1. Begin by asking parents to discuss the support system with their children and to send any photos of loved ones to school.
2. Start the lesson with a Mindfulness activity.
3. Read the story in Activity 1 to the children using hand or finger puppets.
4. First, help the children to process the story by asking them:
 - Why were Zelda and Sherlock very upset?
 - Who helped Zelda and Sherlock during this hard time?
 - What did their families and friends do to help them?
 - Did things get better after a while?
5. Then relate the story to the children's own experiences:
 - Have you ever gone through a hard time like Zelda and Sherlock did?
 - When children lose something or someone they really love, like a pet, how might they feel?
 - When children lose something or someone they really love, it's important that grown-ups are there for them and take care of them. Who are the persons that love you and take care of you?
 - How do these persons show you they love you and support you during hard times? (If children find this difficult, give examples. You may say that adults may show children love and support by taking care of them, preparing food for them, and listening when they have a problem. Children might show they care by playing a game with them etc.)
6. Split the children in groups and help them to make a collage of their support system. The collage can be split into different sections: persons in the child's family, persons in the child's school, and friends, or any other way the children would prefer.

8. The children may wish to talk about their collage during circle time, as a way of closing the activity. Some questions to guide the circle time may include:

- Who are the persons that love and support you?
- How do they show you that they love and support you?
- What can we do to show love and support to another person?

Take Home Activity

Make a list with the children of the things they can do to show love and support for a friend or a family member who has just lost someone or something very special.

Activity 4: What can happen after loss?

Learning Goal

Children will be able to identify and discuss what children can go through when they experience loss.

Learning Outcome. By the end of this unit, I will be able to:

Identify what children can go through when they experience loss.

Age Group

Early Primary

Level

Basic

Materials needed

Hand or finger puppets, 'Feeling face' handout, pictures of emotions.

Activity Steps

1. Start the lesson with a Mindfulness activity.
2. Read the following story to the children using hand or finger puppets.

Zelda the hedgehog lived in a big nest in one of the bushes of the forest. Zelda lived with her daddy, mummy and Aunt Hazel. Zelda was very lucky for having Aunt Hazel as part of her family. Aunt Hazel used to give Zelda lots of good advice when she had problems with her friends. One day Zelda went to play with Sherlock and the rest of their friends like she used to do every day. But while she got there she got some bad news. Aunt Hazel was trying to get food from a tree and had fallen down, gotten badly hurt and lost a lot of her spikes. Zelda knew that when hedgehogs lost a lot of their spikes, that meant they were very hurt. Zelda was very worried. They went to visit Aunt Hazel where Dr Mole was taking care of her but it was too late. Mummy and daddy were very sad but had plucked up the courage to explain to Zelda what had happened: Aunt Hazel had gotten badly hurt and died. Although a lot of animals can get hurt, most end up getting better to live a long life. Zelda felt so angry that this had happened. At first she thought that this was mummy and daddy's fault for not protecting Aunt Hazel. Then she felt very sad and cried for a long time. She also felt hurt and missed her aunty terribly. During this difficult time, Zelda's family listened to her and were always there to hug and cuddle her when she needed it. Her friends helped her by playing with her and by understanding if she didn't feel like talking. After some months Zelda felt brave enough to make a special memory box with her mummy and daddy, of all the special things that reminded her of Aunt Hazel. Remembering the special memories she had with her aunty helped Zelda feel better. Although she still missed Aunt Hazel, she felt glad that Aunt Hazel would always have a special place in her heart.

3. First, help the children to process the story by asking them:

- What feelings did Zelda go through?
- What did her family and friends do to help her?
- Did things get better after a while?

4. Then relate the story to the children's own experiences:

- Have you ever gone through a hard time like Zelda did?
- When children lose something or someone they really love how might they feel?
- When children lose something or someone they really love, it's important that grown-ups are there for them and take care of them. Who are the persons that love you and take care of you?
- What else can we do to deal with the different feelings we may go through?

5. Place these pictures of how loss can affect children on a table. Have a child choose a picture, and then discuss it together as a group. Use the following questions to help you:

- What do you think is happening in the picture? (E.g. the boy is crying and is hanging on to his mummy)
- What do you think the boy or girl in the picture is feeling? (E.g. sad)
- Have you ever felt this way? When? What happened?
- How would we know that we are feeling this way? (E.g. we might cry, we might feel like staying alone in our rooms, we might not feel like playing)
- What can we do to deal with this feeling? (E.g. we can tell an adult, we can try to think of happy memories)
- What can we do to help someone if they are feeling this way? (E.g. we try to be their friend, ask them to play with us...)



Take Home Activity

Children can interview their parents on their own experience of loss. They can ask them about what they felt, how they knew they were feeling this way, how they dealt with the loss and whether things got better after a while. This can help the children to start understanding and empathizing with another person's loss.

