



Children Can Learn to Cope with Grief
written by Marge Heegaard to be illustrated by children

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE NUMBER _____ AGE _____

*With special thanks to the James R. Thorpe Foundation who made this book
and other resources possible through a grant to the Minnesota Coalition For Terminal
Care for Project S.S.A.D. (Someone Special And Death)*

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ISBN-13: 978-0-9620502-0-6

ISBN-10: 0-9620502-0-2

WOODLAND PRESS
99 WOODLAND CIRCLE
MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55424
(952) 926-2665

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

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This book is written for grieving children and is dedicated to my three sons who were 9, 10 and 12 when their father died.

HOW ADULTS CAN HELP CHILDREN COPE WITH DEATH AND GRIEF

It is often helpful for adults to seek additional support and education to understand their own grief process and model a healthy reaction to loss by expressing their feelings and receiving support. Children will generally learn their response to loss from adults in the family.

Children may feel frightened and insecure because they sense the grief and stress of others, and feel powerless to help. They will need additional love, support and structure in their daily routine.

When someone dies, children often worry about themselves and others dying. They need to know who would take care of them in the unlikely death of both parents.

They need an adequate explanation of the cause of death, using correct terms like die and dead. Vague terms and trying to shield them from the truth merely adds confusion. Avoid terms that associate going away, sleep, or sickness with death. Listen carefully to a child's response.

Children have magical thinking and may believe that their behavior or thoughts can cause or reverse death.

Do not exclude children when family or friends come to comfort grieving adults. Avoidance or silence teaches children that death is a taboo subject. Children need to learn how to cope with loss, not be protected from grief.

Help children learn to recognize, name, accept and express feelings to avoid developing unhealthy defenses to cope with difficult emotions. Make physical and creative activities available for energy outlets.

A child may try to protect grieving adults and try to assume the caretaker role, but children need to grow up normally without being burdened with adult responsibilities.

Help children learn to cope with other losses. The death of a pet is a very significant loss for a child. The patterns for coping with loss and grief begin in early childhood and often continue through adulthood.

Share personal religious beliefs carefully. Children may fear or resent a God that takes to heaven someone they love and need.

A child's grief may not be recognized because children express feelings of grief more in behavior than in words. Feelings of abandonment, helplessness, despair, anxiety, apathy, anger, guilt and fear are common and often acted out aggressively because children may be unable to express feelings verbally.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This is a book designed for children, ages 6-12, to illustrate with pictures they choose to draw. Do not make suggestions. They need very few directions or distractions as they use symbols, lines and colors to tell their personal story. It is important that a parent or caring adult be available to read the concepts of each unit, and accept their non-verbal expressions without probing deeply. It is all right to ask them if they can tell you more about a picture to encourage communication.

Focus on their ideas and expressions instead of their drawing ability. This book is intended to be their true story, not a pretty picture book. Listen carefully and be aware that words, adults use, may have several meanings that confuse children. If pictures reveal misconceptions, be gentle with any corrections, recognizing that what a child thinks can be as powerful as what actually happened.

This book was designed to be used just once weekly for 1-1½ hours, but individual needs may vary. The educational concepts are divided into 6 units with specific objectives for each unit. Additional reading is suggested to stress concepts further, and several books are listed in each unit.

Children need to know that this is a book to help them learn about death and the feelings of grief. It cannot be done quickly. It takes time, but it is something they will be able to keep to help them remember someone very special.

Each child will need a basic box of 8 crayons to illustrate their story. Crayons are suggested because they are more effective for expressing various feelings than markers that flow freely, regardless of pressure. Children like to illustrate their books because they naturally think in terms of symbols, instead of words, until sometime between the ages of 9 and 12. Older children may prefer colored pencils and use more words.

Adults may want to work on their own journal or book at this time, recording their own personal feelings, thoughts and memories to share. Children learn to mourn by observing adults. Do not try to protect children from difficult feelings. Help them to understand and express feelings so they will be able to develop coping skills for the natural difficulties of life.

This book was designed to teach children death education, to recognize and express feelings of grief, encourage open communication, and help adults discover unhealthy misconceptions the child may have. The concepts needed to teach the following objectives are included in the following text, but may be stressed further by additional reading suggested.

I. CHANGE IS PART OF LIFE p.1-6

See change as a natural part of growth
Discuss personal change/losses
Identify ways of coping with change
Discuss changes related to death

ADDITIONAL READING

The Very Hungry Caterpillar, E. Carle
Life Times, Mellonie and Ingpen
Who Will Wake Up Spring? S. Lerner

II. DEAD IS THE END OF LIVING p.7-11

Learn basic concepts of death education
Assess understanding of cause of death
Identify personal misconceptions
Accept reality of loss

ADDITIONAL READING

A Look At Death, M. Forrai
Talking About Death, E. Grollman
About Dying, S.B. Stein

III. LIVING MEANS FEELING p.12-18

Learn that all kinds of feelings are o.k.
Begin to recognize/name basic feelings
Encourage acceptance/sharing of feelings
Identify ways to express negative feelings

ADDITIONAL READING

Feelings, Alike
I Was So Mad! M. Mayer
The Colors That I Am, C. Shehan

IV. FEELING BETTER p. 19-22

Identify fears and worries
Recognize individual strengths
Increase confidence and self esteem
Learn ways to communicate concerns

ADDITIONAL READING

What Makes Me Feel This Way? E. LeShan
I Have Feelings, Terry Berger
Someone Special Died, J. Prestine

V. SHARING MEMORIES p.23-27

Discuss painful memories
Identify feelings of being responsible
Recognize losses
Reinforce positive memories

ADDITIONAL READING

Why Did Grampa Die? B. Hazen
When My Dad Died, J. Hammond
Stories From Snowy Meadow, C. Steven

VI. I'M SPECIAL TOO p.28-32

Identify support systems
Describe basic concepts of relationships
Celebrate completion of book
Share memories and feelings with family

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Man About The House, J. Fassler
Sometimes I'm Afraid, J. Fassler
A Taste Of Blackberries, D. Smith

TO GRIEVING CHILDREN:

This is a book written to help you through a difficult time. When someone you love dies, no one can take the loss and pain away. Yet, it does help to learn some facts about death and the feelings of grief, and I hope you will learn it is o.k. to talk about these things.

