



What Is Death? What Is Grief?

A kid's guide to understanding death & loss

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For Grownups

Please read before sharing this booklet with your child.

This booklet is a tool to help explain death and grief to kids (toddlers to elementary-school age) by:

- **Describing death and grief in a simple way**
- **Providing activities that encourage kids to share their feelings and be creative**
- **Starting “The Conversation” between you and your child**

Read the whole booklet. (Consider reading the companion booklet, *Talking to Kids About Death*.) Share with other adults in your child’s life. The way you use this booklet will depend on your child’s age / developmental level (see bottom of the next page). Keep in mind, even if your child doesn’t understand it all, introducing these concepts now can be a starting point for talks as they get older.

These are tough conversations that can be even harder when you are grieving, too. Be gentle with yourself. Remember, there is no right or wrong way to grieve and you are doing the best you can.

We are here for you and your loved ones — contact us if you need more support!



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Using this booklet based on your child's age/developmental level:

- **Ages 2–3:** Toddlers can color or decorate the pages. Read the story to your toddler. Try the activities and let your toddler help. (Grownups can benefit from doing the activities, too!)
- **Ages 4–6:** Most kids this age will need help reading. Some may be able to do the activities with guidance, or you may want to do the activities alongside your child. Younger children will need to break it up in small sections.
- **Ages 7–10+:** This age group can read on their own, but some might want to read with you. Ask what they prefer. They should also be able to do the activities on their own, but some kids this age may need guidance.

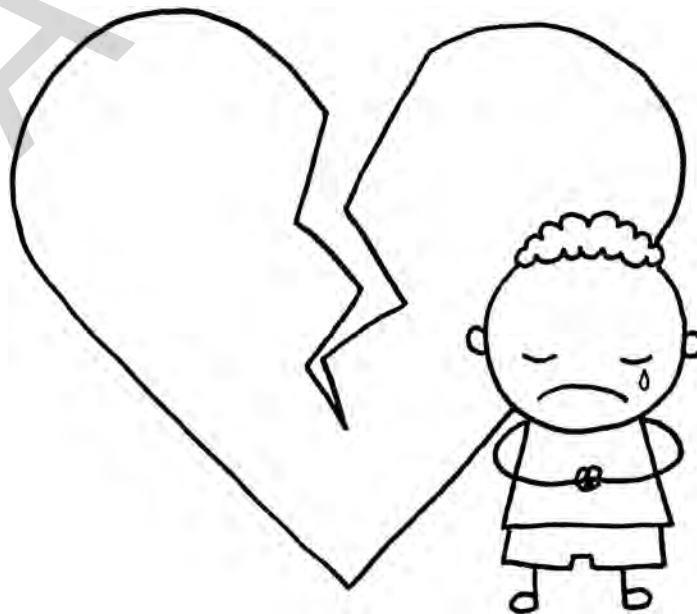
Be aware you may need to skip or change parts of the booklet based on your child's relationship to the person who died, the way the person died, your family's cultural / spiritual / religious background, or if your child has special needs. **Contact us if you need help adjusting your approach.**

Introduction

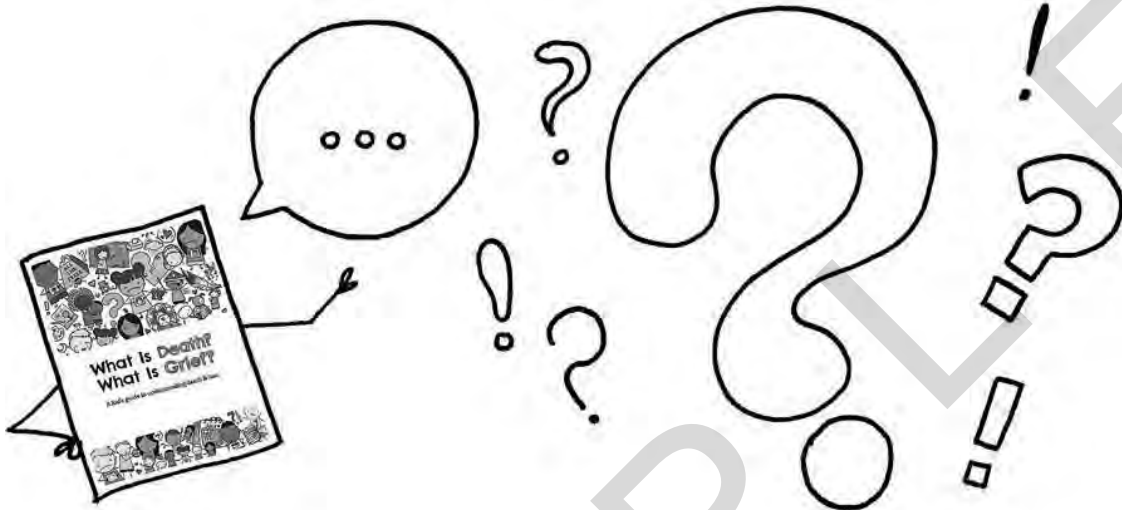
Hi, my name is James.
My grandma died.



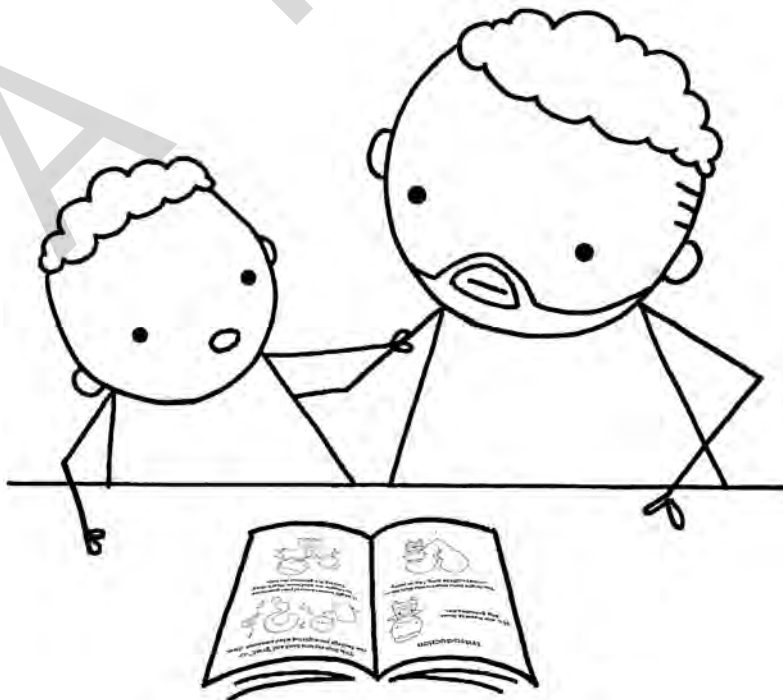
You might know someone who died, too —
or they might be dying. I am so sorry.



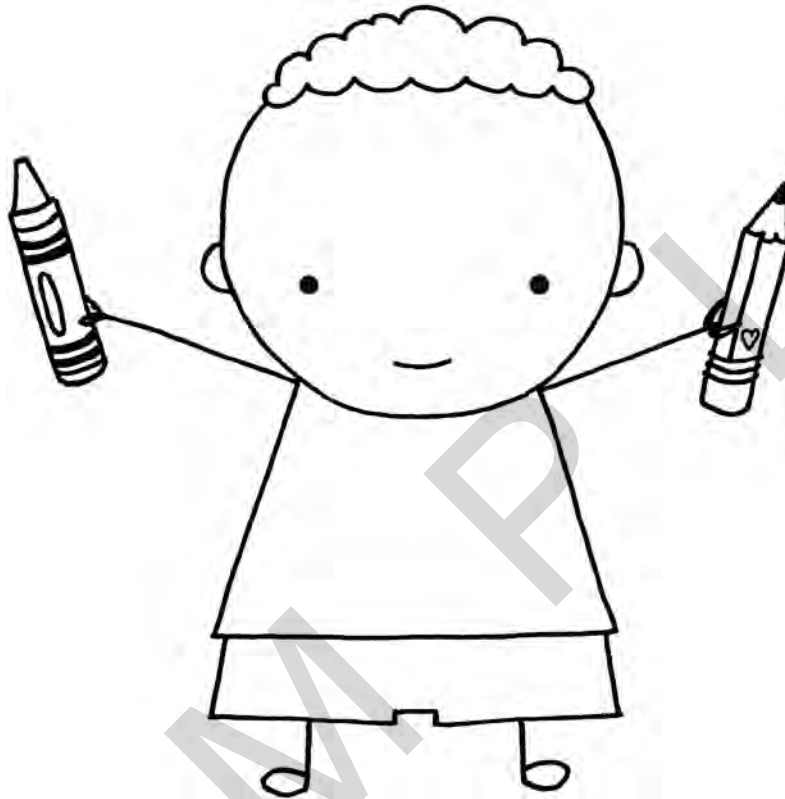
This book explains death and “grief”
(the feelings we feel when someone dies).



