

# SUPPORTING CHILDREN THROUGH ANTICIPATORY GRIEF

Bereavement Professional Section Chat – February 6, 2019



The Elizabeth Hospice

# NCHPP: *WHAT IS IT?*

- NCHPP is a collaborative of 15 discipline specific professional sections advancing end-of-life care within their disciplines.
- NCHPP's on-line resources, forums and networking will help you grow professionally, find new solutions, contribute to the field, and elevate the national profile of your program.



# My.NHPCO

- Professional communities
- Discussion Posts
- Monthly Chats
- Library entries
- Blog



## *PLEASE CONTACT US...*

- if you have questions about membership
- if you have topics you would like us to discuss
- if you would like a mentor
- if you would like to become a section committee member, contact Section Leader Diane Snyder Cowan at: [DSCowan@HospiceVR.org](mailto:DSCowan@HospiceVR.org)





The Elizabeth Hospice

*Supporting Children  
through Anticipatory Grief*

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# *POLL QUESTION*

How often are you conducting pre-bereavement support with children?

- 1-3 times a week
- 1-3 times a month
- 1-3 times quarterly
- 1-3 times a year



# *PRE-BEREAVEMENT*

- Provide honest information with simple explanations
  - Name the illness
  - Explain the difference between a life threatening illness and a curable illness
  - Discuss if it is contagious or not
  - Explain that it wasn't due to anything they thought or did
  - Assure them that medical professionals are working hard to help
  - Revisit their understanding of illness often and answer questions as they arise



# PRE-BEREAVEMENT

## ○ Developmental understanding

### • 0-3

- No concept of death but recognizes the stressors in the environment and changes in routines. Provide physical and emotional comfort to reassure safety.

### • 3-6

- Death concept starting to development but struggles with finality of it. Difficulty with understanding “why” death happens. Magical thinking may increase their feelings of fault. This age also can make up their own explanation of why death occurs if adults don’t provide facts. Can start to understand if explained right.

### • 7-12

- Understand that death is permanent. They usually grasp that it isn’t their fault and understand disease better. They focus on the body more and how it declines. Fears around their own death and others are present.

### • Teen

- They have full understanding and scope of illness and death. Tend to question life and connections. They usually turn inward to process.





# PRE-BEREAVEMENT

- Maintain a sense of safety
  - Maintain schedules and routines
    - Invite family and friends to assist with this
  - Set limits and boundaries
    - Children and teens still need rules and consequences
  - Provide extra nurturing and support
    - Try to give them one on one time away from the house
    - You can check in then but also check out and have normal non patient related conversations
    - Ask them who they want to know- encourage telling school and friends
  - Allow them to decide how involved they want to be
    - Children and teens will often want to be included provide simple tasks that they can be in charge of
    - Some teens may want to pull away, allow them



# PRE-BEREAVEMENT

- Normalize grief responses

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

- Talk about how everyone's response will be different

- No need to worry or hide emotions

- Prepare them for what they can expect

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



# POLL QUESTION

Do you have a standardized offering of Legacy Items or child friendly interventions that you provide to children?

- Yes, and I love it 😊
- Somewhat, but it could use improvement 😬
- No, I wish 😞



# LEGACY ITEMS

## ○ Legacy Package

- Fingerprints
- Molds (sculpey)
- Handprints/footprints/fingerprints (paint)
- Story Corps
- Letters (milestones)
- Bibliotherapy
- Bracelets charms (wishes on a charm)
- Journal
- Videography
- Legacy video/time capsules ([timecapsule.com](http://timecapsule.com))

## ○ Photography

- Flashes of Hope
- Lay Me Down to Sleep

## ○ Music therapy

## ○ Art therapy

## ○ Play therapy



# DEATH NOTIFICATION

- Find a safe neutral setting to deliver the news
- Use age appropriate language
- If possible, have some of their favorite adults present
- Get down at eye level with them
- Prepare for an array of emotions and responses
- Provide activities and opportunities to digest the news
- Give them space/Ask them what they need
- Tell the truth even with traumatic losses(suicide)



# RITUALS POST DEATH

- Allow them to spend time with the body
- Explain that they can still touch and talk to the body
- Let them know what the corner's job is
- Address what the next few weeks might look like
  - Where the body goes
  - Funeral planning (include them)
  - Family and friend interactions and dynamics
  - How to handle insensitive comments
  - Prepare them for many different responses they might see