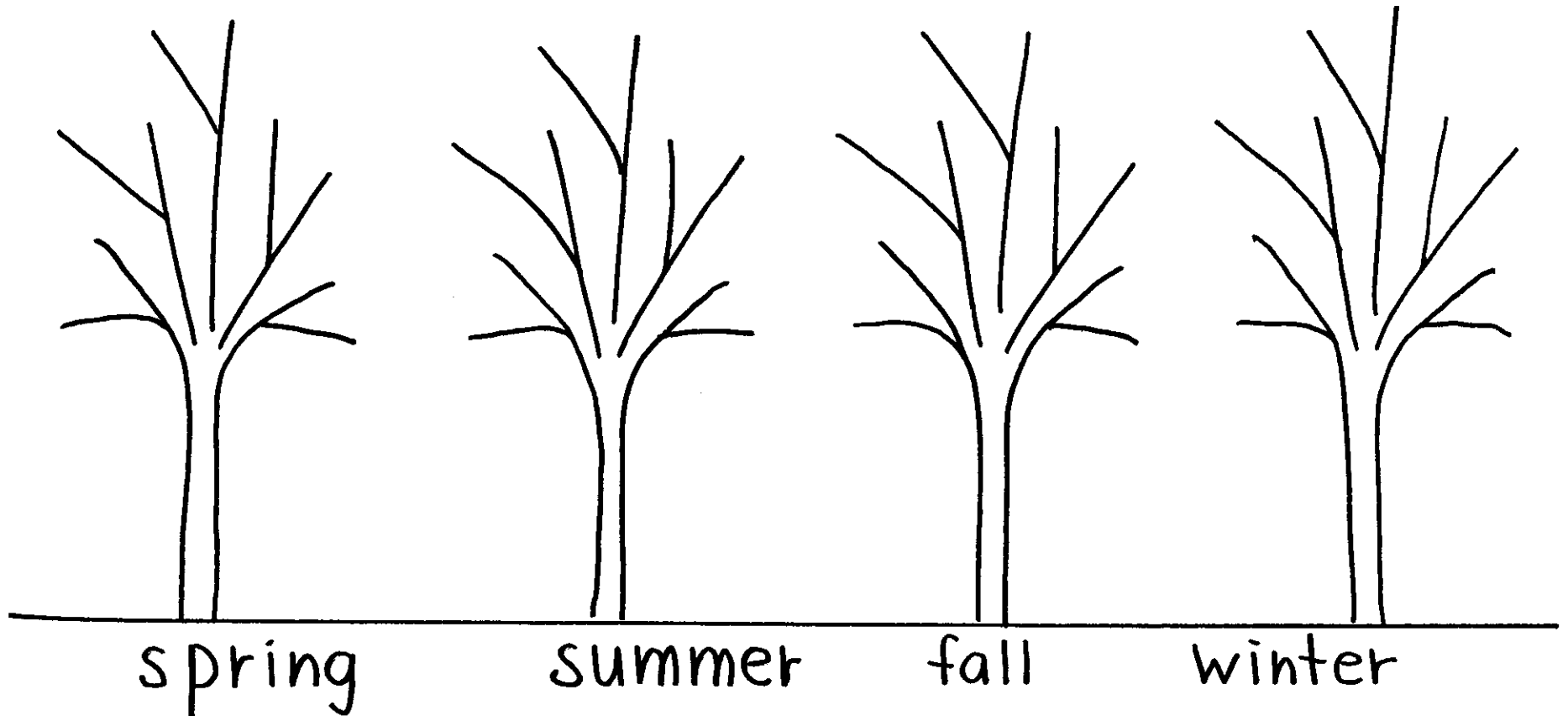
This is not intended to be a book of beautiful pictures. You do not have to be able to draw or color well. You can use colors, lines and shapes and a few words to make pictures that will tell your own personal story.

Do the first four pictures and then take some time to think and talk with someone about what you did before you do the next four.

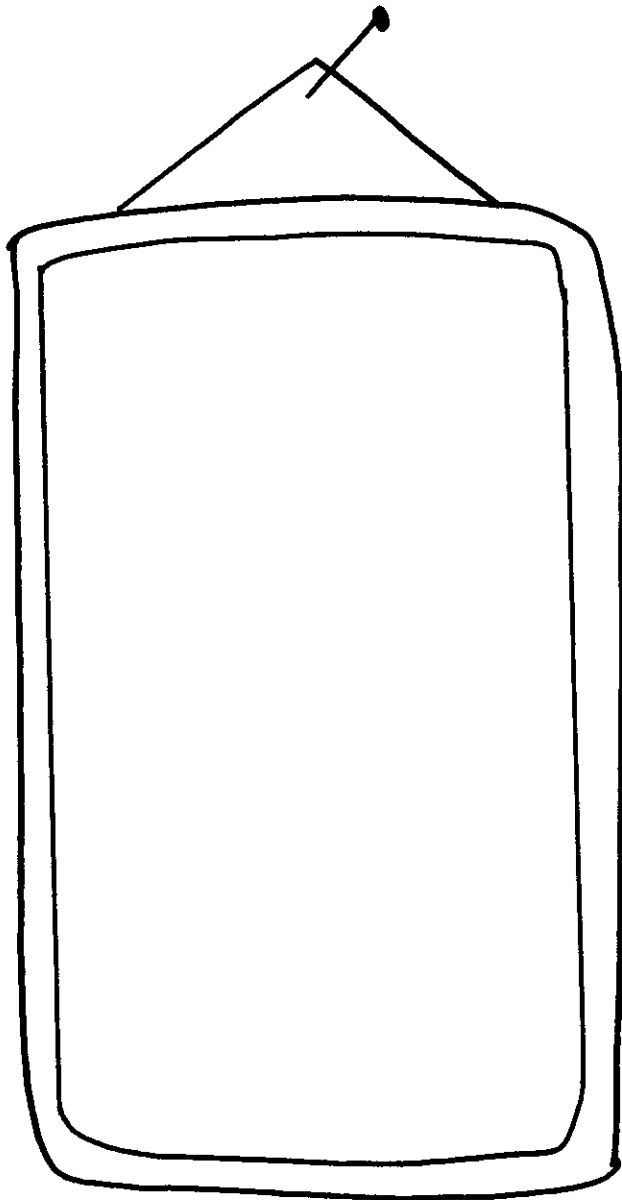
You will want to keep this book in a safe place to read again when you get older, and more able to understand this confusing time.