It might answer some of your questions.
...but maybe not *all* of them. That's okay.
Talking to a grownup can help.



Coloring, drawing, or writing in this book
can help you feel better, too.

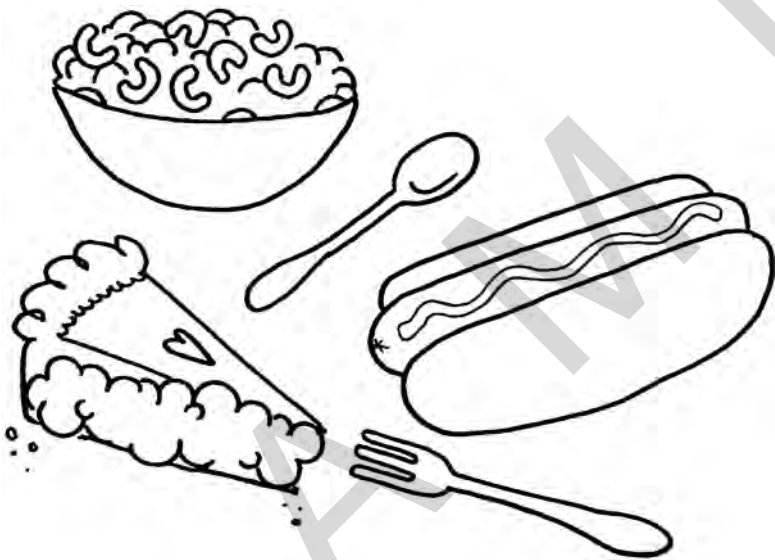


What you will need:

- A grownup to help you read, do the activities, or talk about stuff
- A quiet, comfy spot to read
- Markers, crayons, pencils, or a pen
- Craft supplies (glue, glitter, fabric, colorful paper, stickers, or any supplies you have at home)
- Your favorite toy, blanket, lovey, or pet to hug
- Tissues (just in case!)

About the Person Who Died

My grandma's name was Mary.
She was the
best grandma EVER.



She cooked my
favorite food,

she loved to play games,
and she gave me the
BIGGEST hugs.

I miss her so much!



Can you tell me about your special person?

Draw, write, or talk it out:

- **What is the name of the person who died?**

- **How are they related to you?** Were they a parent, family member, or friend? Or someone else you knew like a coach, neighbor, or classmate?

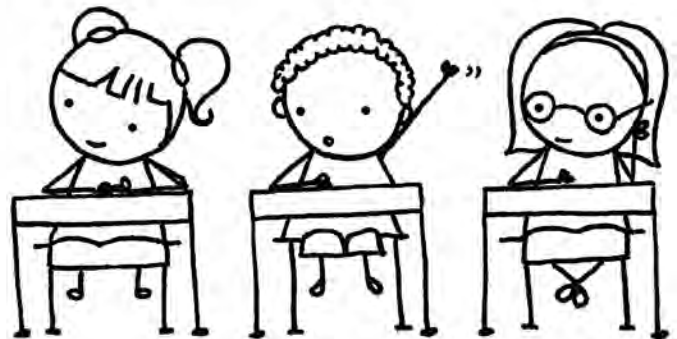
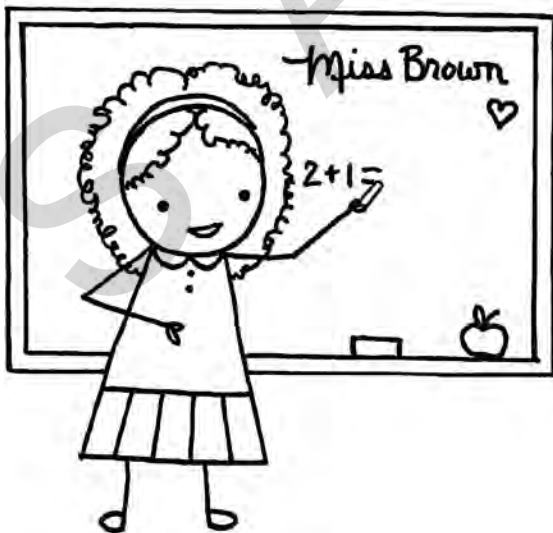
- **Draw a picture of (or write something about) the person below.** What did they look like? What are their favorite things? What do you remember most about them?

Talking About Death

Hi, my name is Sofia.
My teacher died.
Her name was Miss Brown.



Miss Brown was my favorite teacher.
She was so smart and nice. Our whole class is sad.

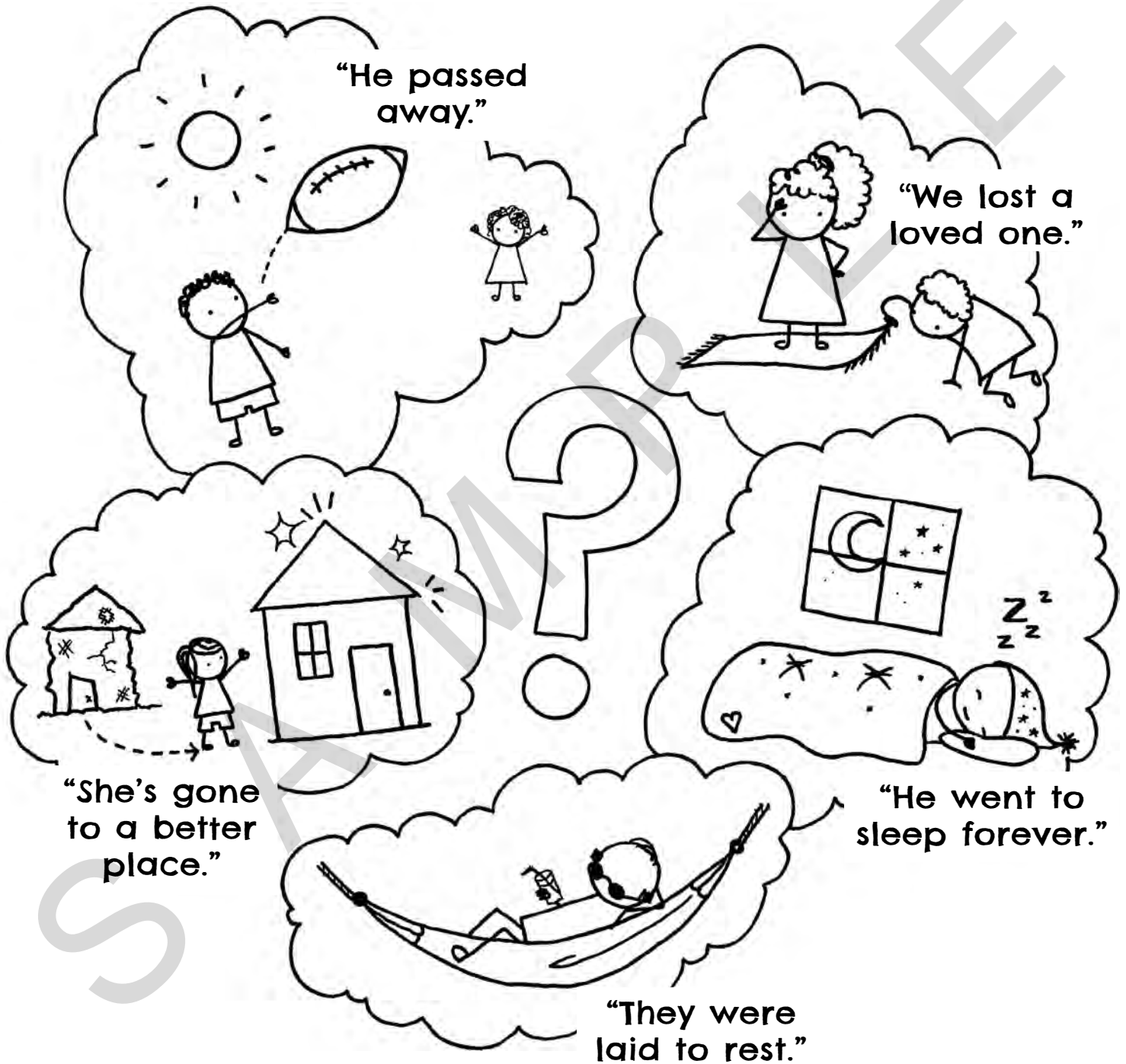


When Miss Brown died,
my mom said death is a normal part of life.