Activity 5: What I felt

Learning Goal

Children will be able discuss and illustrate how they felt when they experienced loss.

Learning Outcome. By the end of this unit, I will be able to:

Discuss and illustrate how I felt when I experienced loss.

Age Group

Early Primary

Level

Intermediate

Materials needed

Hand or finger puppets, 'Feeling face' handout.

Activity Steps

1. Start the lesson with a Mindfulness activity.
2. Read the story in Activity 4 to the children using hand or finger puppets:
3. First, help the children to process the story by asking them:
 - What feelings did Zelda go through?
 - What did her family and friends do to help her?
 - What did Zelda do to remember Aunt Hazel?
 - Did things get better after a while?
4. Then relate the story to the children's own experiences:
 - When children lose something or someone they really love, how might they feel?
 - When children lose something or someone they really love, it's important that grown-ups are there for them and take care of them. Who are the persons that love you and take care of you?

- What else can we do to deal with the different feelings we may go through?

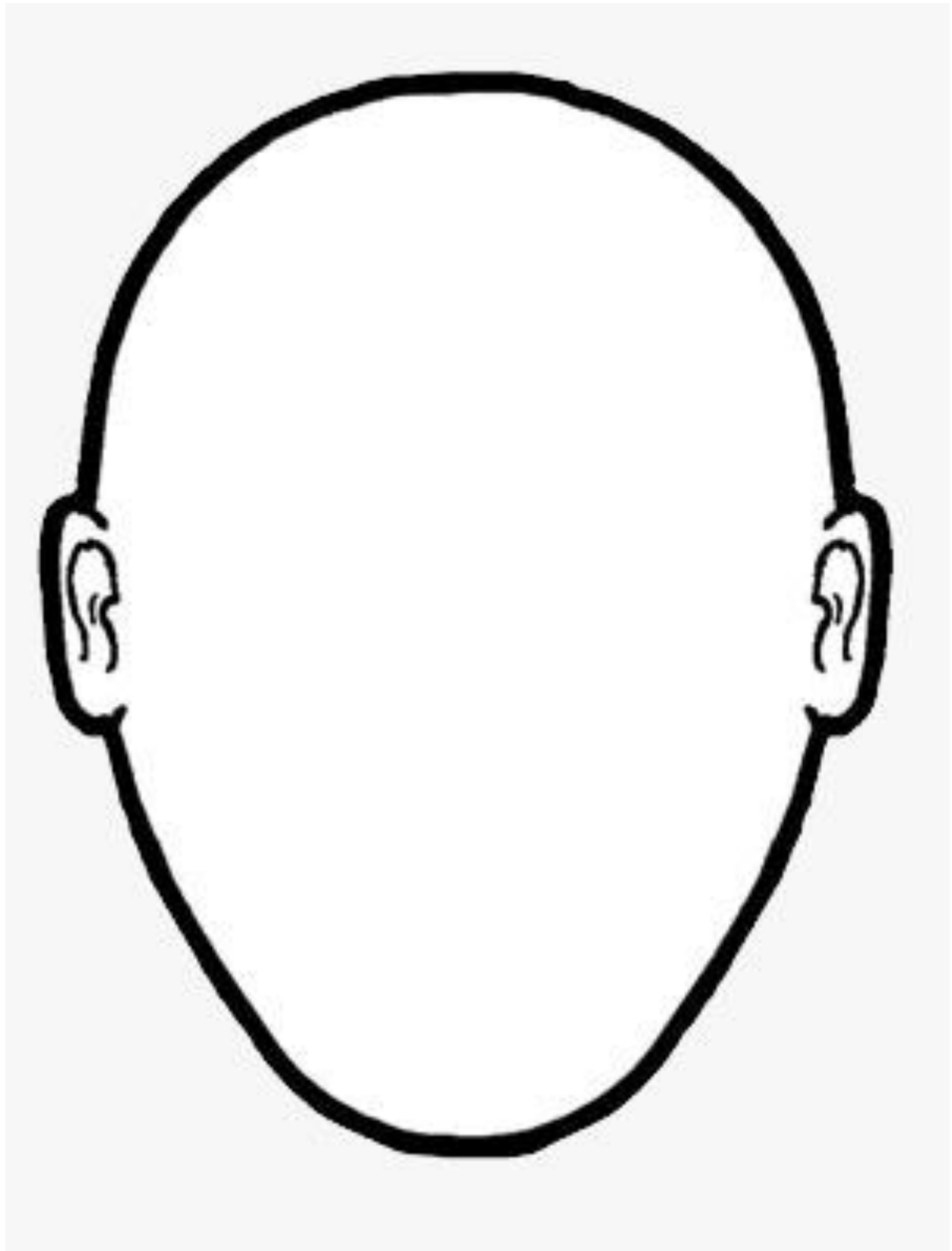
5. Ask the children:

- Have you ever lost something or someone that you really loved, like a pet or a special friendship?
- How did you feel?
- What is one of your favourite memories with the thing, animal or person that you have lost?