change is natural. Draw or color some ↓

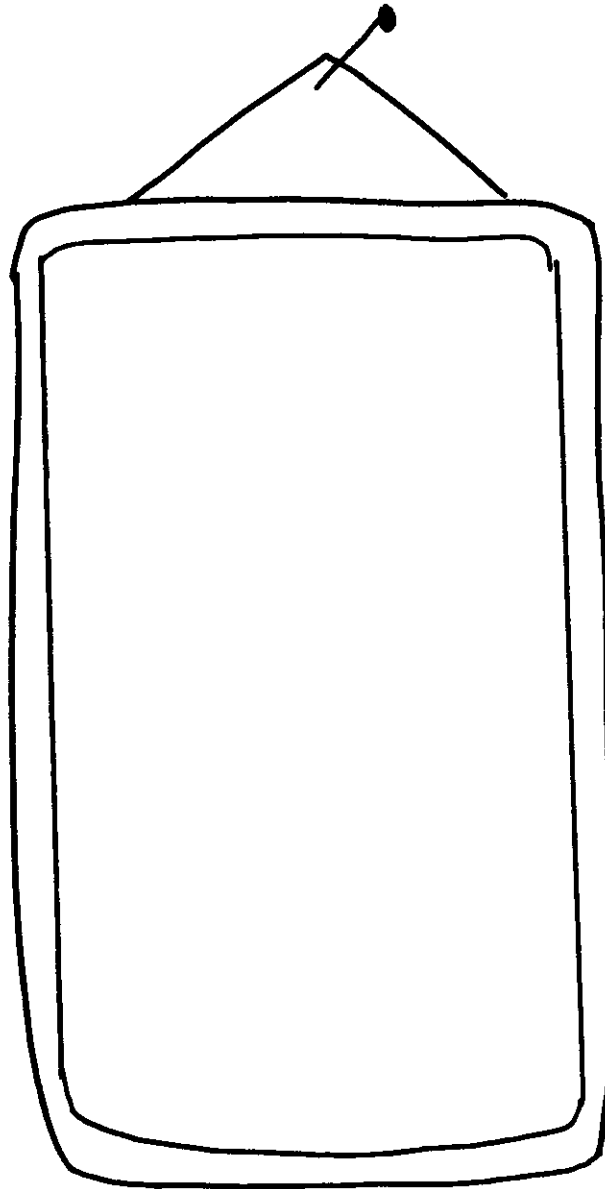
egg → caterpillar → cocoon → Butterfly



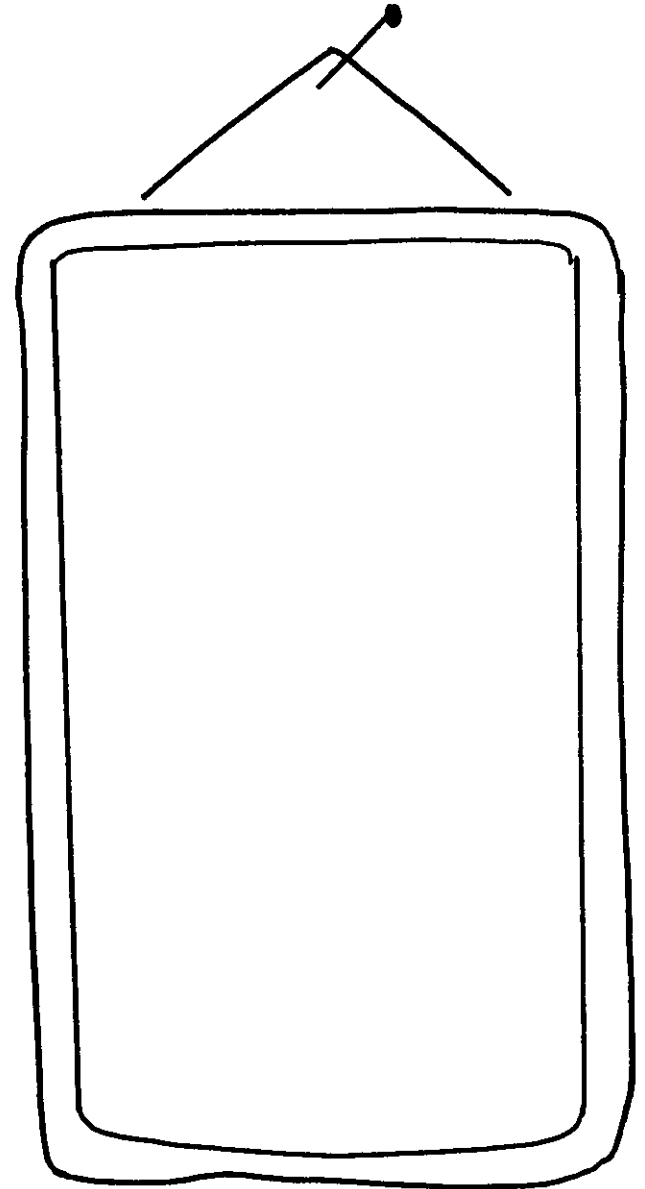
People Change too



Me
"Baby"

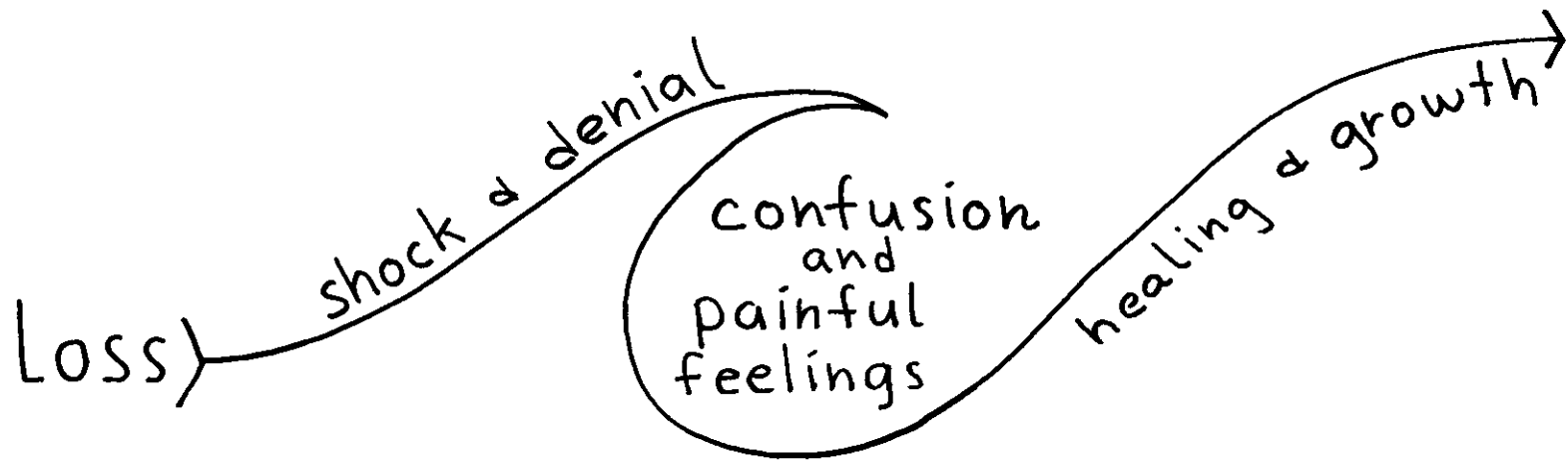


Me
"Now"



Me
"Very old"