All living things (plants, animals, and people)
will die one day. Then *new* living things
(like cute little seedlings, puppies, and babies)
are born and grow. Mom calls it “the circle of life.”



Grownups might say confusing things
when someone dies, like:



(What they really mean is the person died.)

It's hard for some grownups to talk to kids about death. It makes them really sad.

They're afraid to make us sad, too.

But talking about death can help kids *and* grownups.

Draw, write, or talk it out:

- **What does "the circle of life" mean to you?** Draw a picture or write/talk it out in your own words.

What Happens When Someone Dies?

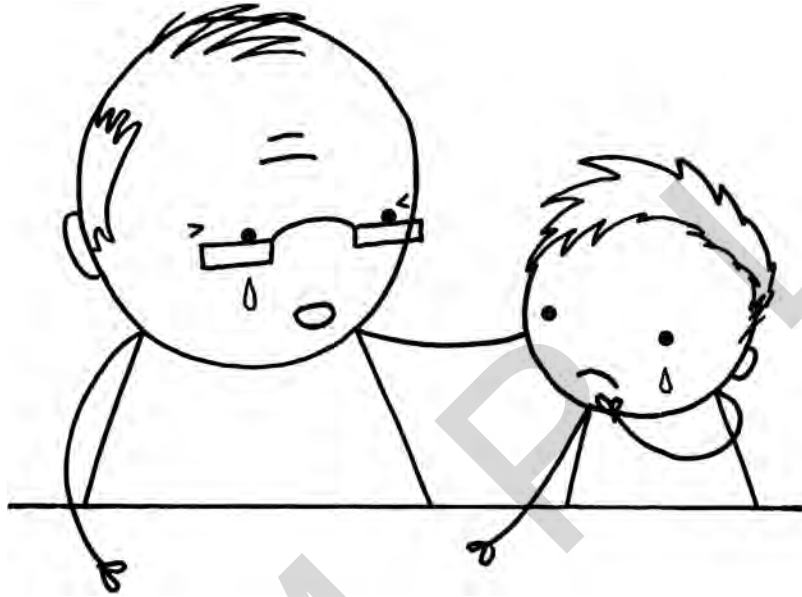
Hi, my name is Daniel.
My dad died.
His name was Scott.



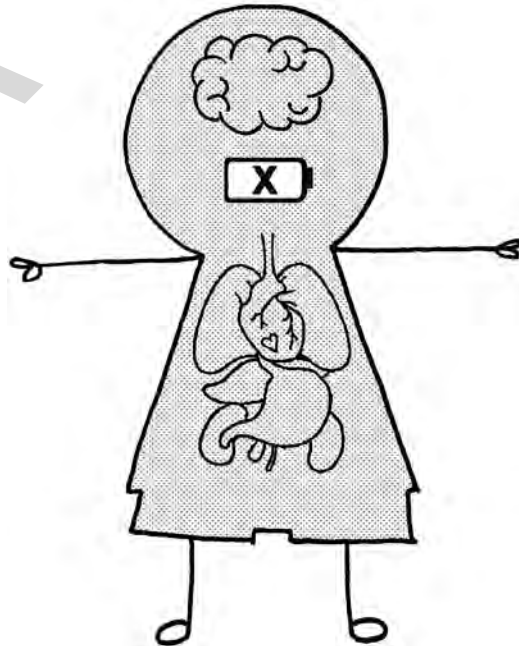
Dad and I did everything together.
He was the greatest! I can't believe he's gone.



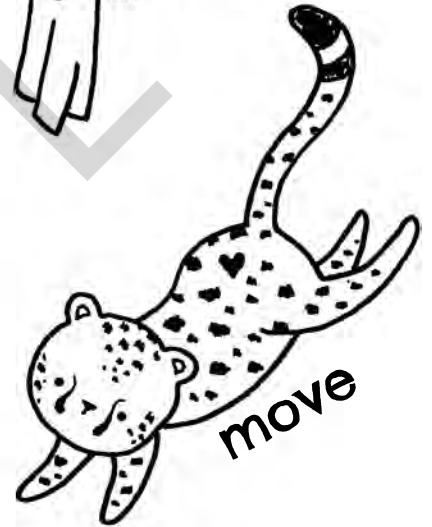
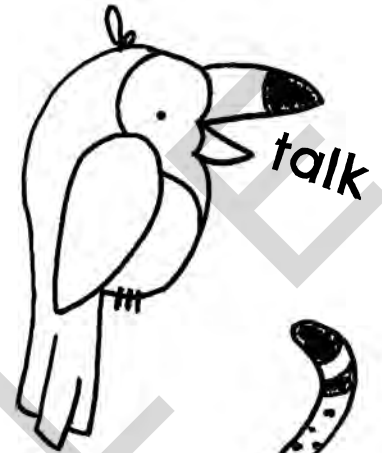
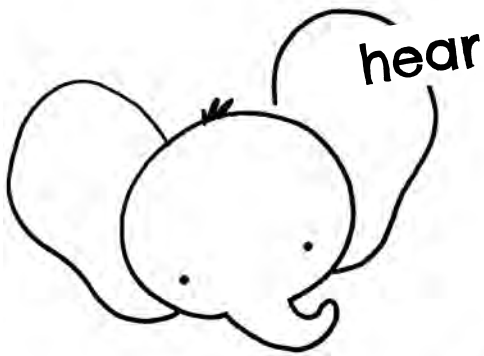
So, what exactly is death?
One day I asked my grandpa,
“What happens when someone dies?”



Grandpa said when someone dies,
their whole body stops working.



When someone dies, they cannot



...or do *anything* living things do. But that doesn't bother them. When someone dies, they cannot be



cold,



hungry,

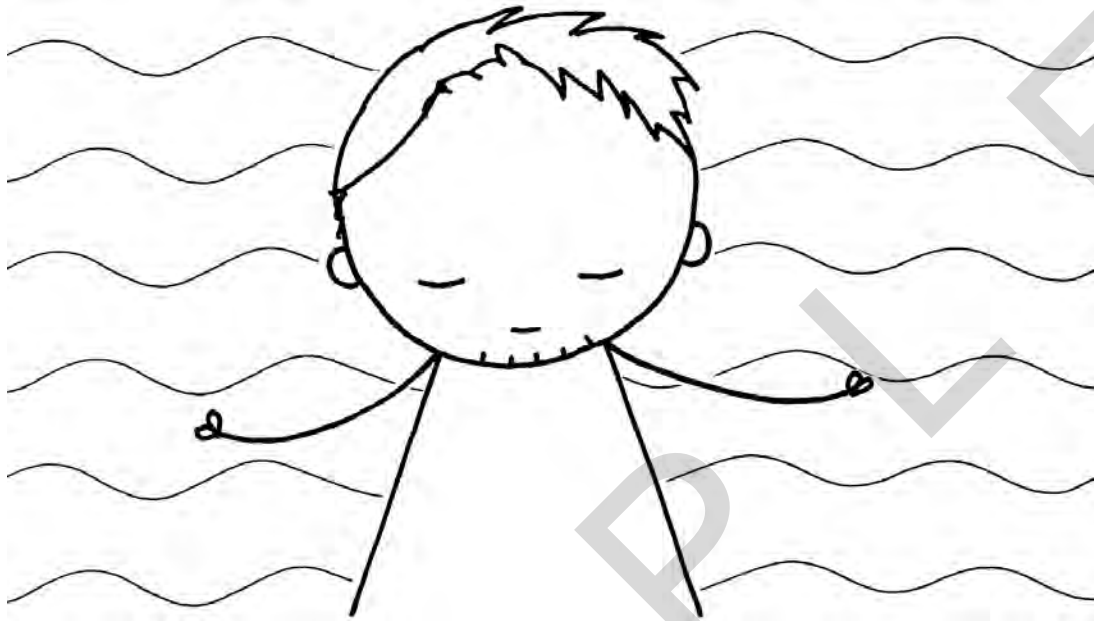


lonely,



or in pain.

