

NAVIGATING BACK-TO-SCHOOL WITH GRIEF

SandCastles Grief Support Program for Children & Families



Times of change and transition can be especially difficult for grieving children and families. Back to school season is no exception, whether your child finds comfort in the routine and support school provides or is struggling with the anxiety and stress of returning to school.

Grief can work as a "magnifier" to existing behaviors. For instance, if a child was worried about fitting in this school year, their worry may be elevated wondering how they will now fit in being the child without a dad. Grief can even impact the youngest students, starting their very first days of school, who are riddled with separation anxiety even without a loss. Teens and older children can experience difficulty concentrating or remembering assignments after a death.

If the death happened over the summer, ask your child what they would like shared with their teachers and peers. School professionals are equipped to help support grieving students and make a difference in your child's life academically and can help them to feel understood.

You know your child best and know what behaviors were present before the death and those that are just part of the child's personality. It's easy to worry about our children and how they are coping. Because grief is so unique to the individual, there is no "normal" in grief, but there are things to look out for. Keep watch on the intensity and duration of your child's behaviors. If your child displays emotions or behaviors that seem intense or worry you because of the length of time they've presented, reach out to a professional to check in.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

My child insists they're "fine," but I am worried about them. How do I communicate with them?

Try a journal or notebook. Have your child pick out a blank notebook and instruct them to keep it somewhere where you both know it is at. Encourage them to put thoughts, worries, and questions down knowing that when they are away, you will read it and respond. This helps take the pressure off them worrying about watching your reaction and can help them open up to you.

I'm already feeling overwhelmed! What can I do to make the year easier?

Pace yourself. The back to school season brings about a lot of changes at once. For some, school schedules include sports, dance, music, or church activities. Is there anything you can skip or take your time with in the first two weeks back? Are there things you can say "no" to and just relax? Find those moments and know that you are not alone. Ask for help when you need it.

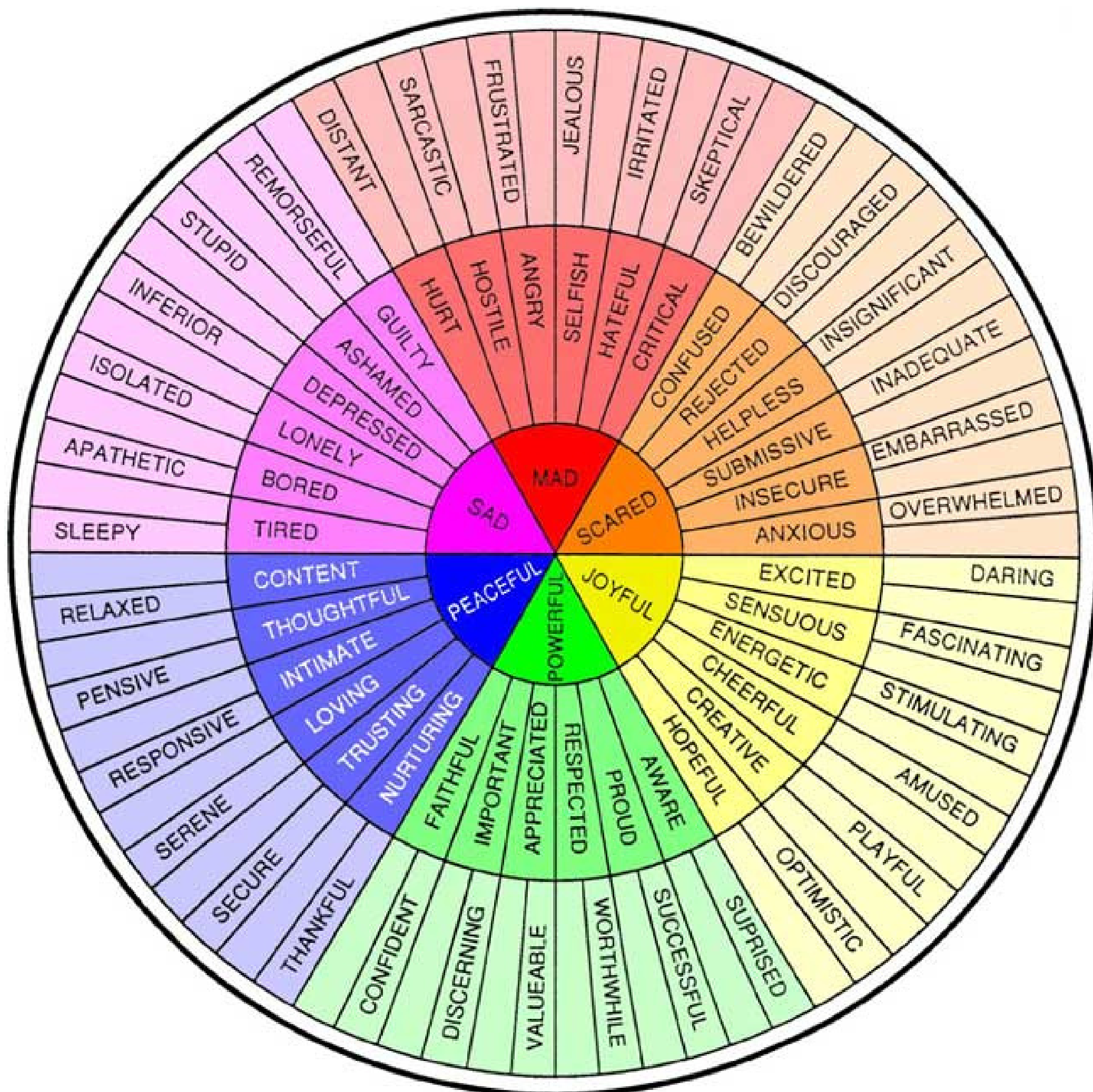
For more grief resources or additional support, please call us at (313) 771-7005 or visit our website:
www.aboutsandcastles.org.

