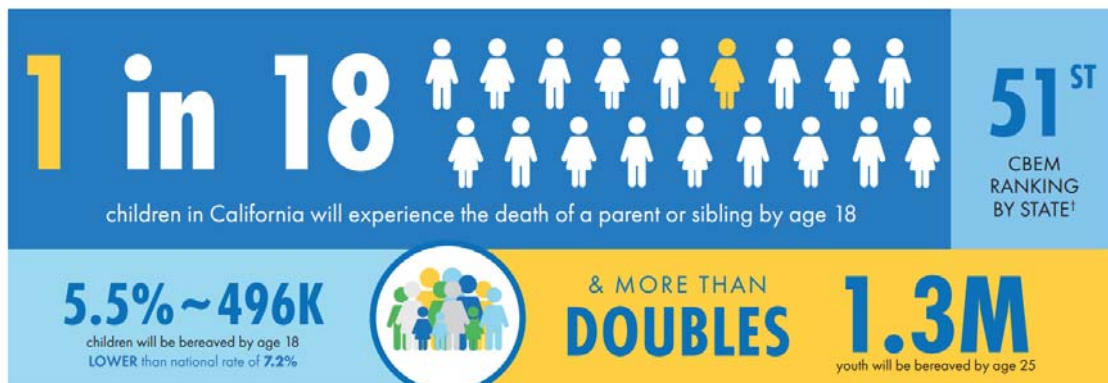




Childhood Grief and Loss

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Prevalence



Pre-Bereavement

Provide honest information and simple explanations

- Name the illness
- Life threatening illness vs curable illness
- Discuss if it is contagious or not
- Explain that it wasn't due to anything they thought or did
- Reassure them that medical professionals are working hard to help
- **Revisit** understanding of illness **often** and answer questions as they arise

Pre-Bereavement Continued

- Create a sense of safety
- Maintain schedules and routines
- Set limits and boundaries
- Provide extra nurturing and support
 - Time away from home
 - Checking in and checking out
 - Ask them who they want to know
- Give choice around involvement
 - Provide simple tasks children can manage

Pre-Bereavement Continued



Normalize grief responses

- Crying
- Anxiety
- Stress
- Regressions
- Irritableness/grumpy



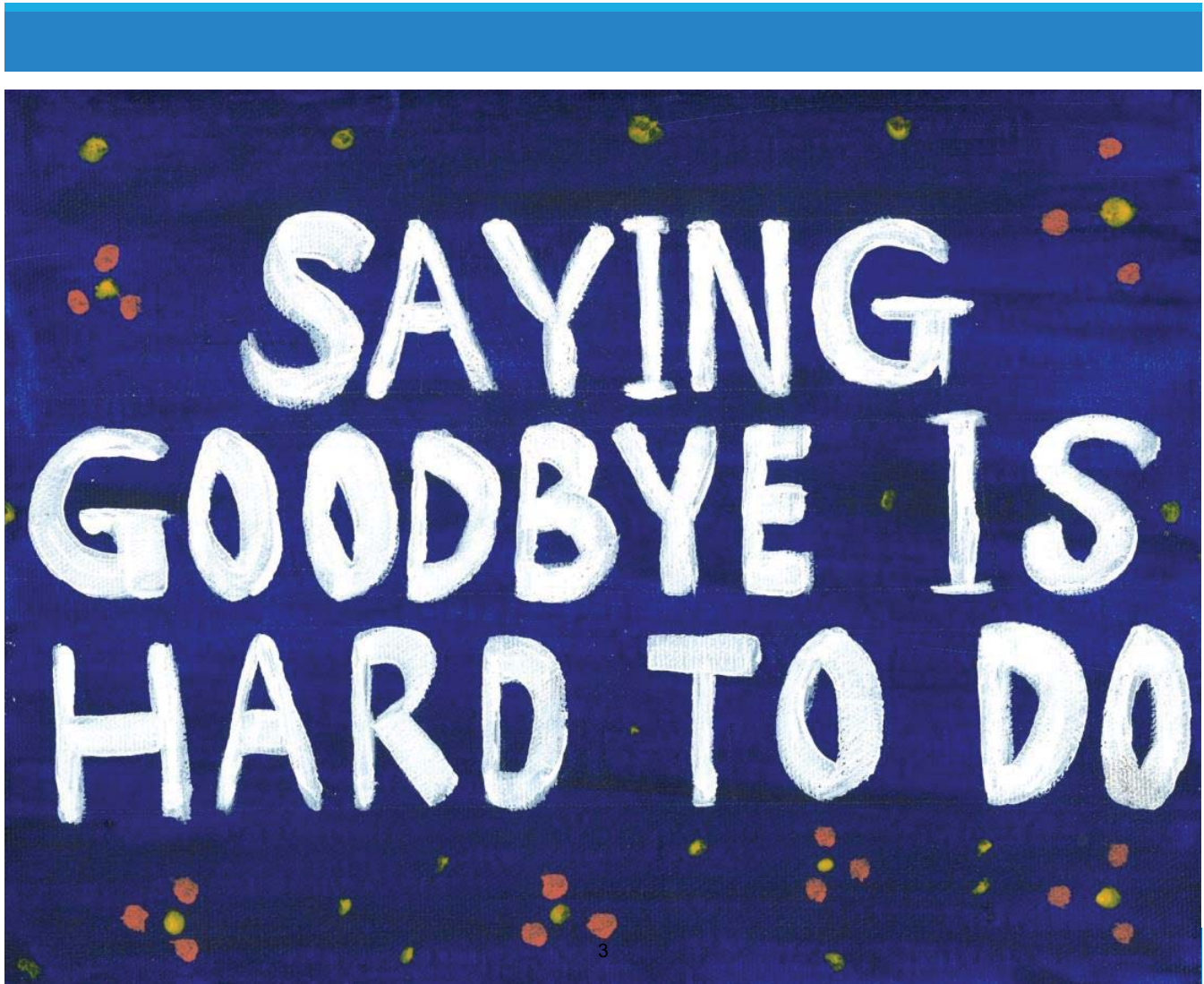
Share that everyone's response will be different