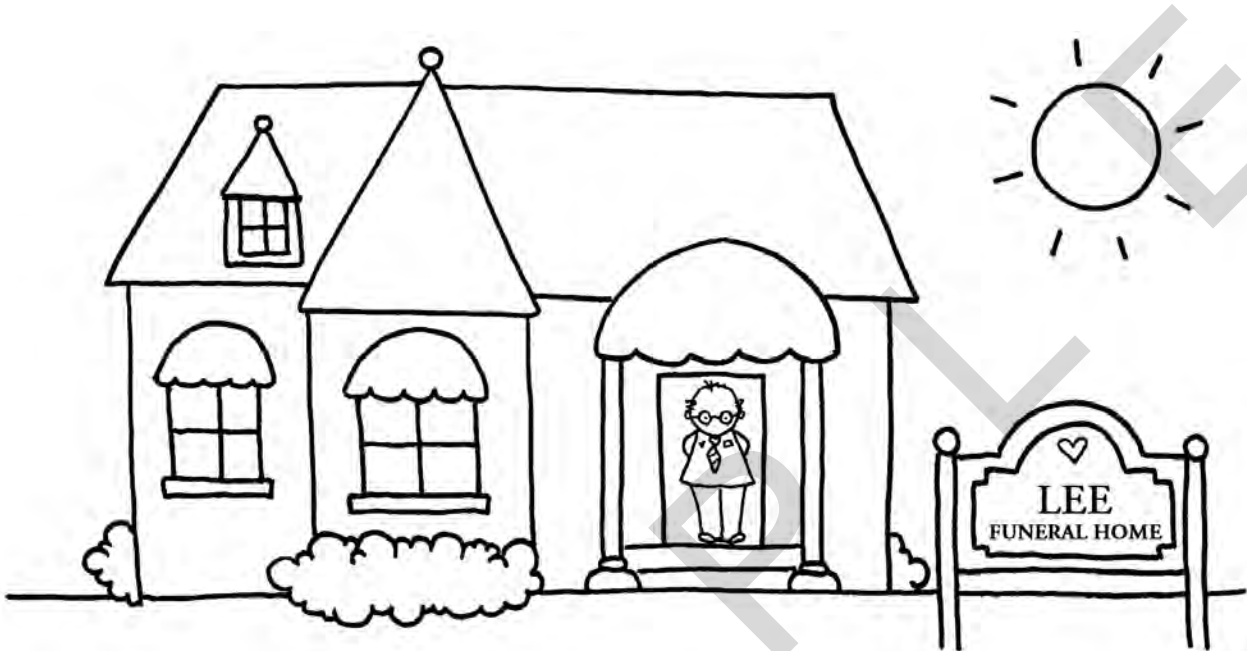
When someone dies,
they are not uncomfortable at all.



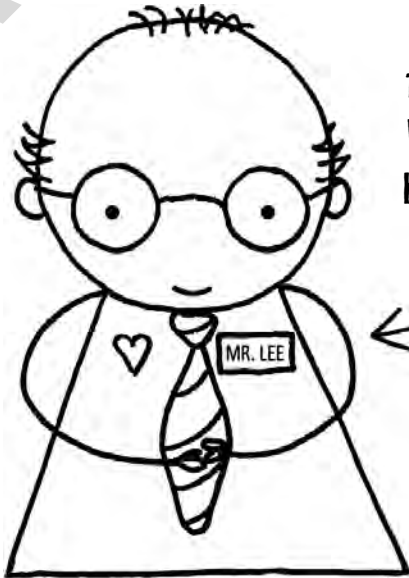
When someone dies, they are gone forever.
They cannot come back to life.



When someone dies, they don't need their body anymore. Most families call a funeral home.



The funeral director gets the body ready for the “funeral,” an event where people can say goodbye to the person who died.



(Mr. Lee is the funeral director at Lee Funeral Home, he was really nice)

Some families bury the body in a special box (a “coffin” or “casket”) in a grave at the cemetery.

A gravestone is put on the grave.



Some families turn the body to ashes (“cremation”).

The ashes can be buried, put in a pretty jar called an “urn,” or scattered in a special place.



Draw, write, or talk it out:

- **Decorate a gravestone for the person who died.**
Write their name, special dates, words, draw pictures, or color/decorate the gravestone in honor of the person.



**“How lucky I am to have something
that makes saying goodbye so hard.”**

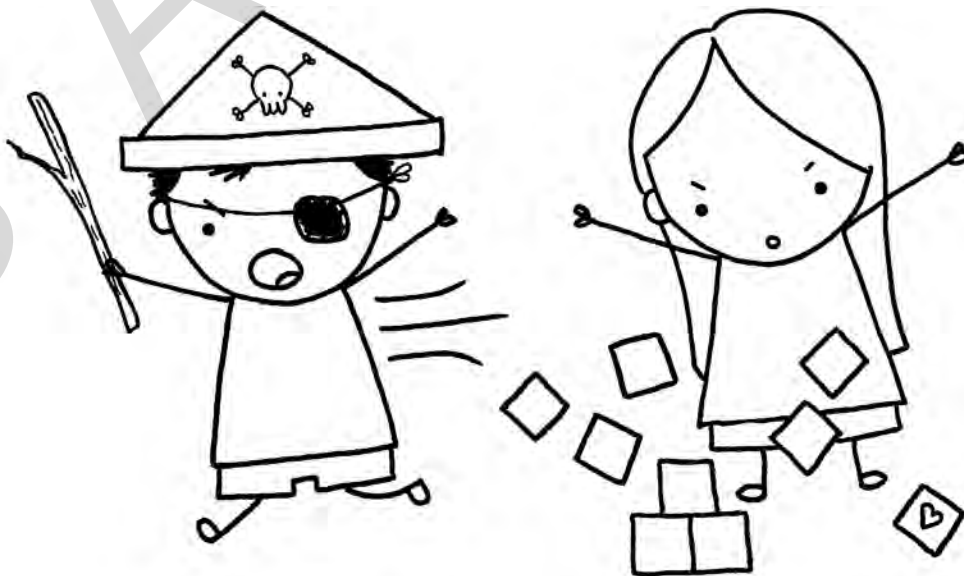
— David Seltzer

Saying Goodbye at the Funeral

Hi, my name is Maya.
My little brother died.
His name was Jay.

