**Art Activity: Emotions Map**

**Time:** 5 - 10 min  
**Suggested Age:** 8 +  

**Materials:**  
- Paper  
- Markers  

**Prep:** Gather markers and paper in front of you  

**Therapeutic Goals:**  
- Develop nonverbal expression  
- Learn to identify emotions  
- Increase self-awareness  

**SEL Skill Development:**  
- Self-Awareness  
- Self-Management  

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**How to explain activity to a kid:**  
Sometimes it’s hard to know how we feel, especially when we feel more than one thing at a time. It helps to take a minute and check in with ourselves. This activity gives us a chance to see how we’re feeling right now and put it on paper. When we know how we’re feeling, then we can figure out what we might do to help those feelings. You can do this activity by yourself or with someone else - all you need are some markers and paper.

**Create:**  
1. Notice 3 emotions that you’re feeling now, and choose a color to describe each emotion  
2. Write the feeling using the color that represents it, making a guide  
3. On your paper, color a space to take up as much as you feel of each emotion. You can use: shapes, blobs, designs, whatever you like. For example, calm can be wavy lines, or anger can be sharp shapes

**Guiding questions to encourage sharing and reflection:**  
- What is it like to see your emotions on paper?  
- Were you surprised by any of the emotions you’re feeling right now?  
- How does it help to know which emotions feel bigger or smaller than others?  
- What would you like to do now that you know how you feel?

**Adaptations of guiding questions for mental health practitioners:**  
- What have you noticed about your feelings since you lost the person you love?  
- How does it feel to have three different emotions inside all at once?  
- Let’s work together to make some plans for when you’re feeling ____ (anxious, angry, lonely, etc.)

**Continued support:**  
Guide the kid through three rounds of deep breathes. While doing so, pause and think about someone or something in your life that brings comfort and joy. Hold onto this image to inspire feelings of peacefulness and to bring ease to the stressful situation.

Whenever a kid is feeling overwhelmed recommend that they can do this activity. Even if they don’t have markers with them they can take a deep breath and think to themselves, “what are three things I’m feeling right now?”

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**WATCH OUR VIDEO ON HOW TO USE ART TO HELP KIDS HEAL**

**DRAW IT OUT CURRICULUM**  
**DRAW IT OUT THERAPEUTIC ACTIVITY BOOK**

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**Generously funded by Safe Crossings Foundation, safecrossingsfoundation.org**
Art Activity: Storytelling “That Day”

**Time:** 10 - 15 min  
**Suggested Age:** 8+

**Materials:**  
- Paper  
- Markers  
- Colored pencils

**Prep:** Gather markers and paper in front of you

**Therapeutic Goals:**  
- Release of helplessness  
- Document important moments  
- Acknowledge loss  
- Encourage storytelling

**SEL Skill Development:**  
- Self-Awareness  
- Self-Management  
- Social Awareness

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**How to explain activity to a kid:**

Sometimes things change slowly, over time. Sometimes everything changes, all at once. Some people want to forget a day that changed everything. Other people think about it in small bits and pieces, because putting it all together may feel too hard. Others can’t stop thinking about it. We all have different ways of responding to big changes in our lives.

It can be helpful to tell the story of a day that made things different. Days are like stories; they have beginnings, middles, and ends. We have lots of feelings throughout a single day, especially when something has changed in a big way. When we get our thoughts and feelings on paper, or share them with others, we can feel less confused and alone.

**Create:**

1. Divide the paper up into 4 boxes like a comic strip
2. Think of a day that was hard or one where where a big change was felt
3. Use the boxes to write the story of that day. Think of the beginning, middle, and end
4. Or, use the boxes to draw feelings felt on the day that was hard. If kids are having a hard time getting started, think about questions like this: What was the weather like that day? What colors do you remember seeing? Were you alone or with other people?

**Adaptation:**

Instead of writing a story, kids can tell it. Talk with someone who is trusted about the day that things changed.

**Guiding questions to encourage sharing and reflection:**

- How does your body feel now that you’ve had a chance to let it out?
- Are there people in your life who tell this story differently than you? How is it different?
- How have your feelings changed since that day? How have they stayed the same?
- How do you continue to comfort yourself and others?

**Adaptations of guiding questions for mental health practitioners:**

- Do you have questions about the day that changed your life? Who could you ask? What can you do if that person doesn’t want to talk about it?
- What happened that day might not have been the only loss you’ve had. Are there other losses you’re dealing with?
- How did you hear about the event/accident/death? Was there a different way you wish you had heard about it?
- Would you like to tell me about the person you miss?