Change creates loss
The pain from loss is called grief

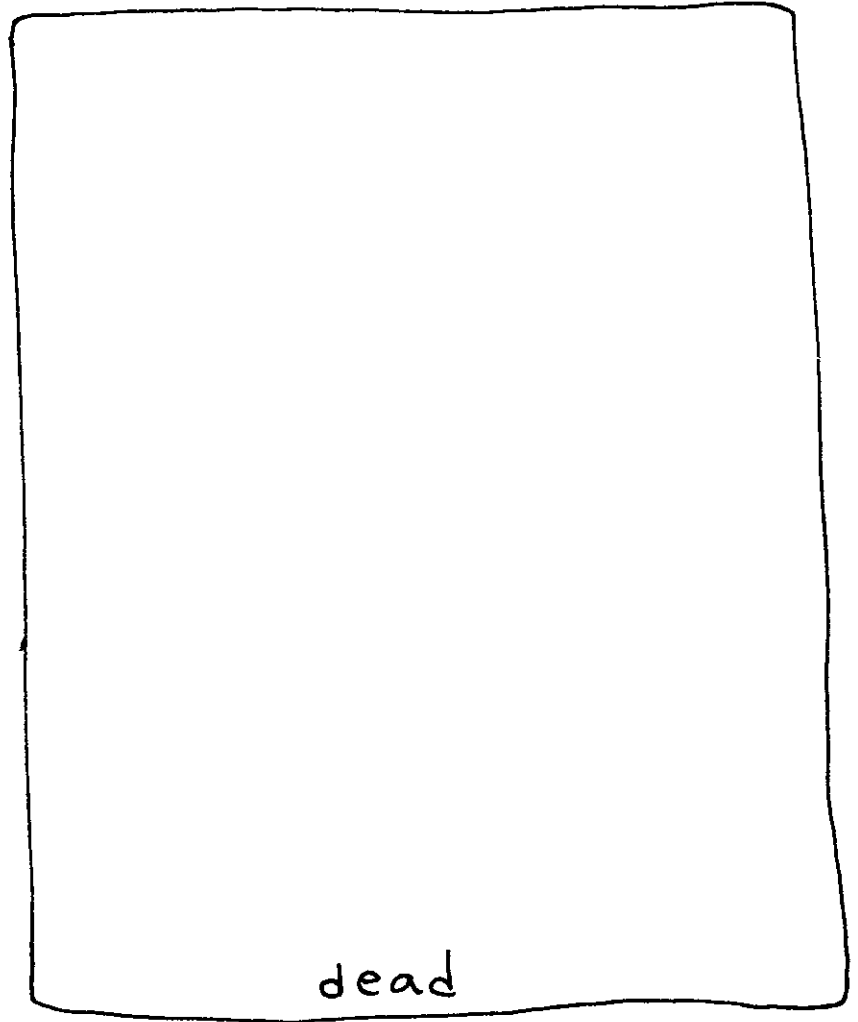
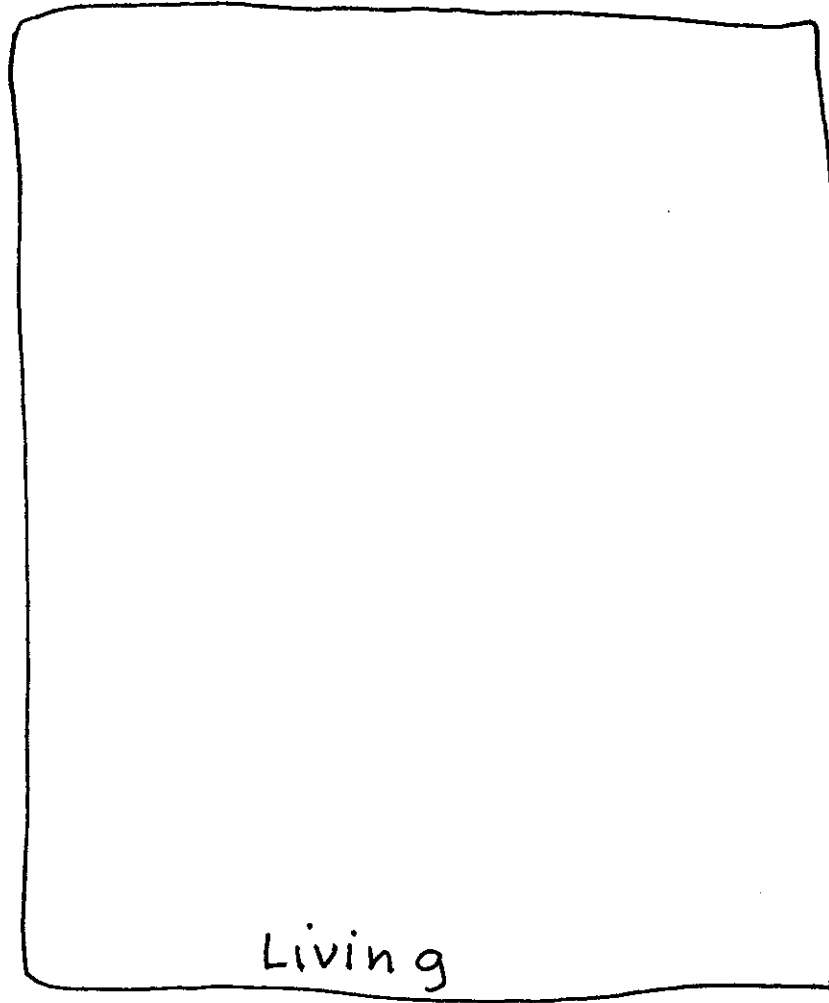


Grief comes and goes
Like waves in the ocean



There will be stormy times and calm times!

Living is growing and changing. Dead is the end of living. Plants die... Animals die... People die...



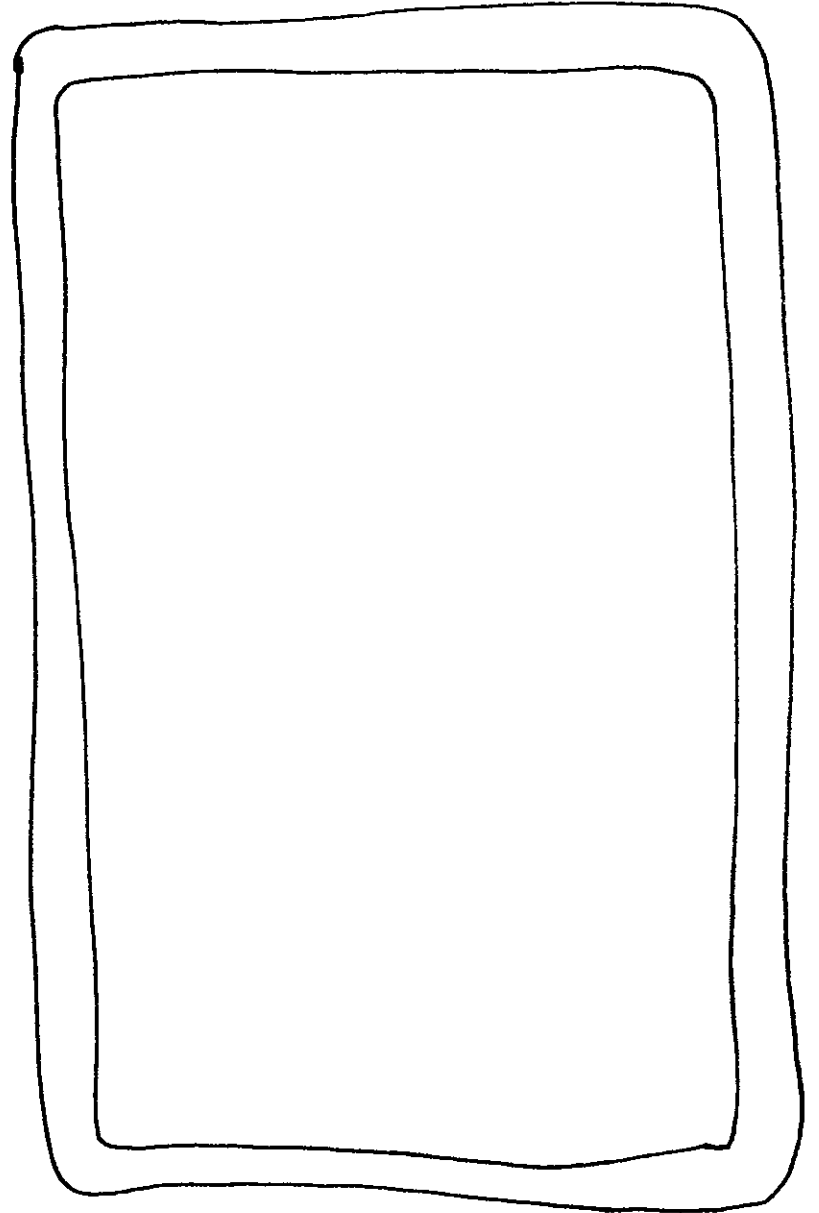
4. Death is a natural part of living

Many different things cause people to die. (Draw some things that cause death)

But people can't die because of anything
we think or say !!

Someone I loved died. This is a picture of that person...