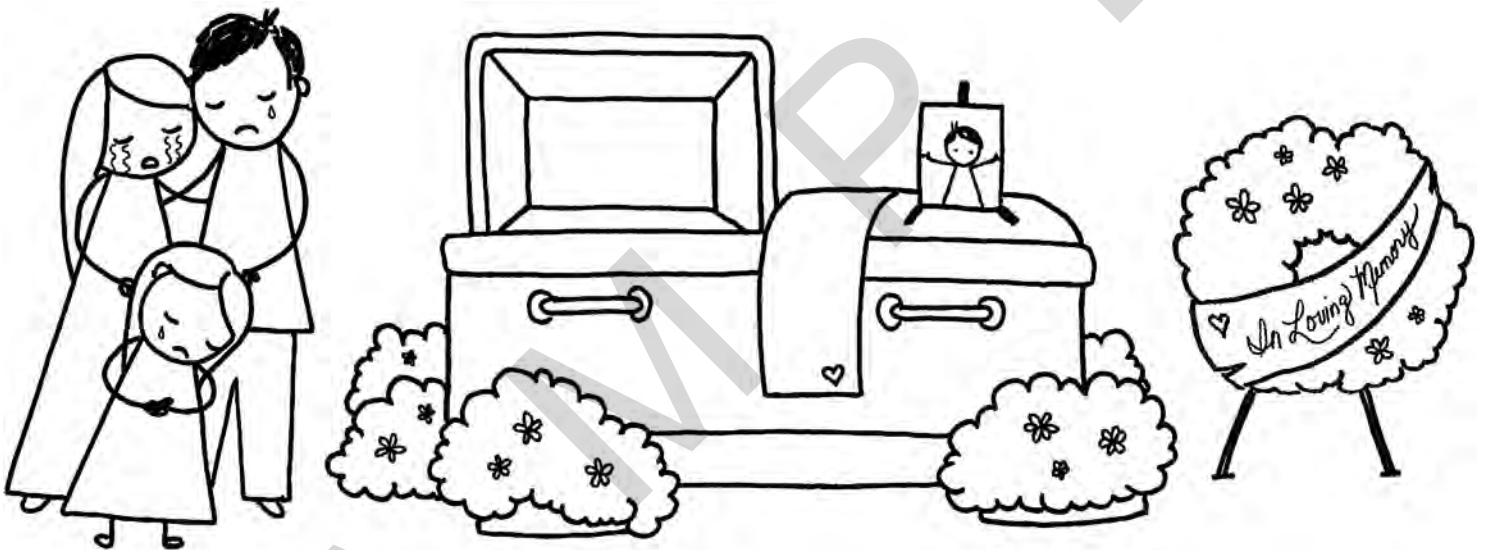


Sometimes Jay could be a *real* pain.
BUT I still loved him. I miss him a lot.



Mom and Dad asked if I wanted to go to the funeral.
I said yes. But my little sister stayed with friends.

At the funeral, Jay's body was in a casket.
The lid was open. The inside looked like a soft bed.



It almost looked like Jay was asleep.
But I knew he was not sleeping. I knew he had died.

I said goodbye one last time.
Then Aunty Meena took me outside for a walk.

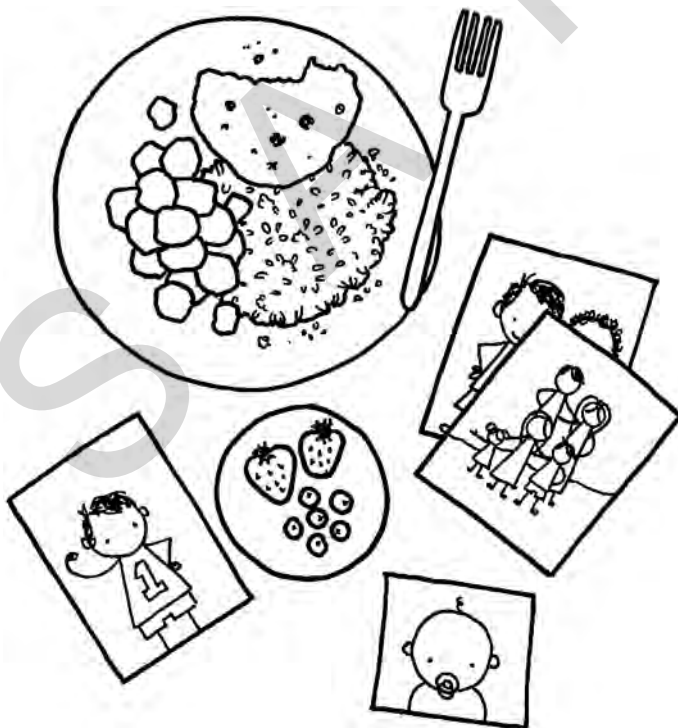
After the funeral, we had a small
“memorial service” at our house.
Some people call this a “celebration of life.”



We shared food and
drinks.

We shared our
favorite stories
about Jay.

We talked, we hugged,
and we cried.



We even laughed when
Dad told Jay's favorite joke.

It felt good to share memories
with people we love.



Draw, write, or talk it out:

- **Answer the questions below.** Ask a grownup if some of your ideas could be used at the funeral. This could be a way for you to be a part of the funeral, even if you do not go.*

- **What clothes would you pick for the person to wear?**

- **What music would you play?**

- **What is the person's favorite story or poem?**

- **What did you love most about the person?**

* Some families choose to have a funeral. Some do not. Some have a big celebration of life. Some prefer a quiet way to say goodbye. Your family will decide what works best.

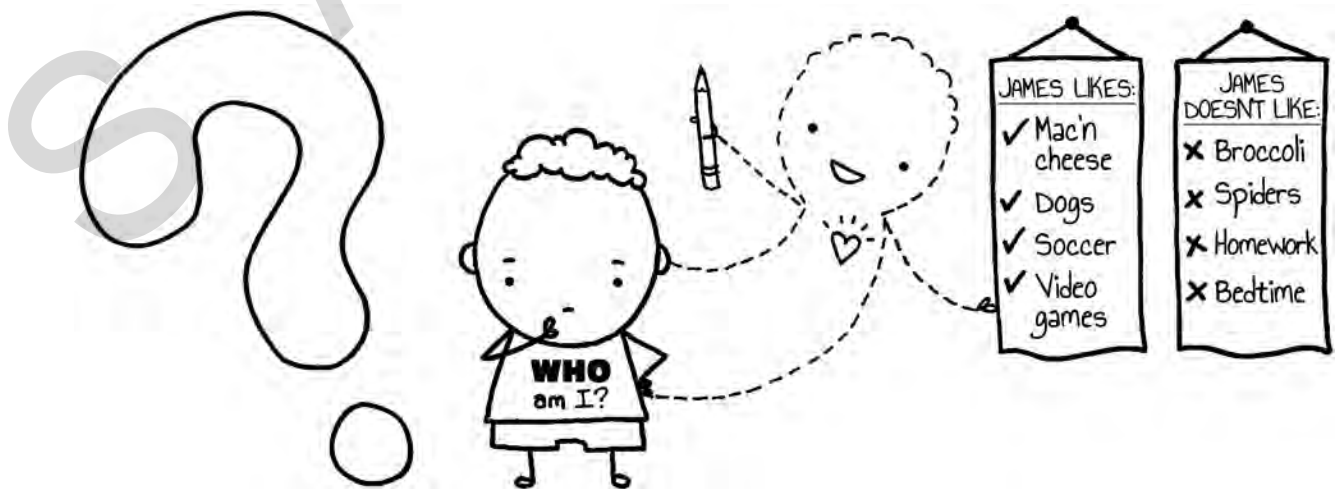
If your family does not have a funeral, you can still plan a simple memorial at home. Set up the person's picture, get flowers, play their favorite music, read their favorite story, or say something nice about them as a way to say goodbye.

What Happens to Someone After They Die?

Everyone has different beliefs about what happens to a person *after* they die.



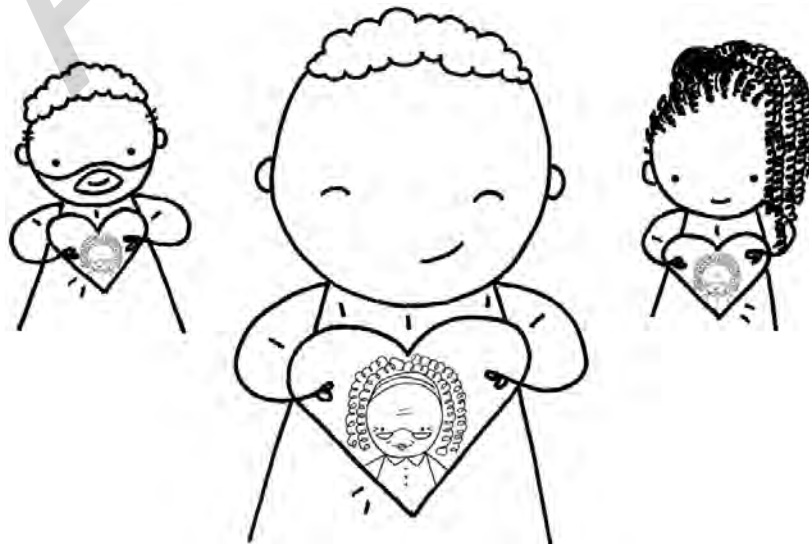
Some people think we all have a “soul” or “spirit.” They think our soul is separate from our body and is what makes us...*us*.



