



The TOOLBOX

TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THEIR EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL NEEDS



PROVIDING SUPPORT TO CHILDREN DEALING WITH LOSS

DEATH, SERIOUS ILLNESS OR DISAPPEARANCE OF A LOVED ONE, PARENTAL SEPARATION, ABANDONMENT OR ADOPTION

TOOL: Prevention | Intervention

TARGET AUDIENCE: Preschool | Elementary school | Secondary

TOOL INTENDED FOR: Professionals | Parents

DESIGN: Deuil-Jeunesse



Providing Support to Children Dealing With Loss

Death, serious illness or disappearance of a loved one, parental separation, abandonment or adoption



The purpose of this booklet is to provide intervention tools for school staff and parents of children and teens dealing with the realities of life, such as death, serious illness or disappearance of a loved one, parental separation, abandonment or adoption. It was designed to meet certain needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the concepts may also be applied to other circumstances.

The booklet is divided into various sections in which you'll find the following icons:



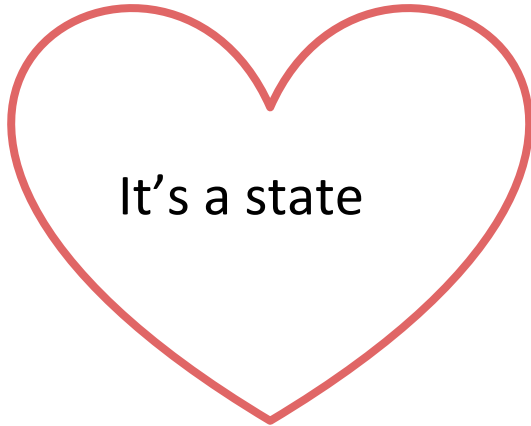
The “How to Talk About it with Children” icon provides background information including children or teens dealing with various losses.



The “Tip” icon introduces important tools, tips or aspects to consider.

What is grief?

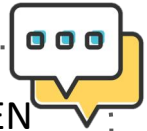
Definition of grief: According to its original definition, the word “grief” comes from the Latin word *gravis*, which means “heavy.” Grief is characterized by the pain or suffering you experience when a loved one dies.



HOW TO TALK ABOUT IT WITH CHILDREN

“Grief is everything you experience when someone you love dies”

Everything you experience may include emotions, behaviours, reactions, thoughts, physical ailments and more!



What is loss?

The word “loss” is sometimes used in various ways: loss of a job, family life, friendship or romantic relationship, etc. However, the words “grief” “mourning” or “bereavement” should only be used when referring to the death of a loved one. It’s best to use the word “loss” when referring to these other situations.

Which situations?

- Serious illness
- Parental separation
- Abandonment
- Adoption
- Disappearance
- Breakup of a friendship or romantic relationship
- House fire



HOW TO TALK ABOUT IT WITH CHILDREN

The choice of words with children is important. Depending on their cognitive development, metaphors and abstract explanations may be difficult for children to understand. For example, “he’s gone” implies the possibility of returning.

Development of understanding

The understanding of death and loss changes during children's cognitive development. Children don't understand like adults; they develop their understanding, among other things, based on the information they receive.



3-5 years old:

- Frequent imaginary, magical thinking;
- Limited understanding of future consequences;
- It's important to consistently repeat accurate information.

6-10 years old:

- Details and answers to children's questions are essential for their understanding;
- Around the age of 10, they gradually acquire a clearer understanding, but this may vary from one child to another.

Development of understanding

Although teenagers' cognitive development allows them to better understand the concept of loss, they are not able to determine all the future consequences. Since they are developing their identity, searching for meaning in their experiences is even more important.



10-12 years old:

- Wondering about the meaning of life, death and loss.

12-17 years old:

- Identity questioning;
- Seeking autonomy and peer importance;
- Culmination of physical, psychological, emotional, hormonal changes in addition to experiencing loss, which also causes changes and stress;
- Difficulty being vulnerable and asking for help.

Influencing factors

Factors that have a positive impact on an individual's experiences may significantly impact another individual's experiences in a negative way.



Dare to ask; don't interpret. Children are experts on their own experiences.