_____ was
(name)
important to me
because...



My Special Person died because...

when someone dies, they can never come back! Death is the end of living. The dead don't eat, sleep, think, or feel anything. 7.

People have a body we can see... and something called a spirit or soul which we cannot see that makes them special.

8. When someone dies, the spirit leaves the body, and what is left is placed in a casket to be buried or cremated.

Family and friends gather for a funeral service to honor the dead, remember the good they did, and show their love for you!

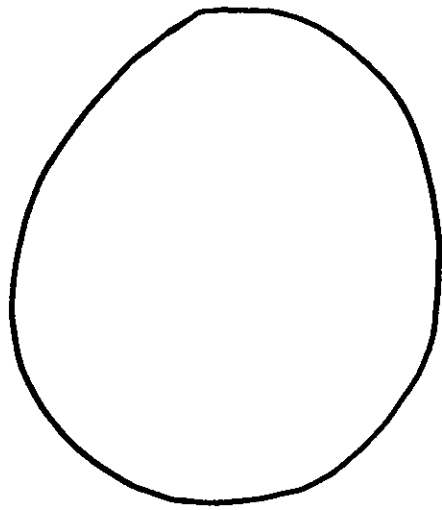
It's hard to say goodbye to someone you love!

Some people think the spirit goes to heaven to be with God, and some think it takes a new form... like the caterpillar that becomes a butterfly. Others think the spirit becomes a part of those they loved. (draw what you think)

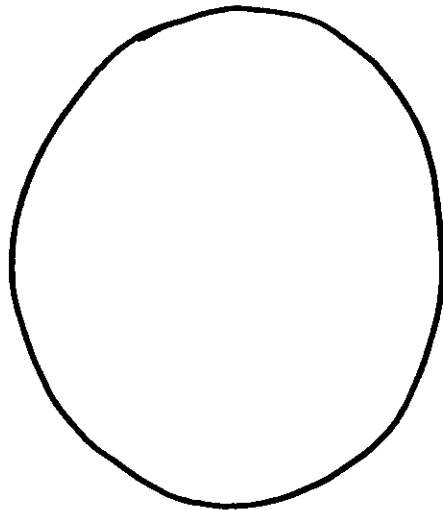
10. We don't know everything about death!

There are things I wonder about.
I would like to ask someone these
questions...

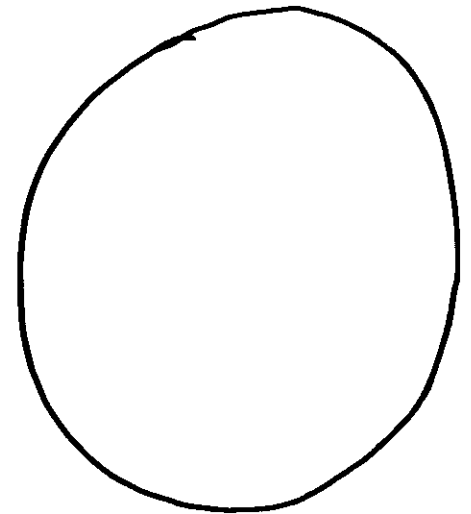
Everyone has lots of different feelings.
They are all OK! Feelings change.



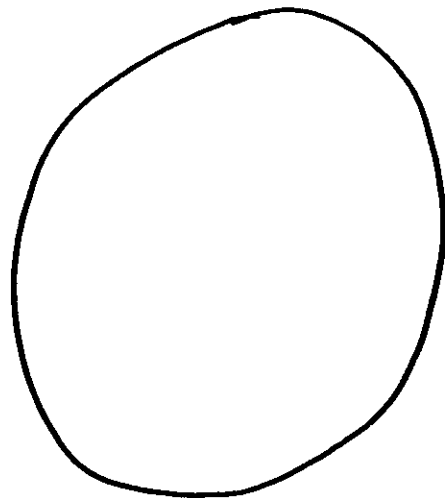
Happy



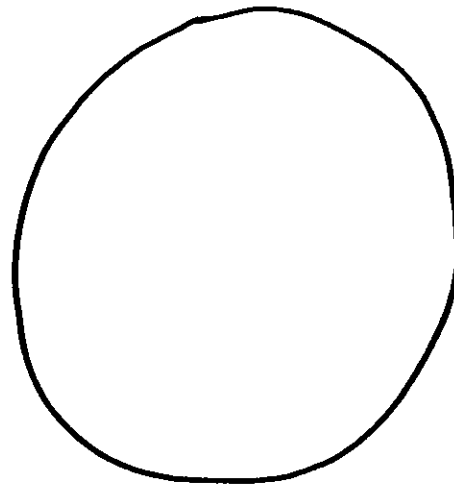
SAD



Angry



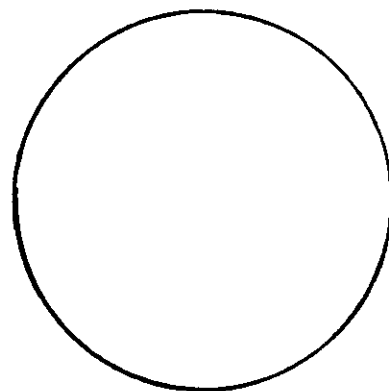
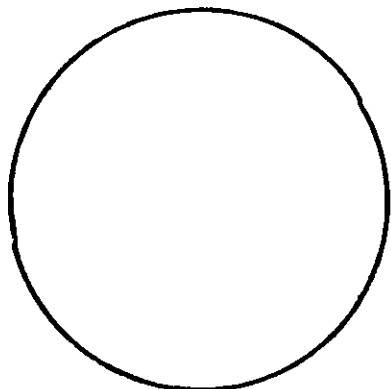
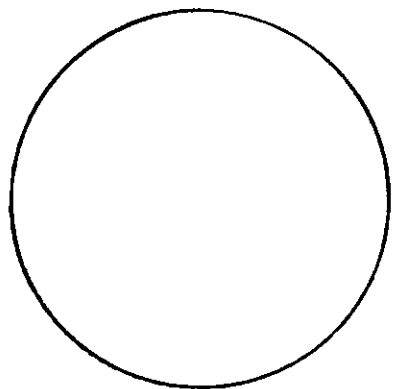
Afraid



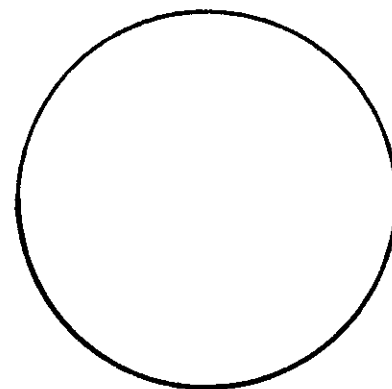
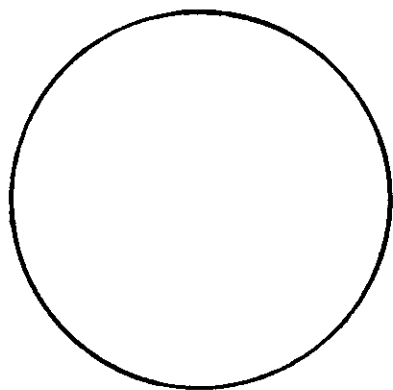
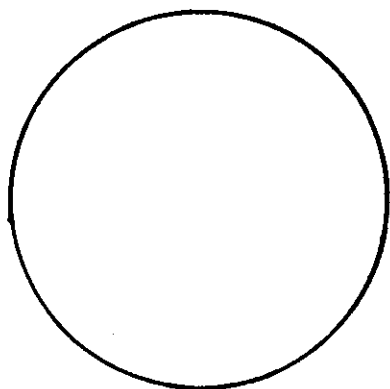
Guilty