Some people think a person's soul lives on after their body dies.



Others think the person who died lives on in our memories and our hearts.



Draw, write, or talk it out:

- **Talk to a grownup.** Ask your grownup what they believe happens to a person after they die. Now, what do YOU believe? Draw a picture, write it down, or talk about it.

**“Time for me to go now, I won’t say goodbye;
Look for me in rainbows, way up in the sky.
In the morning sunrise when all the world is new,
Just look for me and love me, as you know I loved you.”**

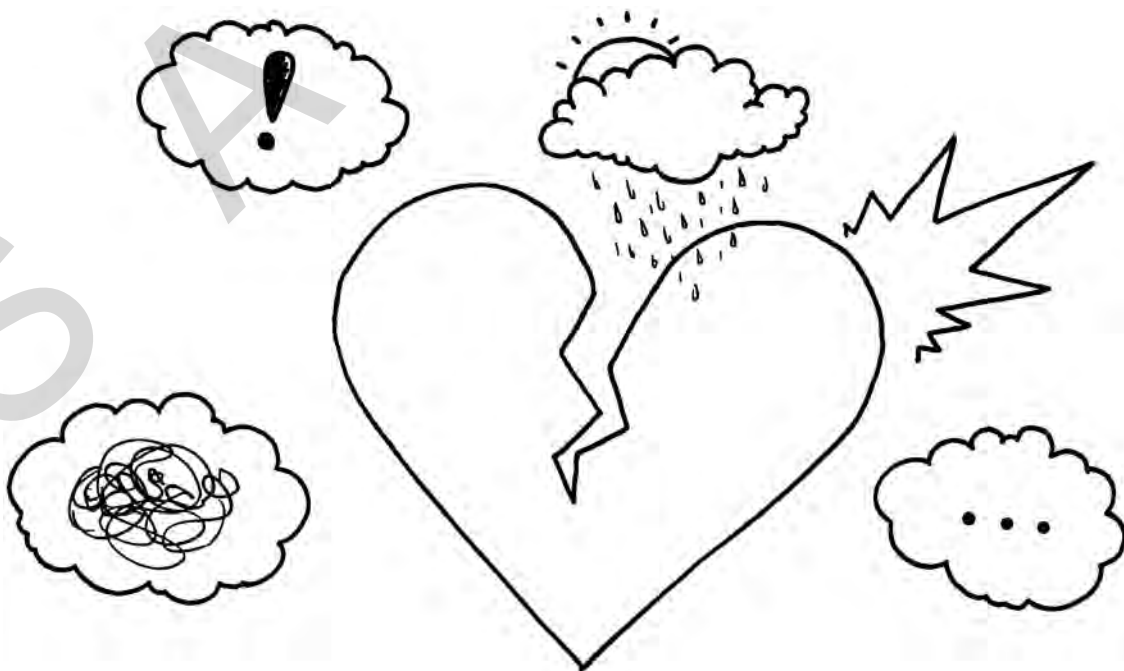
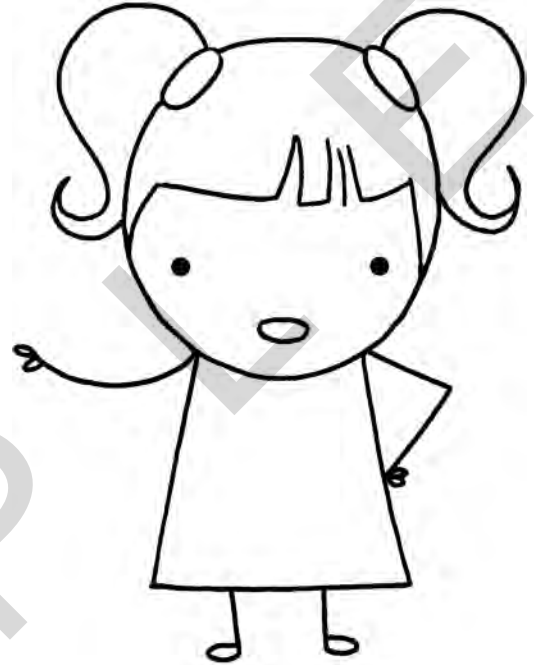
— Vicki Brown

What Is Grief?

You might have all kinds of feelings when someone in your life dies.

This is called “grief” or “grieving.”

Feeling grief is normal when someone who was a part of your life is gone.



You might...



...feel sad...



...feel mad...



...get a headache
or bellyache...



...not feel hungry...



...not sleep...



...feel numb...



...cry a lot...

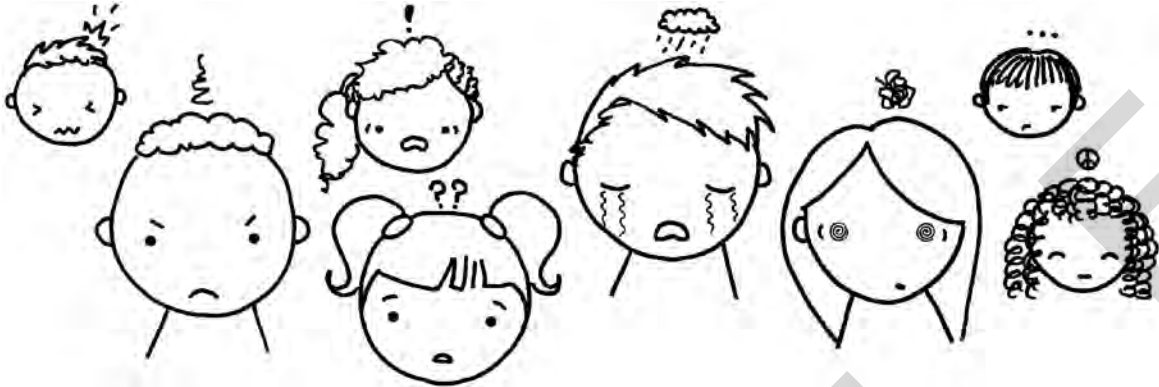
-OR-



...you might feel fine.

It's okay to feel however you feel!

The people around you might be grieving, too.



Just know that everyone grieves in their own way.

Sometimes, grief might feel really hard to handle.



Other times, grief will seem easier to handle.



And everybody grieves in their own time.

Some people grieve for a short time.



And some people grieve for a long time.

The first year of grief can be hard.
There might be big (or small) changes in your life.

And holidays or other special days might
remind you of the person who died.

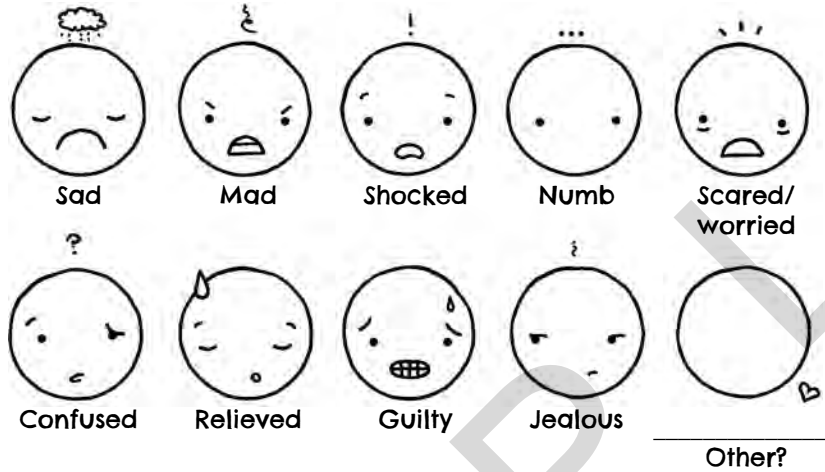


It's normal for strong grief feelings to come back.
But there are ways to deal with these
feelings when they hit you.