No need to worry or hide emotions



Prepare

- Loss of strength, appetite, vocalization, personality
- See, hear, smell, and touch
- Breathing changes
- Pain



Death Notification

- Identify a safe, neutral setting to share the news
- Age appropriate language
- Favorite adults present
- Get down at eye level
- Prepare for an array of emotions and responses
- Provide activities and opportunities to digest the news
- The 4 C's: Cause. Catch. Cure. Care.

Rituals Post Death

- Allow time with the body
- Explain interacting with the body
- Model behavior
- Address the next few weeks:
 - Where the body goes
 - Funeral planning (include them)
 - Community involvement

Rituals Post Death

Wake/Viewing

- Show entire body to younger children
- Allow time to explore the body

Funeral

- Assign each child a buddy
- Give creative options (draw on coffin, leave gifts)

Burial

- Explain what happens to the body
- Watch the casket being lowered
- Remind young children that the body is no longer alive

Cremation

- It is ok to tell children about it
- Share plans for ashes (keep or let go)

Childhood Bereavement

- Action-oriented
- Differs from adult grief
- Limited death experiences
- Grief through play
- Need for creative outlets

0-2 years Developmental Responses

Concept of death

- Sense that something is different at home
- Grasp *goneness*
- May not remember the person who died

Reactions

- Fussiness, crying
- Inconsistent eating and digestion
- Clinging to adults
- Regressive behavior

Ways to Help

- Nonverbal care (such as hugs and rocking)
- Stable routine
- Identifying another attachment figure

2-5 years Developmental Responses

Concept of death

- Sees death as reversible & temporary
 - Believes person will return
- Doesn't understand that death is permanent
- Usually can't comprehend the concepts of heaven, afterlife or soul/spirit
- May not remember the person who died or quickly forget them

Reactions

- Grief spurts
 - Crying
- Regression (bed wetting, thumb sucking)
- Fear of separation
 - Temper Tantrums
- Nightmares
 - Telling story to anyone
- Aggression/ irritability
 - Irregular sleep
- Non-compliance

What helps

- Stable daily routine and structure
- Use of words "dead" and "died"
- Repetitive questions
- Physical and emotional nurturance
- Heard and listened to

Common Grief Reactions

Physical

- **Abdominal pains**
- Headaches
- Nausea
- Change in appetite
- **Fatigue**
- **Sleeping problems**
- Restlessness
- **Crying**
- Tightness in the throat (can't swallow)
- **Hyperactive** or under active
- Shaking or trembling
- Weakness or feeling dizzy

Emotional

- **Sadness**
- **Anger**
- Disbelief
- **Fears**
- Relief
- Irritability
- **Guilt**
- **Attachment**
- **Longing**
- Anxiety
- Vulnerability
- Jealousy

Behavioral/Cognitive

- Confusion
- **Searching for loved one**
- Dreaming of loved one
- **Sensing their presence**
- **Retelling story**
- **Dramatic play**
- **Clinging**
- Mood swings
- **Regressive behaviors**
- **Repetitious questioning**
- Hitting/fighting
- **Co-sleeping**

Interventions

- What is death?
- Exploring feelings/emotions
- Physical manifestations
- Memories
- Continuing bonds
- Support systems
- Coping skills
- Play
- Support and education for caregivers

Death during COVID-19

Considerations

- Greater isolation
- Change in routines and schedules
- Less opportunities to receive support from family and friends
 - Impact on caregiver grief
- Little or no memorial services
 - Virtual engagement

How to Help

- Creating keepsake and legacy items
- Using bibliotherapy to start dialogue
- Referrals

Resources

The Elizabeth Hospice Children's Bereavement Program

760-737-2050

www.elizabethhospice.org

Children's Groups (Mission Valley and Escondido or Virtually)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHKsoSGSGJs>

-Little's Group (3-6)

-Elementary Age Group (6-12)

-Tween Group (11-13)

-Teen Group (13-17)

School Based Groups with 20 School Districts

Sesame Street: Helping Families Grieve

<https://www.sesamestreet.org/toolkits/grief/>

Centering Corp: Online grief bookstore www.centering.org

National Alliance for Grieving Children: www.childrengrieve.org

Coalition for Grieving Students: <https://grievingstudents.org/>

The Center for Loss and Life Transition: <https://www.centerforloss.com/>

Thank you!
Questions?