MY FEELINGS PIE

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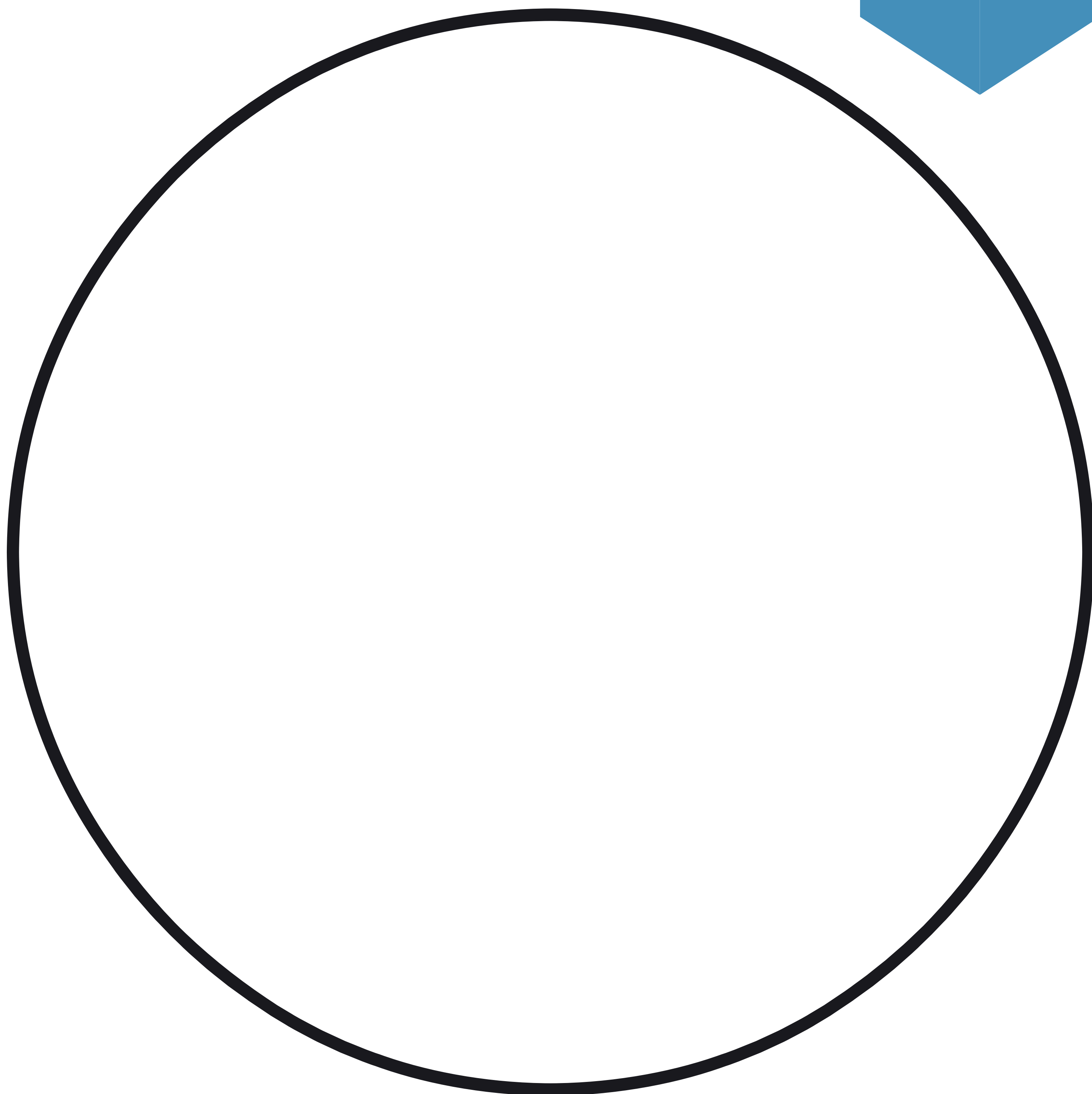
It's normal to feel many different feelings in our grief journey. Take a moment to think of each of the feelings you've felt since your special person died. Has each feeling happened often? Have some not happened much at all? While thinking of the feelings, assign a color to each. You are then going to construct a "pie" chart using those feelings as your guide. Make each feeling a piece of the pie - making feelings you feel a lot in your grief journey the bigger slices and the feelings you don't feel as often smaller. Remember that all feelings in grief are normal and OK, it is what we choose to do with those feelings that matters. When you're finished, take a look at your feelings pie and reflect on each part of your grief journey.



Use this chart to think of different emotions. When you're ready to construct your pie, turn to the next page and begin.

MY FEELINGS PIE

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Feeling/Color Key

FAMILY TABLE TOPICS:

BACK TO SCHOOL

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Sometimes, after a death, it can be harder to connect as a family. What do we talk about? Maybe it's hard to find the time. You may feel worried about one of your family members but aren't sure how to check in with them. We recommend using these questions at the dinner table. Take time to eat together and use that time to share these questions and the answers to them with each other. If you're unable to set aside time to eat together every day, find times throughout your week to talk with your family and actively listen.