6. The children can draw how they felt on the 'Feeling face' handout.

Take Home Activity

Ask the children to get a paper and draw a vertical line in the middle. In the first half, ask them to draw how they felt when they experienced the loss. In the second half, they can draw a picture of themselves trying to deal with that feeling.



Activity 6: A special memory

Learning Goal

Children will be able to identify and illustrate a special memory that was shared.

Learning Outcome. By the end of this unit, I will be able to:

Draw pictures or make a painting of a special memory that was shared.

Age Group

Early Primary

Level

Advanced

Materials needed

Hand or finger puppets, A3 blank paper, paints.

Activity Steps

1. Start the lesson with a Mindfulness activity.
2. Read the story in Activity 4 to the children using hand or finger puppets.
3. First, help the children to process the story by asking them:
 - What feelings did Zelda go through?
 - What did her family and friends do to help her?
 - What did Zelda do to remember Aunt Hazel?
 - How did Zelda feel after making the memory box?
4. Then relate the story to the children's own experiences:
 - Have you ever gone through a hard time like Zelda did?
 - When children lose something or someone they really love, how might they feel?
 - When children lose something or someone they really love, it's important that grown-ups are there for them and take care of them. Who are the persons that love you and take care of you?
 - What else can we do to deal with the different feelings we may go through?

5. Ask the children to draw or paint a special memory they shared with someone they loved but lost. Fortunately, only a few children might have gone through a loss and so children can choose to portray another memory that they miss. The children may work alone, in pairs or in groups.

6. At the end, children can share their special memories during circle time. Together they can celebrate these special memories.

Take Home Activity

Together with other family members, children can make a collage of a loss that the family has experienced, as a way of remembering the person or the special time that was lost.

Activity 7: My experience of loss

Learning Goal

Children will be able to discuss their experience of loss and how they dealt with it.

Learning Outcome. By the end of this unit, I will be able to:

Discuss my experience of loss and how I dealt with it.

Age Group

Late Primary

Level

Basic

Materials needed

None

Activity Steps

1. Before the day of the activity, ask the children to think about something or someone they have lost and that they miss. If both children and parents are comfortable with the idea, ask them to get some photos to make a collage of the person or special thing they have lost.
2. Start the lesson with a Mindfulness activity.
3. Read 'Thor', a story about loss, to the children:

Thor

Once upon a time in a town not far away there lived a big furry dog. This dog's life was a very happy one. He lived with a family that loved dogs; he always had lots of food to eat and big juicy bones on special occasions. The family named their dog Thor, because they wanted him to scare away burglars and be fierce. But Thor was a gentle and loving dog who spent most of his time running in his yard, where he was happy to chase squirrels or sleep in the shade. The people next door also had a dog that they had named Critter. Critter had been Thor's friend for a long, long time. Each morning Thor looked forward to going to the fence and running up and down its length with Critter on the other side. They barked at each other, panting and whined together, and even sometimes were able to play in each other's yards. Critter was so much a part of Thor's life that it seemed natural that he would always be there at the fence waiting to greet him.

One morning when Thor ran to the fence as he usually did, something was different: Critter did not appear. Thor spent all day waiting and watching by the fence with a sadder and sadder look on his face. Still there was no Critter. Now Thor's owners understood that Critter had died, but they did not know how to make Thor understand what had happened. Finally they led Thor to the next yard to view Critter before he was buried. Thor sniffed and then began to whine; he knew then that Critter was gone.

But knowing didn't stop his pain. Thor got a pain in his heart that grew and grew. He refused to eat and stopped chasing squirrels. Every time he glanced at the fence Thor would be reminded that Critter was gone, and a big tear would roll from his eye. His owners tried to interest him in new toys, in walks or in fancy bones, but Thor would not be comforted.

One day as Thor glanced at the fence next door, feeling again his sorrow, a young puppy ran across the yard. Thor was horrified. How dare these people think that Critter could be replaced?? Determined that he would not pay any attention to the newcomer, he curled up in the shade of an old tree and fell into a deep and troubled sleep.

As Thor slept, Critter came in a special dream to talk to his heart.

"You are hurting because you miss me, and you miss me because you've been looking for me in the wrong place. Don't look for me on the outside; I'm here in your heart."

Listening to the words of his friend, Thor began to feel a fullness in his heart that he had never felt before, a fullness that hurt and felt good at the Sherlocke time. And it was in this dream that Thor made his heart big enough for the two of them. After that, Critter and Thor talked for a long time in the way those who love each other talk.