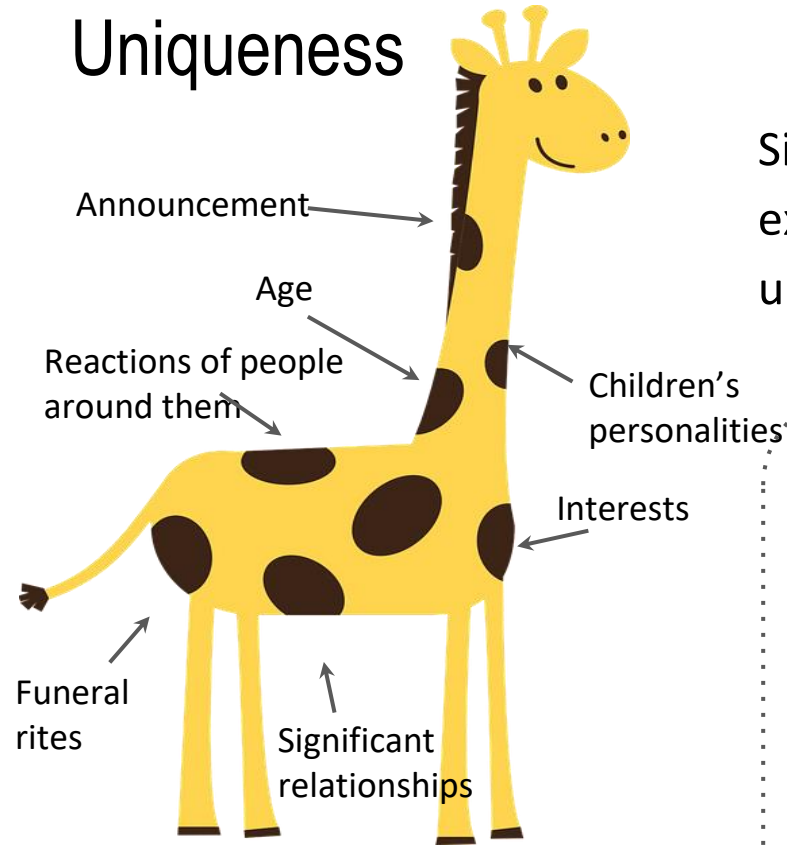
There are more than 50 factors that influence experiences with grief and loss in a positive or negative way.

Here are some examples of influencing factors:

- Announcement;
- Funeral rites;
- Age;
- Reactions of people around them;
- Interests;
- Significant relationships;
- Children's personalities;
- Etc.



Uniqueness



Since there are many factors that influence experiences with grief or loss, it always has a unique face.

HOW TO TALK ABOUT IT WITH CHILDREN

“Although each giraffe looks the same, they all have different spots. It’s the same for your grief. Although it may look like your brother’s, your reactions and what makes you feel good are sometimes different. This is normal.”



Reactions

Since each experience with grief or loss is unique, everyone's reactions may be different but are not necessarily a concern. It's impossible to fully anticipate children's reactions.



P: Personal

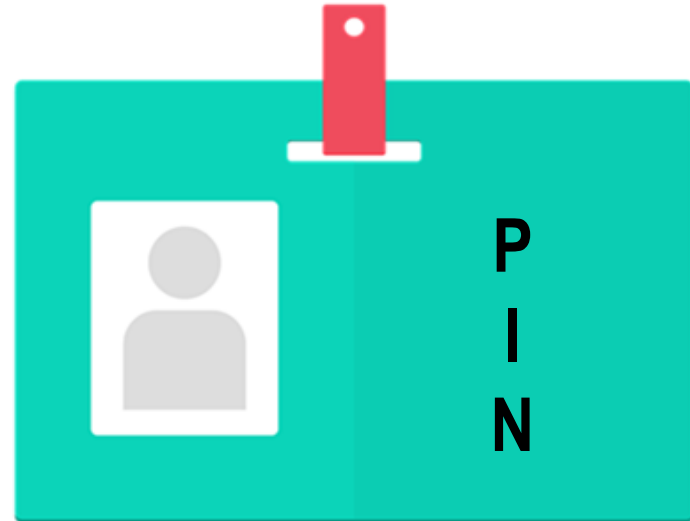
Every individual reacts according to their personality, resources and life circumstances.

I: Irregular

They can unexpectedly happen at any time.

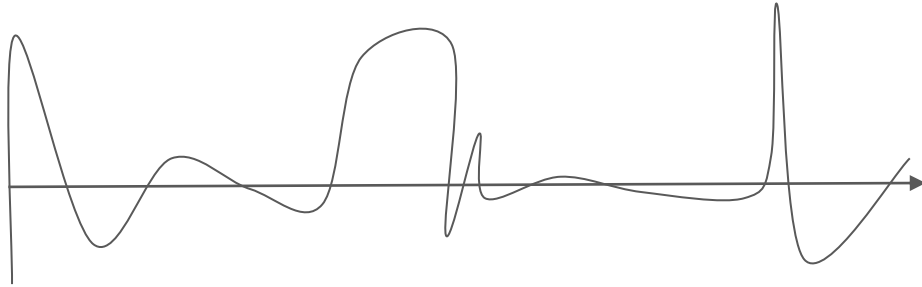
N: Normal

There are no bad reactions; all of them are okay.