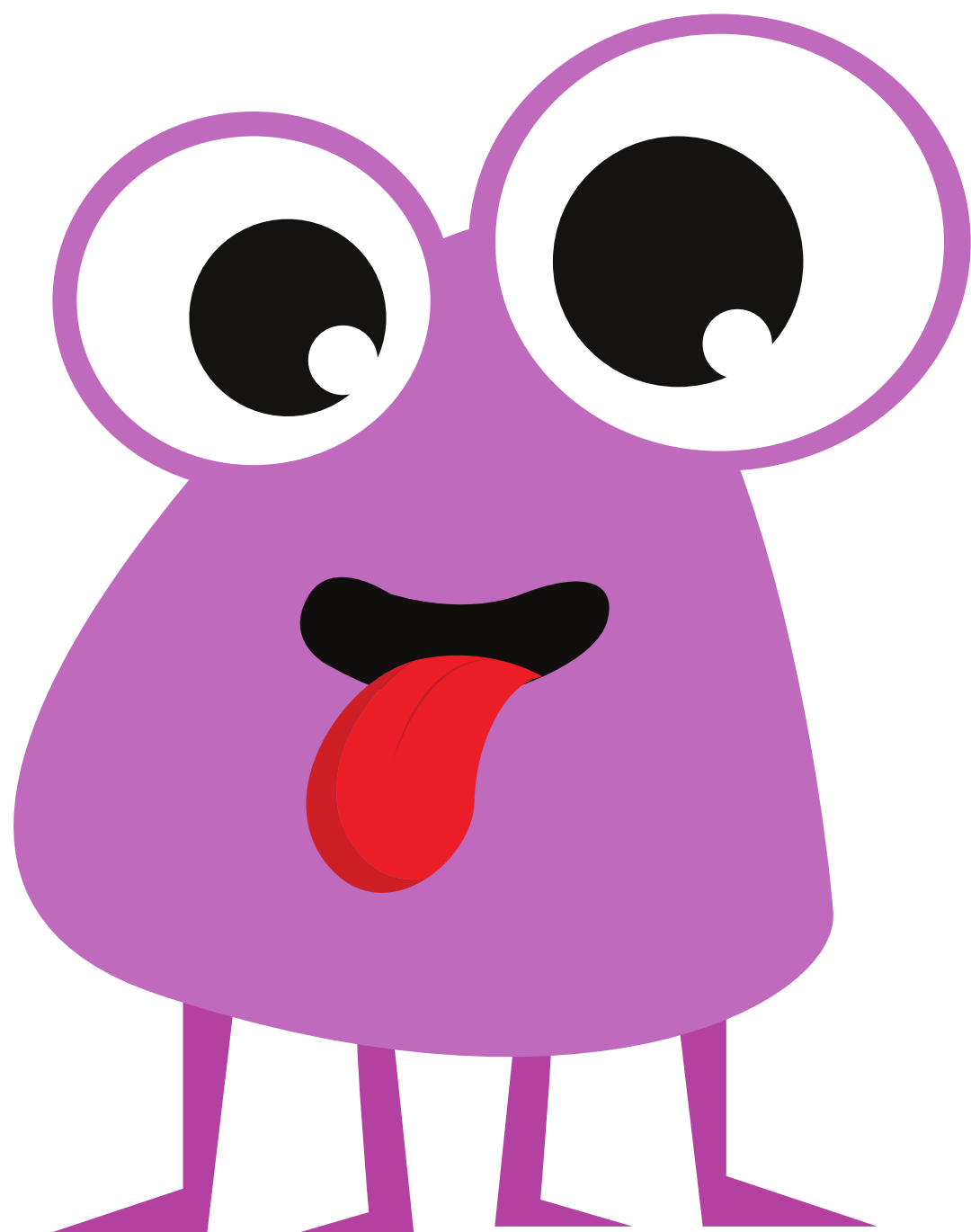
- What is your favorite memory of _____?
- If you could say something now to them, what would you say?
- Who in the family has a similar personality to them?
- What do you wish they knew about you today?
- What was the best time you ever had with them?
- What special story can you share about them?
- What will be the most difficult thing you have to do this school year without them?
- What can you do to feel close to your loved one?
- What are some of your favorite meals, dishes, or heirlooms that have been passed down through the family?
- Do you have a favorite travel or vacation story with them?
- What was the best time you ever had with them?
- What is a funny memory of _____?
- What was their favorite food?
- What special touch did they add to dinner/meal time?
- If they were here, what would be different?
- What will you always remember about them?
- What are you looking forward to this school year?
- Discuss a tradition (old or new) that you'd like your family to continue.

WORRY MONSTER

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After we experience a death, it is normal to feel worried or nervous about losing people we care about. Keeping those worries trapped inside can make the worries feel bigger! Get your worries out by feeding them to your own Worry Monster, who will help to eat the worries away.



INSTRUCTIONS

You'll need a few supplies to make this activity:

- Scissors
- Paper
- A small box or jar
- Tape or glue
- Crayons/colored pencils

Start by cutting one of the monsters provided out of this sheet (or create your own on a scrap piece of paper!).

Tape or glue your worry monster to a small box, jar, or even a paper bag. You can decorate your box/jar/bag however you'd like.