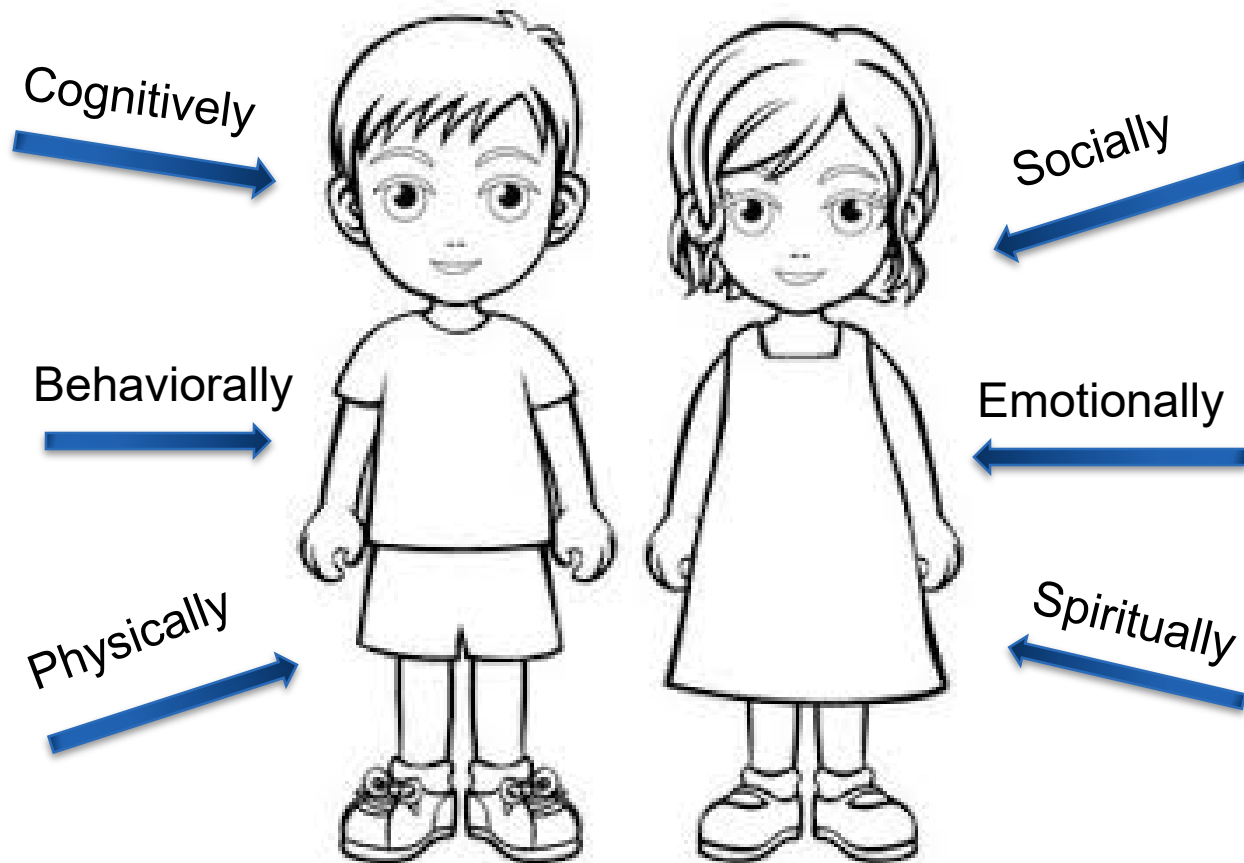


# RITUALS POST DEATH

- Wake/Viewing
  - Give them the option
  - Show the entire body to younger children
  - Allow them to explore the body
- Funeral
  - Include them in the planning process
  - Assign each child a buddy so they can leave when needed
  - Allow them to get creative (sign coffin, leave gifts, create slideshow)
- Burial
  - Explain what happens to the body
  - Let me watch the casket being lowered
  - Remind young children that the body is no longer alive
- Cremation
  - It is ok to tell children about it
  - “The body can no longer feel anything when it is dead. Cremation is when the body is placed in a room that heats up to a high temperature and after a few hours the body is transformed into ashes. We keep the ashes in a special container called an urn.”
  - Share with them what your plan is (keep or let go)



# BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT





# AFTERWARDS

- Returning to school
  - Let them have a say in who knows
- First year of firsts
  - Expect shifts in behaviors
  - Strong opinions
  - Relearn family members who are grieving
- Grief spurts and triggers
  - Understand that their grief requires more physical and creative outlets
- Connect them with resources, groups, or one on one counseling
  - Providing immediate support is rarely an emergency



# *BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT*

- Ask them if they have any questions
- It's ok if you don't have all the answers
- Engage their curiosity and offer to research questions with them
- Model healthy coping strategies and mourning
- Check in with them regularly but be respectful of requests for privacy
- Don't be afraid to talk about them, share memories, laugh, and reinvest back into life (modeling)



# BEREAVEMENT RESOURCES

## ○ Books:

- Preparing the Children, Information and Ideas for Families Facing Serious Illness and Death by Kathy Nussbaum.
- 35 Ways to Help a Grieving Child and Helping Teens Cope with Death by The Dougy Center
- Healing A Child's Grieving Heart by Alan Wolfelt

## ○ Activity Books

- <http://www.tdcbookstore.org/store/c4/Books.html> (Dougy Center)
- <https://www.centerforloss.com/bookstore-category/for-adults/books-resources-to-help-kids-teens/> (Center for Loss)
- [https://www.amazon.com/dp/099638040X?m=A2I7VY5I0NP7P8&ref\\_=v\\_sp\\_widget\\_detail\\_page](https://www.amazon.com/dp/099638040X?m=A2I7VY5I0NP7P8&ref_=v_sp_widget_detail_page) (National Alliance for Grieving Children)
- [https://www.amazon.com/When-Someone-Very-Serious-Illness/dp/0962050245/ref=pd\\_sim\\_14\\_3?encoding=UTF8&pd\\_rd\\_i=0962050245&pd\\_rd\\_r=2E6Y3GM267MVXJ4GA89Y&pd\\_rd\\_w=jK2Mq&pd\\_rd\\_wg=7r8x8&psc=1&refRID=2E6Y3GM267MVXJ4GA89Y](https://www.amazon.com/When-Someone-Very-Serious-Illness/dp/0962050245/ref=pd_sim_14_3?encoding=UTF8&pd_rd_i=0962050245&pd_rd_r=2E6Y3GM267MVXJ4GA89Y&pd_rd_w=jK2Mq&pd_rd_wg=7r8x8&psc=1&refRID=2E6Y3GM267MVXJ4GA89Y) (Various activity books on serious illness and death)



# BEREAVEMENT RESOURCES

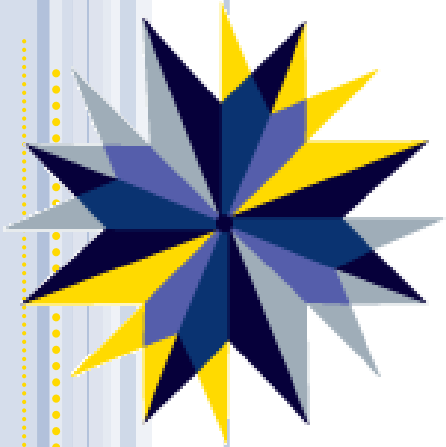
## ○ Websites:

- National Alliance for Grieving Children- [www.childrengrieve.org](http://www.childrengrieve.org)
- What's Your Grief?- [www.whatsyourgrief.com](http://www.whatsyourgrief.com)
- Dougy Center- [www.dougy.org](http://www.dougy.org)
- Center for Loss- [www.centerforloss.com](http://www.centerforloss.com)
- Online Grief Bookstores: [www.centering.org](http://www.centering.org) or [www.compassionbooks.com](http://www.compassionbooks.com)

## ○ The Elizabeth Hospice

- One on One Counseling
- Camp Spero
- School Based Program
- Peer Based Grief Support Groups
  - Concurrent Adult Groups
    - Little's Groups (3-6)
    - Elementary Age Groups (6-12)
    - Tweens Group (11-13)
    - Teen Group (13-17)





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*Questions?*