

Therapy To Heal Hurting Children

Drawing: Young children may need to “talk” by drawing pictures of how they feel. These pictures can be saved in a notebook or a large photo album and the child can look at them whenever they need to process more of what they are feeling. This also opens the door for you to discuss how they feel when they tell you about their picture. Please allow them to have times when they draw but don’t want to discuss it with you. In time they will, but don’t force it. Remember, this is a way to work toward the healing, not something more to pressure them.

Puppets: Many times a child can talk through a puppet when they won’t just open up to tell you what they are feeling. I personally think it’s best if you let them pick out puppets of whatever they like. They can play alone with the puppets or they may ask you to take a puppet and play along. Let them bring the subject up and don’t try to steer the conversation. You will get more information about where they are in the grieving process and what they think about it by allowing play to be spontaneous.

Movie time: Watch movies that may open up the conversation comfortably, such as Winnie the Pooh’s Grand Adventure. In this movie Tigger gets lost and they talk about how they feel when they cannot find their friend, Tigger. Ask a local movie rental store or librarian if they have some suggestions for age appropriate movies that may be helpful.

Pets: A pet is a perfect “healing tool” for a child. Even my 16 year-old would curl up on her bed with her cat when she was having hard days. Pets seem to be the right ‘fit’ no matter what the age, & tests have proven that pets are great therapy. Even something like a Gerbil is very effective.

Collections: Help them start a collection of something, or a variety of things, that remind them of the loved one. This needs to be a project they do, so only help when asked, and don’t ‘take it over’ by adding things to the collection on your own. *They need to know this project is theirs alone.*

Huggers: Here’s another any-age aid... Give them a stuffed animal that once belonged to the deceased, or one that reminds them of that person, so they can have something to hug when they hurt most. Another neat idea is to take one of their shirts & sew the bottom closed, stuff it and then sew the sleeves and neck closed. Sleeves can be sewn in a decorative fashion across the front, if desired. This can be stuffed with stuffing or with a pillow and be used to sleep on or to cuddle at night.

Resources: *Fred Rogers has some videos and booklets that you can order. Check with your local funeral home and see if they have “loaner” copies- many funeral homes keep a few in stock for this purpose. I got a booklet from our local funeral home called “Talking With Young Children About Death” that was free for the taking. The video that accompanies it is called ‘Mister Rogers Talks About Living and Dying.’ He also has a book called ‘When A Pet Dies’ & an activity book called ‘So Much to Think About- When Someone You Care About Has Died’ For more resources go to www.misterrogers.org*

You can also find suggested play therapy books, story books, books for teens, young adults and also books for caregivers to help a child through a death by suicide on the road2healing web site. Go to www.road2healing.com/booksC.html