When he awoke, Thor stretched and yawned, and suddenly noticed the puppy staring longingly at him through the fence. As he looked back at the little dog, Thor noticed a new feeling growing inside him. He sat there, thinking again of his dream, letting its special message be clear to his heart. Then, slowly, Thor walked across the yard. And with a greeting that dogs clearly understand, Thor leaned through the fence and licked the furry head of the puppy.

"I once knew a dog named Critter," Thor told the puppy. And as he said these words, he felt Critter smile.

By Nancy Davis, Ph.D.; Karen Custer, LCSW-C

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In 'Therapeutic Stories to Heal Abused Children; Stories to Help with Death, Loss, or Illness'

4. First, help the children to process the story by asking them:

- **What happened to Thor after Critter had died?**
- **When Critter appeared in Thor's dream what did he say to him?**

5. Then relate the story to the children's own experiences:

- **Have you ever gone through a hard time like Thor did?**
- **When children lose something or someone they really love, how might they feel?**
- **What can we do to deal with the different feelings we may go through?**

6. The children can make a painting or a collage of what they have lost.

7. They can present their photos or collages during circle time. These are some questions to help guide the discussion:

- **Have you ever lost something or someone special? Perhaps a pet, a special friendship, or someone you knew?**
- **How did you feel? What other feelings can children go through when they lose someone or something that they love?**

- What did you do to deal with the loss?
- How can we deal with the feelings that come with experiencing loss?
- If someone that you know is experiencing loss, how can you help them?

Take Home Activity

Children can make a collage with all the changes that have occurred since they experienced loss. They can also speak about some new memories they are making. Although these memories will in no way replace what they have lost, they are a sign of the strength within the child to overcome the loss.

Activity 8: How do children deal with loss?

Learning Goal

Children will be able to describe different ways in which children deal with loss.

Learning Outcome. By the end of this unit, I will be able to:

Describe different ways in which children deal with loss.

Age Group

Late Primary

Level

Intermediate

Materials needed

Writing paper

Activity Steps

1. Start the lesson with a Mindfulness activity.
2. Read the story in Activity 7 to the children.
3. First, help the children to process the story by asking them:
 - What happened to Thor after Critter had died?
 - When Critter appeared in Thor's dream what did he say to him?
 - What did Thor do after the dream?
4. Then relate the story to the children's own experiences:
 - Have you ever gone through a hard time like Thor did?
 - When children lose something or someone they really love, how might they feel?
 - What can we do to deal with the different feelings we may go through?
5. Present this scenario to the children:

Michael, a student at school, has recently lost his uncle. Uncle Joe died suddenly in a car accident. Michael feels very upset as he loved his uncle very much.

6. Split the children in groups. Together they need to make a list of all the ways Michael might be feeling after losing his uncle, and all the ways he can be reacting to the loss. Next they can make a list of what Michael can do to deal with the loss, and what the people around him can do to support him. The children can present their answers in a group discussion. Remind the children that children can have different reactions to loss, and therefore the way that we deal with loss can be different as well.

Take Home Activity

Children can collect all those things that remind them of the special person or special thing they have lost and make a memory box together with their family.

Activity 9: A story about loss

Learning Goal

Children will be able to write a story about loss describing what made it difficult and what helped the character deal with the loss.

Learning Outcome. By the end of this unit, I will be able to:

Write a story about loss describing what made it difficult and what helped the character deal with the loss.

Age Group

Late Primary

Level

Advanced

Materials needed

Writing paper.

Activity Steps

1. Start the lesson with a Mindfulness activity.
2. Read the story in Activity 7 to the children.
3. First, help the children to process the story by asking them:
 - What happened to Thor after Critter had died?
 - When Critter appeared in Thor's dream what did he say to him?
 - What did Thor do after the dream?
4. Then relate the story to the children's own experiences:
 - Have you ever gone through a hard time like Thor did?
 - When children lose something or someone they really love, how might they feel?
 - What can we do to deal with the different feelings we may go through?
 - Who can help us deal with this difficult time?
 - What can people do to help anyone who has experienced loss?

5. Tell the children to write a story about someone who has experienced some sort of loss. In the story, the children should describe what made the experience difficult and what they tried or what happened that helped them deal with the loss. Children may work alone, in pairs or in small groups.

6. The children may then read out the stories they wrote if they wish.

Take Home Activity

Children may produce a story that describes their own loss. They may opt to “tell” their story using pictures, drawings or writing or they may choose to tell it using different modalities.

References

Nancy, D. (1988). *Examples of Therapeutic Stories*. Retrieved from <http://www.therapeutic-stories.com>

NASP. (2003). *Helping children cope with loss, death, and grief: Tips for teachers and parents*. Retrieved from www.nasponline.org