12. Draw some feeling faces... (feelings often show on faces)

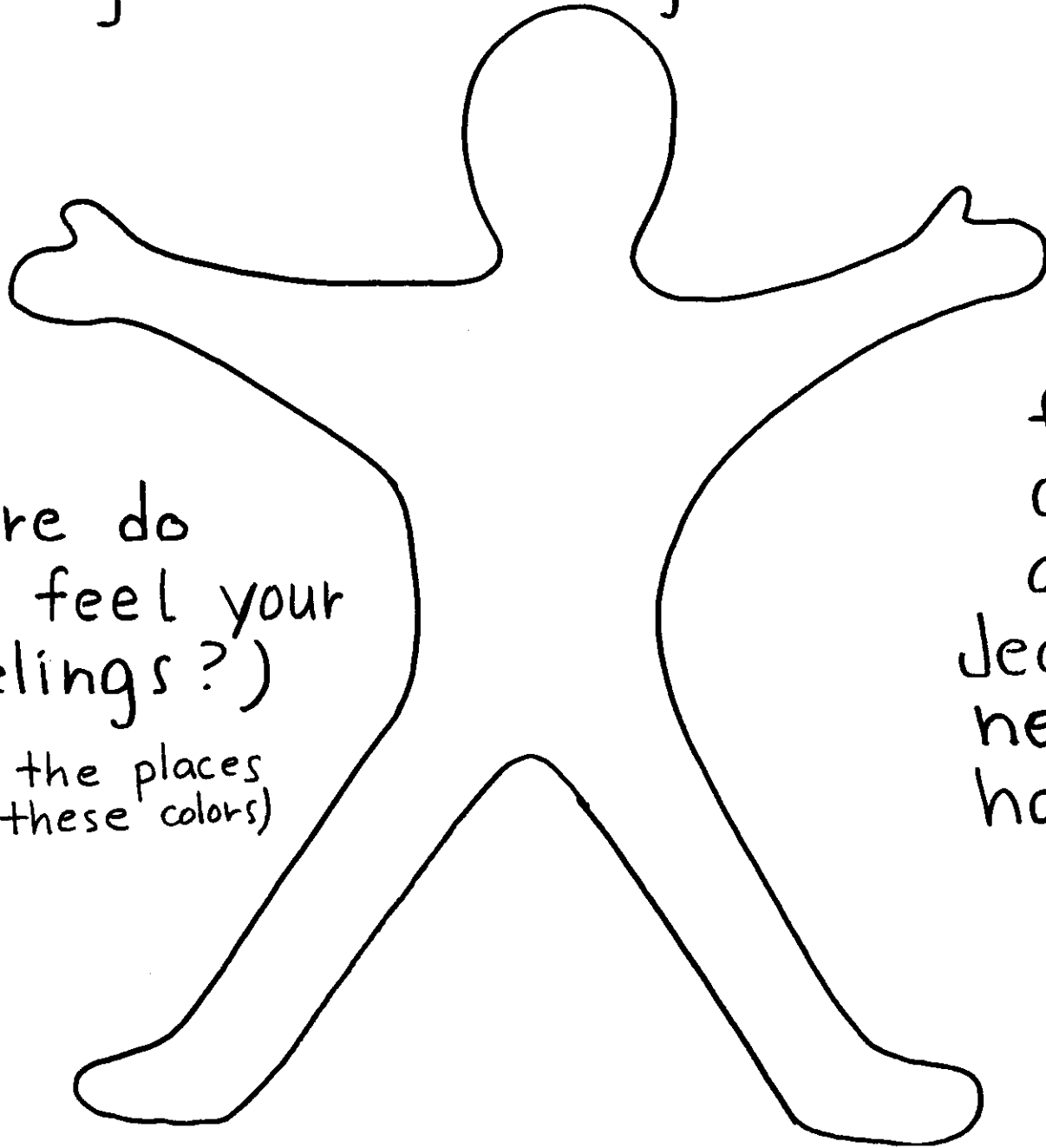
Sometimes people put on a "mask" to hide feelings they don't like to show. (name and draw 3 feelings you sometimes hide with a different feeling.)



Name and draw the feeling masks you might use.



Feelings are something we feel in our body.