Draw, write, or talk it out:

- **What grief feelings have you felt?** Color the faces of the feelings you've felt below. Circle the face that shows how you feel now.



- **What changes were there in your life after the person died?**
Examples: You moved, someone else has to take you to school, mealtimes are different, or people around you are sad. Sort them into BIG CHANGES and small changes below.

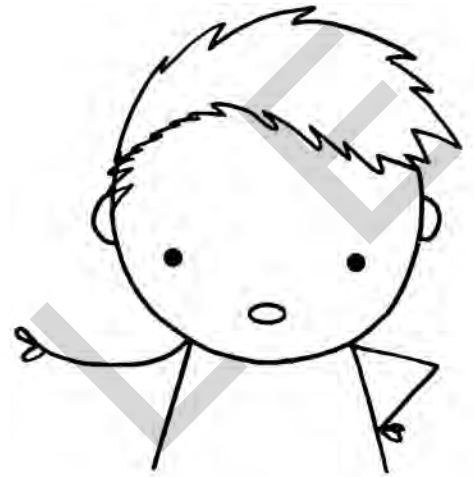
BIG CHANGES

small changes

- **Make a list of special days that might remind you of the person who died.** This can help prepare you for strong feelings on these days. This could be a birthday, the day they died, their favorite holiday, or any special day. Ask a grownup to mark these days on a calendar. See if you can do something on (or around) these days, like go to a park, see a movie, or do something special to remember the person (see page 35).

Dealing with Grief

When it's hard to handle your grief feelings, it might help to...



Everyone has their own way of dealing with grief.
As long as it is not harmful,
there is no wrong or right way!

Draw, write, or talk it out:

- **Look at all the ways Daniel suggests dealing with grief.**
Circle ones you think you'd try.
- **Start a journal.** Write your name at the top of the next page. Ask a grownup to make a bunch of copies and staple them together for you. Fill out one page each day (or every few days, or once a week). After a while, look back through your journal. What changed? What is the same?
- **What else could you do to handle tough feelings of grief?**
Draw or write it out below, or talk to a grownup.

's

Name

Journal

Today's date is...

Today I felt...



The best part about today was...

The hardest part about today was...

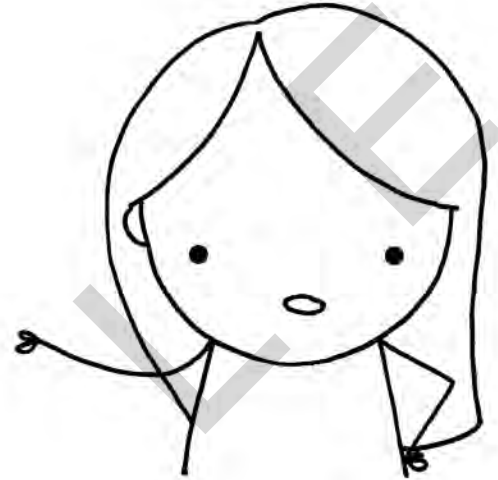
Today I'm grateful for...

Word, quote, thought, or drawing of the day...

Keeping Memories Alive

One day, you might worry you will forget the person who died.

Sometimes you'll try to remember stuff like...



...the sound of their voice,

their favorite song,



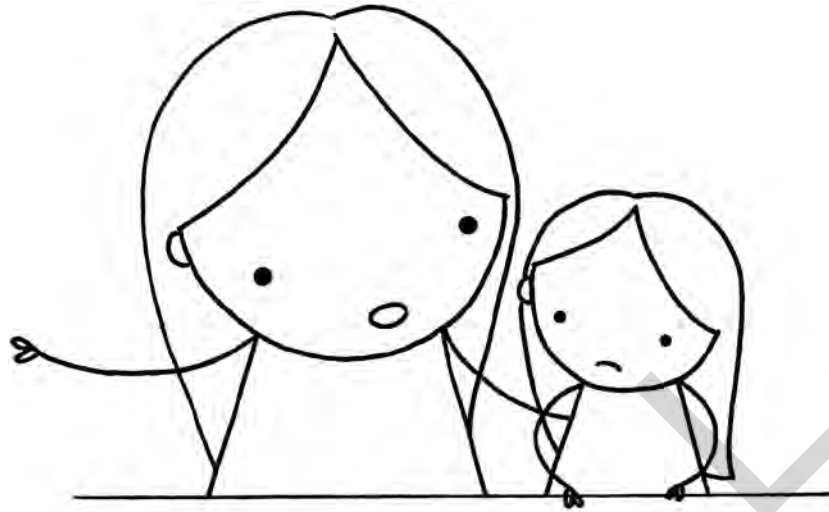
the shows they watched,

or the exact color of their eyes...

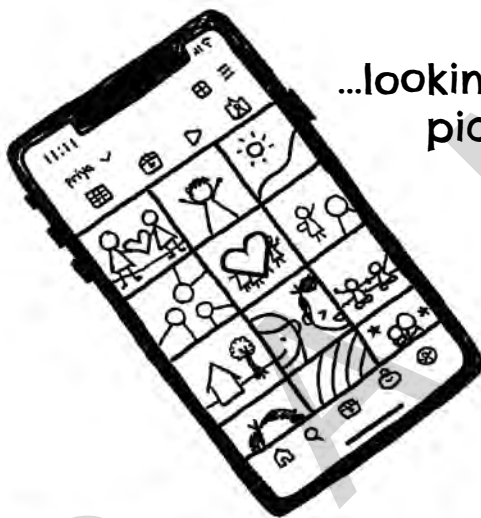


...but you might not be able to remember!

Mom tells me not to worry if that happens.



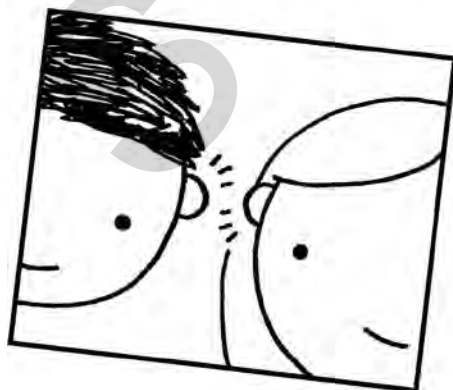
We talk about other ways we can keep Jay's memory alive, like...



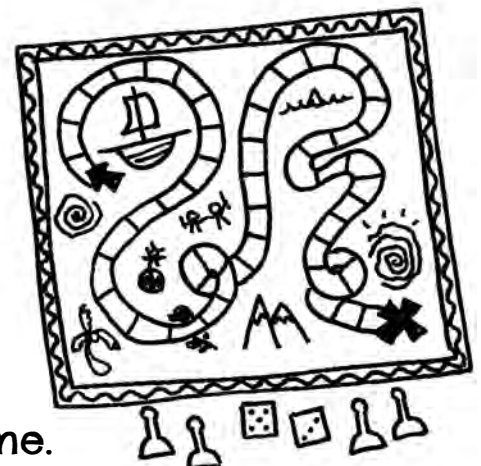
...looking through pictures,



wearing his favorite T-shirt,



remembering we had the same ears,



or playing his favorite board game.

Activities to remember your special person:

The next pages list a few ideas to keep the memory of your loved one alive. Ask a grownup if you need help!

- Make a memory box.
 - **Decorate an empty box** (like a shoebox or cereal box). You could use markers, wrapping paper, magazine clippings, glue, glitter, stickers, etc.
 - **Write (or draw) memories of the person** on small pieces of paper, such as:
 - * Funny or memorable stories
 - * The person's favorite joke
 - * Something the person always said
 - * A word that describes the person
 - * Things the person liked
 - **Collect the memories in the box.**
 - **Add things that remind you of the person,** such as:
 - * Something the person wore (like glasses or earrings)
 - * Something the person collected or treasured
 - * Pictures
 - * Items from places the person went (like a concert ticket or a travel brochure)
 - * Cloth or paper sprayed with their favorite scent
 - **What else would you add to the box?** Make a list below:

- Pick a special day (or days) to celebrate the person.
 - **Pick any day.** Some pick the day the person died. But you can celebrate on the person's birthday, another anniversary, or any of the special days you marked on the calendar (from page 28).