**Continued support:**

In a blank notebook, guide kids to use 10 minutes to write down as many memories as they can think of about the person they miss. Suggest inviting others to join, if helpful, to add stories to the pages whenever they want to.

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**WATCH OUR VIDEO ON HOW TO USE ART TO HELP KIDS HEAL**

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Game: Make Your Emotions Move

**Time:** 5 - 10 min  
**Suggested Age:** 2 - 8

**Materials:**  
- Open space to move  
- List of emotions: happy, sad, excited, angry, proud, confused, fear, joy

**Therapeutic Goals:**  
- Learn to name emotions  
- Connect mind/body experience  
- Expel negative energy

**SEL Skill Development:**  
- Self-Awareness  
- Self-Management

**How to explain activity to a kid:**

Everyone feels emotions in our bodies. Sometimes it’s hard to know what we’re feeling until we stop and think about it. We also see that emotions can look like lot of different things because people express them differently. This is a game to help us connect how we feel, with how we express ourselves. Starting with a list of different emotions you might be feeling today, we’re going to explore different ways our bodies show our feelings. When we know what our emotions are and how we express them, we can help to take care of our feelings.

**Create:**

1. Pick an emotion from the list  
2. Move your body to show what that emotion looks like. Kids can dance, pose, make a face - whatever they like to show with their body that emotion  
3. Pick another emotion from the list and do it again!

**Guiding questions to encourage sharing and reflection:**

- How do you feel when you move your body into that emotion?  
- Were there any emotions that you weren’t sure how to show with your body? Which ones?  
- What did your body feel when you lost someone important to you?  
- Which of these emotions are you feeling right now? (It’s okay to pick more than one)

**Continued support:**

Tell kids they can play this game with friends by asking everyone to move their body to show what an emotion looks like. Then, have their friends freeze in position and finally have everyone move in slow motion to notice how similar or different each person has shown the same emotion. This is a great reminder that sometimes the same emotion looks and feels different for each of us, especially when we’re grieving.

**WATCH OUR VIDEO ON HOW TO USE ART TO HELP KIDS HEAL**

**DRAW IT OUT CURRICULUM**  
**DRAW IT OUT THERAPEUTIC ACTIVITY BOOK**

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**SAFE CROSSINGS FOUNDATION** Generously funded by Safe Crossings Foundation, safecrossingsfoundation.org
Help empower kids to cope. Coping with a death brings enormous change and big feelings for a kid. All kids, no matter their age, are able to experience grief. Kids grieve in different ways than adults and though it may never completely end, you can support them to help process their feelings. Through opportunities for self-expression, modeling your own grief journey, and finding moments to remember the person who died, you’ll help a kid begin the healing process.

Caregivers Guide: Helping Kids After a Death

Here are some considerations that can help you talk with kids about death and create a supportive environment of healing.

- **Model healthy grieving**
  Kids can be confused about their own feelings and for younger kids, they may have difficulty identifying their emotions. Help kids to connect to their feelings by mirroring healthy language when you talk about your grief. Use validating statements such as “I sometimes feel mad too when I think about [Blank] dying.” By sharing and expressing your own emotions you can provide more comfort and safety for their expression.

- **Talk about the person who died**
  You may think you’re protecting a kid by avoiding conversations about the person who died. However, it’s important to recognize and remember the person in order to empower kids to begin healing. It’s okay to say, “I miss [Blank] sometimes. I think about them a lot when I’m [blank].”

- **Create rituals and opportunities to say goodbye**
  Make opportunities to remember a person who has died. You can do this through special rituals to celebrate the person’s life - plant a tree, light a candle, make a collage or picture, or create a special spot of remembrance. If kids don’t have an opportunity to say goodbye to a person who has passed, allow for a special time for this by doing things like writing a letter to the person, or drawing them a picture.

- **Encourage kids to express in all kinds of ways**
  Create therapeutic opportunities for a kid to express their grief. Many kids don’t know how to verbally process their emotions so incorporate creative outlets for them to express like reading, creative expression, music, and play.

- **Listen and use what you hear as a gauge of how to respond**
  Each kid experiences grief in a unique way. Be attentive to what they express and what they understand. Recognize that their perception of death is shaped by their community, culture, and lived experiences. By carefully listening and simply being there, you’re offering companionship and can help address exactly what they want to know - nothing more, nothing less.