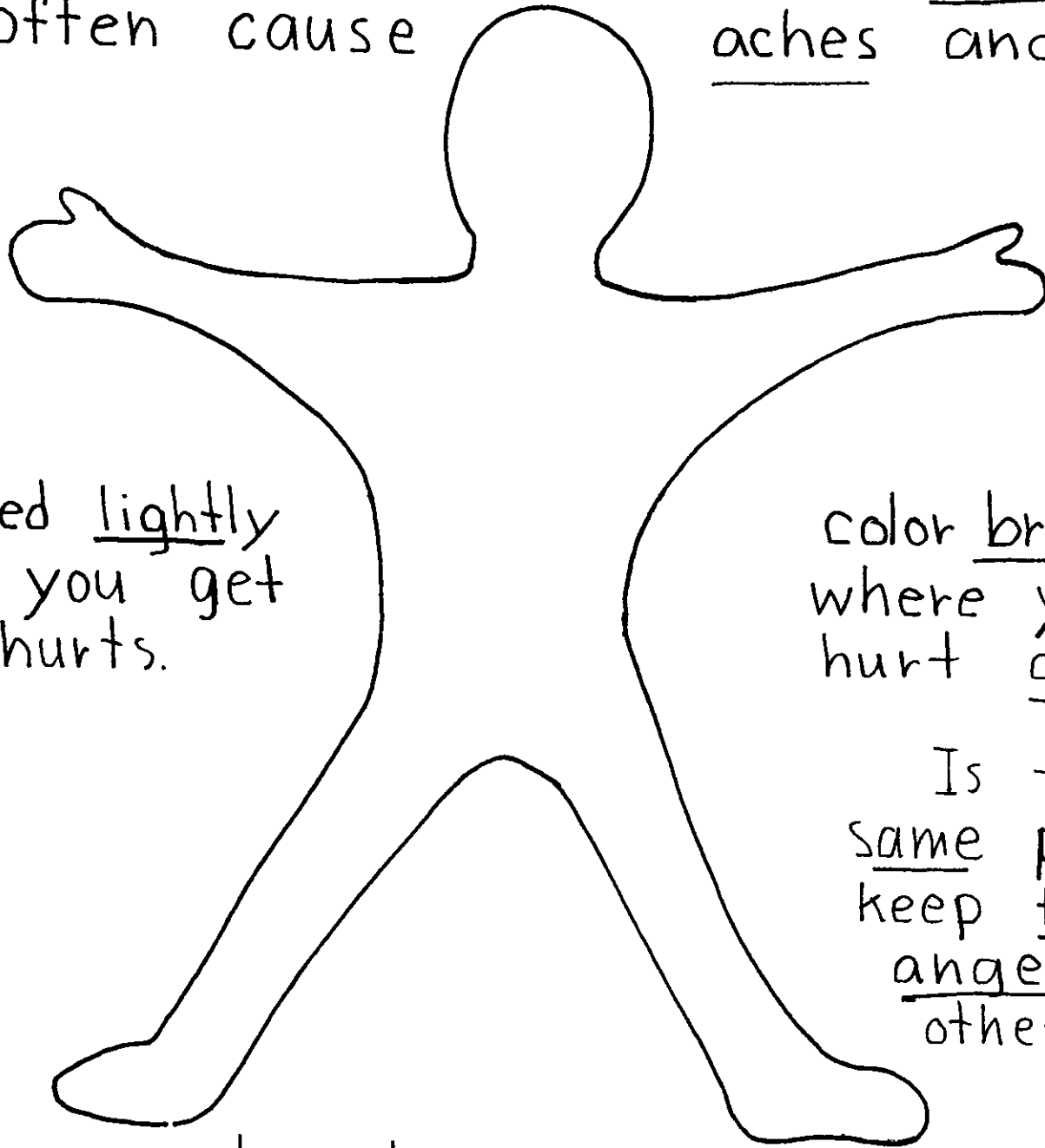


(where do
you feel your
feelings?)

(show the places
with these colors)

sad - blue
fear - black
guilt - brown
anger - red
jealous - green
nervous - orange
happy - yellow

If feelings are stuffed inside too long
they often cause aches and pains



color red lightly
where you get
little hurts.

color bright red
where you sometimes
hurt alot!

Is this the
same place you
keep fear or
anger or
other feelings?

Exercise, sports, play, music, art, writing and
talking are all good ways to let feelings out. 15.

Something Sad

^{16.} Drawing out sadness takes some of the pain away

Sometimes I get angry because...

Putting anger on paper doesn't hurt anyone!_{17.}

It is important to let anger out in ways that will not hurt people or things. O.K. ways are:

1. Saying "I am angry because..."
2. Scribbling with a red crayon on an old newspaper (hard!) and scrunch it into a ball to throw away.
3. Punching a ball or a pillow.
4. Yelling into a pillow or in a shower.
5. Writing an angry letter. Tear it up.
6. Write feelings in a journal.
7. Run or walk fast.
8. Stomp your feet. Clap your hands.

I feel frightened when...

Drawing something fearful makes it less powerful.

I worry about...

20. Worries need to be shared with someone!

Sometimes I feel different because...

But these are things I like about me...

1.

2.

3.

Me... doing something I am good at !

22. Everyone is good at something. No one is good at every thing.

I remember being told about the death.

I needed love and comfort. I still do!

I know how I like to be comforted...
(draw this... and then close your eyes and imagine it.)

24. I can use words to let others know what I need.

" If ONLY "

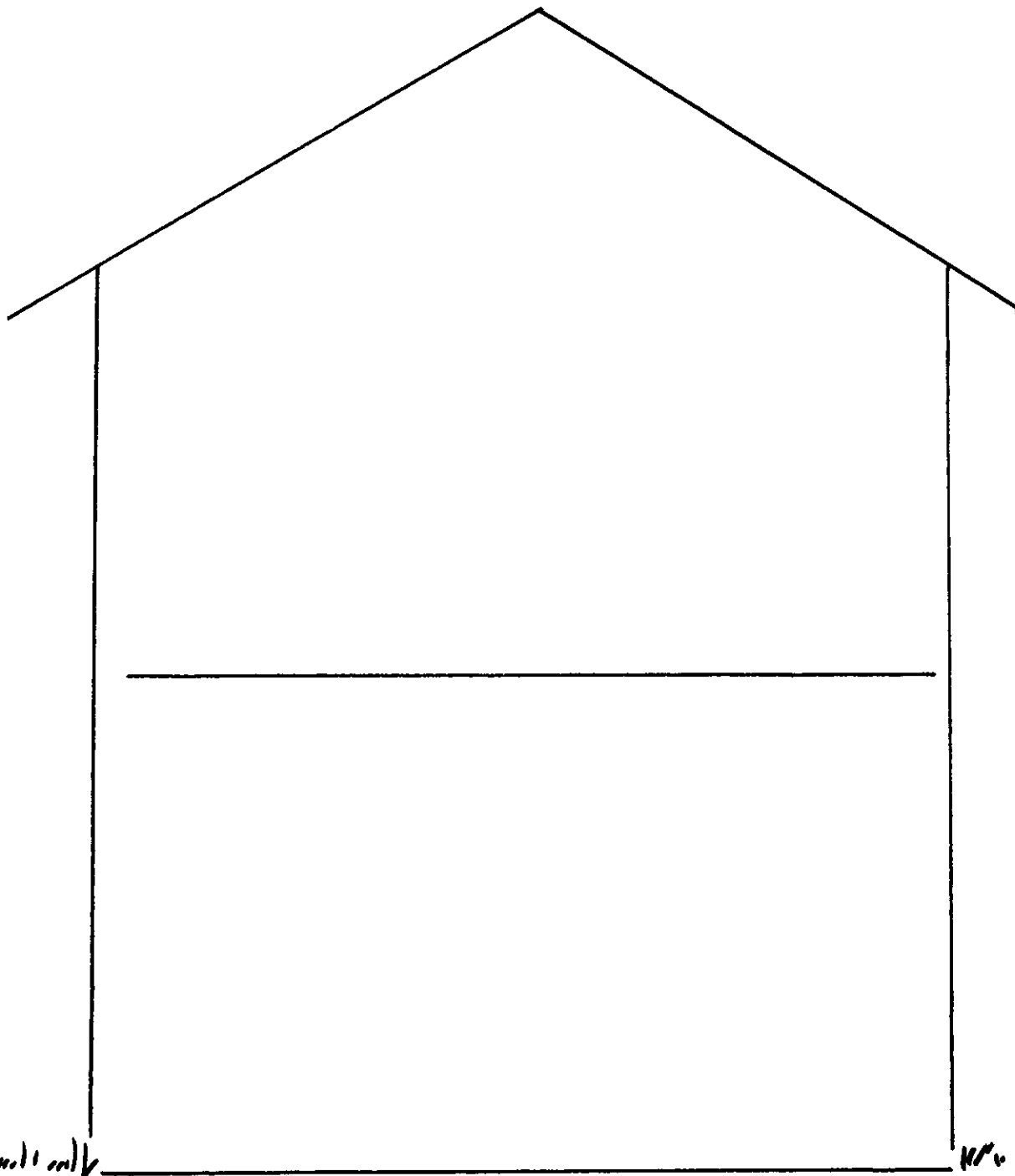
Everyone has something they wish they did...
or didn't do.

My favorite memory

and other good memories are mine to keep !

I learned something important from this person

and I will always have the love given to me! 27.