Take some paper and write down your worries. Once you have them down, it's time to feed them to your monster! If the pieces seem too large, you can tear them into bite-size, smaller snacks for your monster. Continue to feed your monster when you have worries.

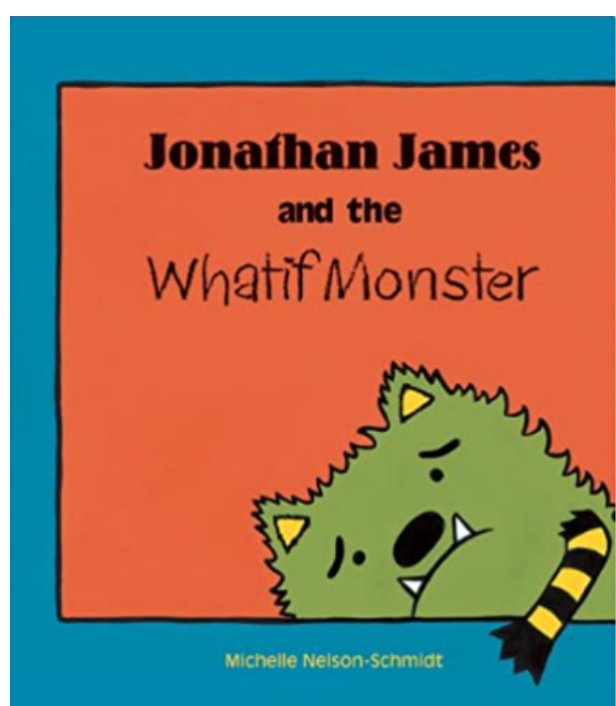
Every couple weeks, empty your monster's tummy and read your worries with a trusted adult. This makes room for more worries.

BOOKS FOR COPING WITH LOSS & DIFFICULT EMOTIONS

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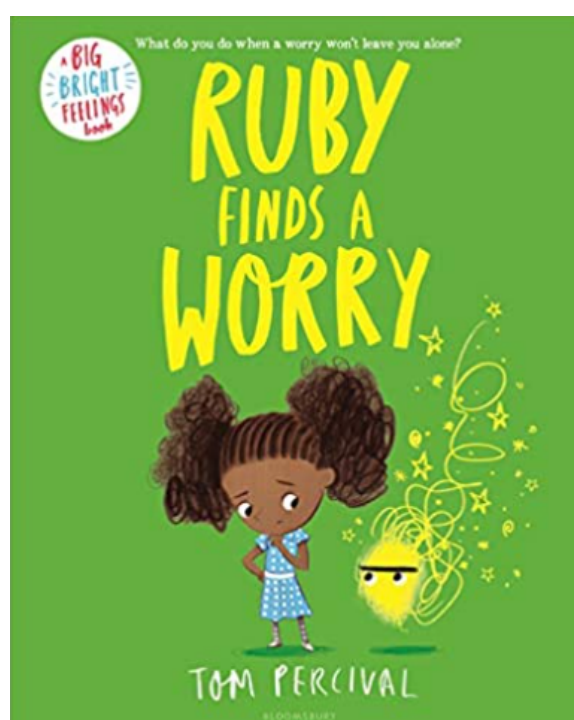
Here are some great book recommendations dealing with emotions and topics that may come up during this back-to-school season. Scan the QR code on your phone's camera to access a video reading of each story. Watch the video with your children or use the video to determine if it's a book you want to purchase and read together often.



Jonathan James and the Whatif Monster
by Michelle Nelson-Schmidt
Topics: Worries, confidence, and anxiety.



Life is like the Wind
by Shonna Innes
Topics: Grief, explaining death to children.



Ruby Finds a Worry
by Tom Percival
Topics: Worries, coping, and empathy.



The Magical Yet
by Angela Deterlizzi
Topics: Resiliency, hope, and healing.

Recommendations for teens and young adults:

- Fire in my Heart, Ice in my Veins by Enid Samuel-Traisman
- Sometimes Life Sucks by Molly Carlile
- The Night Diary by Veera Hiranandani