- **Help kids to understand that grief is permanent**
  Help kids know that grief will be a part of their lives for a long time. It is also okay if their feelings are bigger one day, or one moment, than another.

- **Look for and understand different triggers**
  Kids naturally revisit feelings as they grow, build, understand, and create new perspectives. You can anticipate some triggers, but others are more difficult to notice. Events that bring to surface feelings of grief are often ones where the absence is most felt. Triggers don’t have to be event or routine based and may include things like sights, sounds, or smells. While these moments can be felt acutely, you can still help to prepare for these moments and encourage coping techniques.

- **Trust a kid’s process**
  Help kids feel empowered in their journey and remind them and yourself that each person’s grief journey is unique and incomparable. Let them share when they’re ready and do not push them to talk if they don’t feel like it. Your job is to help them through this by being with them to support, listen, and understand.
Help Your Kid Explore Their Grief

Kids need other creative outlets to be able to share and express their grief. Here are some ways to help kids explore their feelings through creative expression.

1. Fold a piece of paper in half. On one side draw how it feels when people say things that don’t make the kid feel good, and on the other how it would feel if people asked or said the things they want.

   Use this as a guide to begin discussing the questions:
   • Sometimes people don’t know what to say when someone dies. What do you wish people would ask you or say to you?
   • What are some things that people say that make you mad or sad?

2. Set a timer for 5 minutes and together write as many memories as you can think of before the timer rings. Read the memories aloud to each other and see if you remember the same things.

3. Create a memory box by decorating a box and putting keepsakes of the person who died or memories the kid wants to write down and include. They might want to put something in the memory box that’s private and just for them. Take turns sharing thoughts, memories, or wishes.

   Ask guiding questions to help begin conversation like:
   • How does it feel to have these memories and talk about them aloud?
   • We get to keep our memories forever, where is your special place for them?

4. Look around your house, or at school, and think about what grief looks like to help a kid visualize their feelings. Have them draw a picture or use collage materials like magazine cutouts to represent what they think grief looks like.

   Ask guiding questions that help understand their drawing:
   • Is your grief messy, sad, or confusing?
   • What colors are in it?
   • What would you say to someone else who was going through the same things as you are?
   • Afterward, encourage them to write down advice they’d give to other to help them to connect to the tools and resilience that live inside of them.

5. On a piece of paper have a kid draw a line without lifting their pen to show what all the feelings they’re experiencing right now look like. For example, anger could be a jagged line or peace a slow loopy line.

   Ask guiding questions to help begin conversation like:
   • Have you ever noticed that ignoring feelings can make them stay longer or feel bigger?
   • What are some feeling that might grow inside you if they are trapped inside?

For more resources for caregivers visit artwithheart.org/learn

For more information on how to help grieving children, visit Safe Crossings Foundation, safecrossingsfoundation.org and National Alliance for Grieving Children, childrengrieve.org

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SOURCES:

SAFE CROSSINGS Generously funded by Safe Crossings Foundation, safecrossingsfoundation.org
Finding out that someone has a terminal illness impacts the whole family and community, including kids. As an adult, it’s okay to have your own emotions associated with the grief experience alongside a kids, and you may be dealing with identical feelings to their response to grief. With so much to process as an adult when thinking of how to talk about an impending loss, having feelings of nervousness, fear, and being overwhelmed can come up for you. However, by modeling openness and transparency you can help create opportunities for trust, allow for a kid to process their own feelings, and make them feel included in the grief journey.

Caregivers Guide: Talking to Kids When Anticipating a Death

Here are some examples of how to talk with kids about death and dying with considerations on theories of child development, as well as individual strengths and cultures.

**Ages 2 to 6:**

**Example:** “[Blank] is really sick. The name of [Blank]’s sickness is called (name of illness) and the sickness is in the (part of the body) of their body. You didn’t do anything to make [Blank] sick, and you can’t catch the sickness from them. [Blank]’s sickness is so big that there isn’t medicine to make it better. Eventually, [Blank]’s sickness will make their body die. When a person’s body dies it means their heart stops working, their lungs stop breathing, and they won’t be able to think or feel anything.”