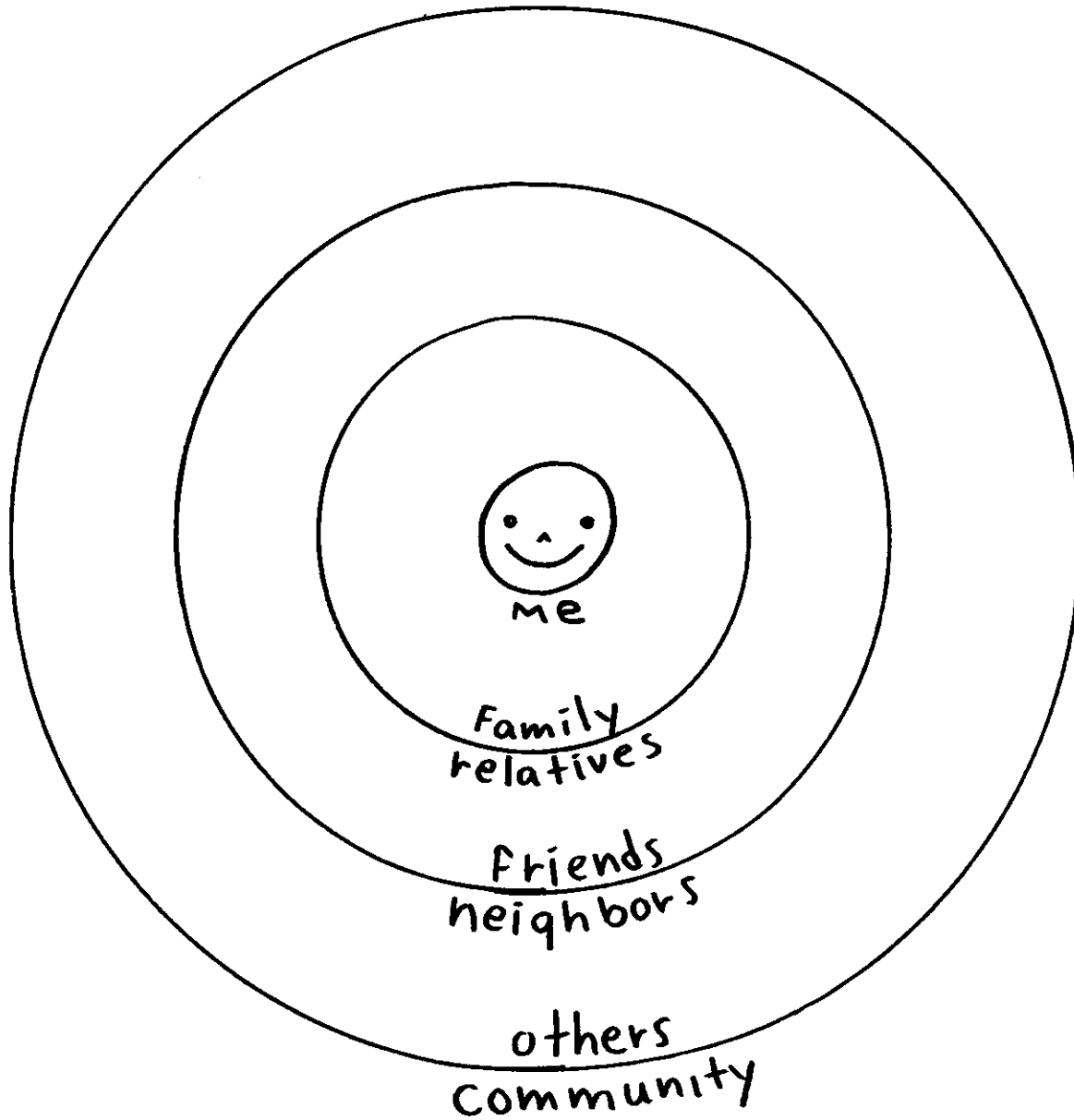


28. ↑
VH 1100 1000 1000 1000 1000 only
Best Friends

People I live with

↑
H/V 1000 1000 1000 1000 1000
important others

Many People care about me



1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

List names and place numbers in "caring circle".

I have someone I can always talk to.
(this can be a pet, a person or something special)

I show others I care about them..

And that makes me special too!

I can still have fun and be happy!

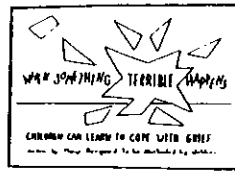
32. Living means changing and growing.

The Drawing Out Feelings Series

This new series designed by Marge Heegaard provides parents and professionals with an organized approach to helping children ages 6-12 cope with feelings resulting from family loss and change.

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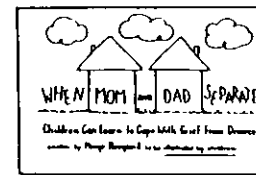
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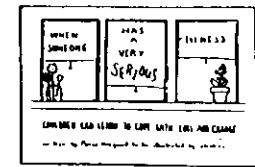
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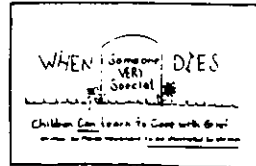
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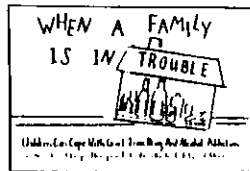
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Here is a practical format for allowing children to understand the concept of death and develop coping skills for life. Children, with adult supervision, are invited to illustrate and personalize their loss through art. This workbook encourages the child to identify support systems and personal strengths. "I especially appreciate the design of this book...the child becomes an active participant in pictorially and verbally doing something about [their loss]." —Dean J. Hempel, M.D., Child Psychiatrist

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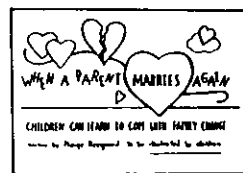
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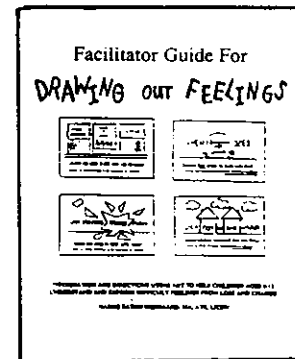


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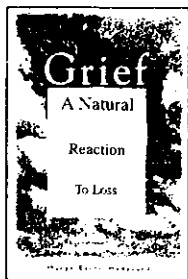
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For Adults



Grief - A Natural
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6 x 9 • 92 PAGES

This book was designed to teach basic concepts of death and help children understand and express the many feelings they have when someone special dies. Communication is increased and coping skills are developed as they illustrate their books with their personal story.

'When someone very special dies is a superbly useful tool to help young people work through their grief. . . highly recommended. . . a real contribution.'

Rabbi Dr. Earl A. Grollman, Author: *Talking about death:
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Monty Williams, A.C.S.W., Social Worker
Minneapolis Children's Health Center

'People have neglected children's grief for years, and here we get not only a description of the process, but a potent book for helping children work through their grief.'

Christine Ternand, M.D., Pediatrician

'I am impressed with the way in which this work involves children so concretely and personally in the grief process. I believe that it has great potential for being helpful to many children who are stunned by the agony of loss.'

Lowell O. Erdahl, Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

'I have been searching for just such a book to use with grieving children! The concepts are honest and truthful.'

Ruth D. Meitz, Student Support Teacher
Bloomington Public Schools

'I especially appreciated in the design of this book, the effort to enable a child to convert what has been a profound, passively experienced situation into one in which the child becomes an active participant in pictorially and verbally doing something about it.'

Dean J. Hempel, M.D. Child Psychiatrist
Wilder Child Guidance Center

MARGE EATON HEEGAARD, MA, ATR, LICSW is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Registered Art Therapist and Certified Grief Counselor in Minneapolis, MN. She has been a leader in developing support for adults and children using the art process to express feelings of grief. This book is part of a series called DRAWING OUT FEELINGS designed to provide parents, educators and counselors an organized approach to help children cope with grief from family loss and change.

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