- **What day(s) would you pick to celebrate the person?**

- **Make plans** to do something to remember the person on that day. You can do things like:
 - * Take out the memory box and go through the memories.
 - * Display a photo of the person who died on special days.
 - * Leave an empty chair at the dinner table for special meals (like a holiday dinner) or at a special event (like a wedding) for the person who died.
 - * Play the person's favorite music.
 - * Cook/eat the person's favorite meal or dessert.
 - * Plant the person's favorite flower.
 - * Light a candle.
 - * Visit the person's grave, the place where their ashes were scattered, or any place that reminds you of them.

- **What things would you do to celebrate the person?**

- Pick a symbol (or symbols) that reminds you of the person.
 - **Pick any symbol**, like a heart, a butterfly, a music note, an animal, a number, a logo, a team mascot — anything!
 - * **What symbol would you pick?** Write it here or draw it in the space below. Think of the person anytime you see their symbol.

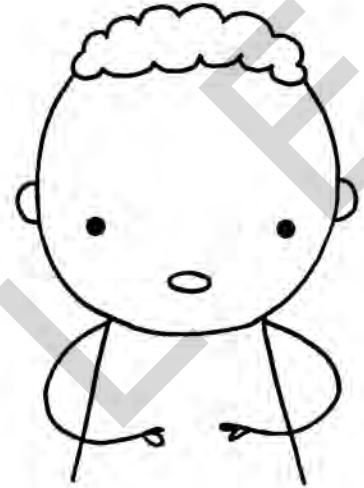
- What else could you do to remember your loved one?
Draw, write, or talk it out.

“One day we will remember how lucky we were to have known their love with wonder, not grief.”

— Elizabeth Postle

In the Future...

Things might seem pretty
crazy right now.



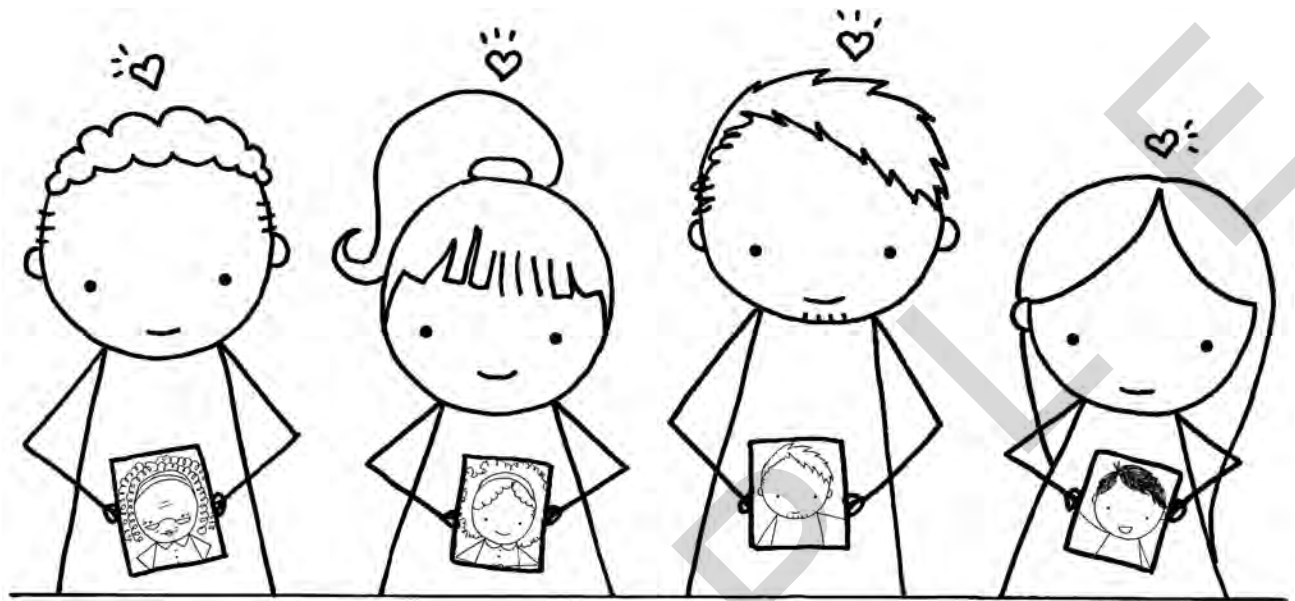
It might seem like life will
never be the same.

The truth is,
life never *will* be the same.



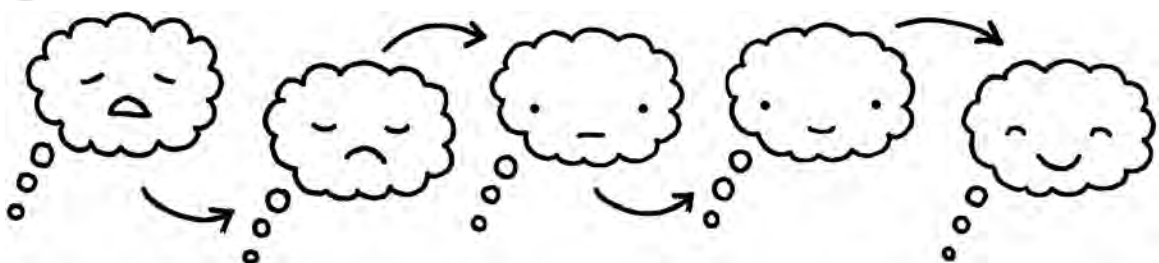
And that's okay!
Life *shouldn't* be the same
after someone special dies.

You will always miss the person who died.
Even when you are a grownup.



It could be hard to believe now,
but it IS possible to get used to a “new life”
without the person who died.

Grief should get easier with time.
It can help to keep drawing, writing, and talking it out.
Then one day, you might find your sad thoughts
have turned into happy thoughts.



You can always honor the person who died by living a life full of LOVE and happiness.

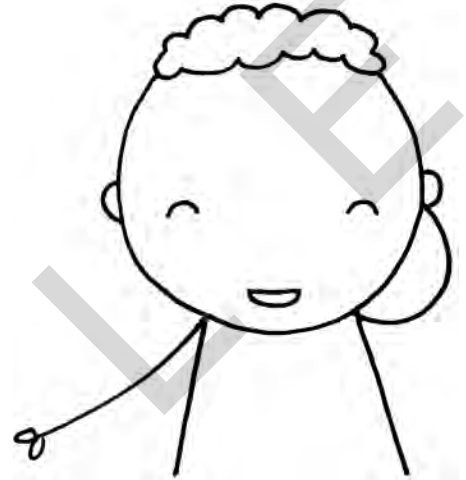


Draw, write, or talk it out:

- **Draw a picture of (or write/talk about) something you hope for in your future.** This could be an event in the near future you are excited about, like a field trip, birthday, playdate, holiday, etc. Or it could be goals for the future, like what you want to be when you grow up, a big trip you'd like to take one day, someone famous you want to meet, etc.

Summing It All Up

I know that was A LOT to read —
but you did it! Just remember:



- **Death is a normal part of the circle of life.**
- **When someone dies they cannot come back to life,** they cannot do anything living things do, but they are not uncomfortable in any way.
- **A funeral is an event that lets people say goodbye** to the person who died.
- **People have different beliefs about what happens after death.** Some think people have a “soul” that lives on after they die. Others think people who have died live on in our memories and hearts.
- **“Grief” is ALL the feelings** you feel when someone who was a part of your life is gone. **There is no right or wrong way to grieve.**
- **There are a lot of ways to deal with hard feelings of grief.** You can play, be creative, take big breaths, hit a pillow, talk to a grownup, or find ways to keep the person’s memory alive, just to name a few ideas.
- **YOU’RE NOT ALONE!** When things feel tough, get help from a grownup you trust. There are other kids who have had someone in their life die, too. Your grownup can talk to the people who gave you this booklet to see if there are “support groups” where you can meet them.
- **Grief will get easier with time,** but you will *always* miss the person who died. Honor them by living a happy life filled with love.

“Be the things you loved most about
the people who are gone.”

— Unknown



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