- Kids at this age may think the sickness is contagious. Help them understand that they will not catch the illness from the person who is dying.
- Kids can have magical thinking, meaning that they believe their thoughts can make things happen, and sometimes their thoughts are more frightening than what is actually occurring. Ensure they know they didn’t cause the illness to happen.
- Kids typically don’t understand the finality of death or the concept of time. Kids may ask questions repeatedly, and it can be difficult for you to keep answering them. But, continue to provide the same consistent information when you’re asked repetitive questions.

**Ages 7 to 11:**

**Example:** “[Blank] has a really big sickness called (name of illness). The doctors have tried hard to figure out how to make [Blank] feel better but there is no medicine that will work. Do you know what (illness) is? (Explain illness in a developmentally appropriate way). Do you know what happens to someone’s body when the medicine won’t make it better? It means that someone’s body dies. Do you know what it means when someone dies? It means that their heart stops working, they stop breathing, and they are not able to think or feel anything. The doctors are thinking that [Blank] has (time frame) longer to live but we don’t know for sure and that is hard.”

- Kids understand the concept of finality and oftentimes want more details. Consider providing specific details about the illness and how it affects the body.
- Kids understand the concept of time and may want to know when the person will die. If you know, help them understand the plan for when and where the adult will die (home, hospital, hospice, etc.).

**Ages 12 and up:**

**Example:** Discuss the illness and help the adolescent understand what the medical team has done for treatment, and how the illness is terminal. Pay attention to detail, as most adolescents seek thorough information in order to feel a part of the process.

- If appropriate, allow adolescents to attend any doctor’s appointments to allow for opportunities to ask the medical team questions.
- Talk to the adolescent about when the adult is expected to die and where this will take place (home, hospital, hospice, etc.).
Ways to Support Healthy Processing During Grieving

1. Create a supportive environment with trusting adults

Find a place that feels quiet and comfortable. Consider having extra support there like a partner, or another adult who has a close relationship with the kid. It doesn’t need to be the person with the illness sharing the information, but if possible have them present. Don’t have too many adults involved in the conversation as it can be overwhelming. Also, consider what time of day you’re having the conversation (i.e. morning vs. bedtime) and ensure there are no big events happening afterward like a sports game or test.

2. Lead with open-ended questions

Use open-ended questions during conversations to assess what a kid understands about what’s going on with the illness and the person affected.
- “How do you think [blank] has been doing?”
- “What do you see happening at the doctors?”

3. Understand how much you want to share

Knowing what and how much you want to share depends on a kid’s developmental age not just their physical. Below is a base of key components most kids can understand:
- Name of the illness
- If the adult has any physical changes or additional medical equipment (i.e. hair loss, oxygen tank, etc.)
- If the illness is contagious
- If the medical team anticipates the illness to progress
- The illness will end in death and there is no cure to change the end

4. Be honest and concrete with what you say

Kids can sense when adults are not being honest. Use simple and developmentally appropriate language like “death.” Avoid soft language like “passed away, lost, or gone to a better place,” as kids can have misconceptions about what these terms actually mean.

5. Normalize and identify kids’ feelings while acknowledging your own

Kids can have confusion about their feelings, and for younger kids, they may have a difficult time identifying emotions. Help normalize feelings with validating statements such as “I understand why you feel that way; sometimes I feel that way too.” Help kids to realize that they’re not alone in their feelings and that other kids and even adults feel the same things when someone is very ill and dies.

6. Be prepared for different reactions and ability to process

Grief is unique for everyone and lots of factors from environment to friendships affect how kids react; and it may be in a way that you didn’t anticipate after the initial conversation. Kids can only process stressful information in small amounts. After a tough conversation they might want to do something else like play, however this doesn’t mean that they didn’t understand. Listen, be patient, and meet them where they’re at. Don’t push kids to talk if they aren’t ready to.

6. Give kids opportunities to ask you questions

Give space for kids to ask questions about the person’s illness. Kids might not have questions right away. Encourage them to write down what they’re wondering or draw pictures of what they want to ask at a later time. Let them know that you’re available to talk whenever they feel like it. Sometimes, it’s helpful to set up a future time to talk so kids can be prepared for when the conversation comes up again.

7. Provide reassurance, safety, and routine

Help kids understand who will take care of them and reassure them that their body is safe. Let them know those people will continue to take care of them and keep their routine as normal as possible.

8. Reflect and know your role identity

Let kids be kids and continue being kids. Encourage them not to take on roles that the ill person can no longer do. Instead, allow kids to be involved in ways that help them still feel like a part of the person’s life or family. Your role is to guide the journey by being with them to support, listen, and understand.

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