When should you become concerned?

Here's a simple way to classify children's frequency and intensity of reactions. Use a logbook, calendar or agenda to note their reactions. This will allow you to track any increase, decrease or maintenance of reactions.



Grief is not linear. Emotions and reactions can be compared to waves, which are somewhat intense, but don't follow a path.

Frequency and intensity - When reactions become more frequent and intense over an extended period.

Functioning - When children's functioning is affected in one or various areas of life (e.g. sleep, diet, academic and social functioning, etc.) by the frequency and intensity of reactions.

Announcement

The announcement must be made by the children's close relative, ideally the parents. It should be done as soon as possible, in a safe place, in the presence of all the siblings at the same time and with few spectators. The "SVP" acronym should be remembered:

S - Simplicity: Use real words: simple and direct

V - Verification: What the children understand and want to know

P - Precisions: Certain details and facts, answer questions, reframe certain aspects, etc.



HOW TO TALK ABOUT IT WITH CHILDREN

Details for children

S - "Mum just found out she's got a very serious disease. It's called bowel cancer.

V - "Have you ever heard of cancer? What do you know about it?"

P - "No, it's not exactly like the flu you had last week; it's a very serious illness."

Announcement



HOW TO TALK ABOUT IT WITH CHILDREN

Details for teens

- S - “It’s difficult for me to tell you, but your mother doesn’t want to hear from you at this time. I don’t have any way of contacting her.”
- V - “Do you have any questions? Is there anything you’d like to know? If I can give you details, I’ll do it.”
- P - “I don’t know why your mother made this decision, so maybe we could find out more information from her acquaintances.”

Explaining losses

When explaining losses, it's important to tell the truth. If you're not comfortable, be authentic and name it. Refer to professionals. These sticky notes include concepts to consider for explanations and reactions.



Abandonment

- Disbelief
- Questioning
 - Lack of answers

Serious illness

- It has a very specific name and it should be named
- Involve the child

Death

- The body stops functioning

Adoption

- Search for identity
- Questions about their origins

Parental separation

- Various reasons
- Parents still love their children

Preparing for loss

P - Prepare: Keep the child informed of developments and prepare them for what's coming in order to avoid guessing.

I - Involve: Involve the child while respecting their needs and limitations without burdening them.

T - Talk: Provide information, ask them what they want to know and give them the opportunity to talk about it.

We can prepare children for certain losses, such as serious illness or parental separation. The “PIT” acrostic should be remembered:



HOW TO TALK ABOUT IT WITH CHILDREN

Details for children

- P** - “Daddy is moving into the new house next month.”
- I** - “Would you like to choose the decoration in your new room?”
- T** - “You asked your teacher a lot of questions today. Would you like to talk about it together?”

Preparing for loss

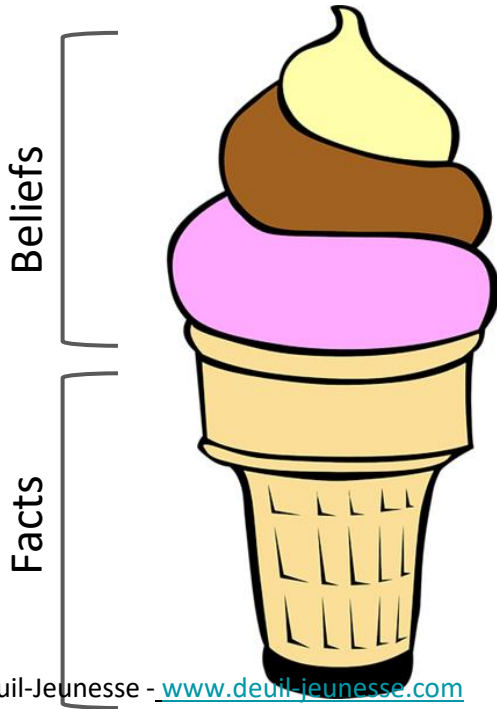


HOW TO TALK ABOUT IT WITH CHILDREN

Details for teens

- P - “We found out your grandfather has brain cancer. His cancer is incurable. Doctors believe he’ll be able to live another two or three years.”
- I - “We’re going to visit him on Friday. Would you like to come with us?”
- T - “Would you like to be kept informed of the disease’s progression or would you prefer to ask questions when you feel the need?”

Beliefs



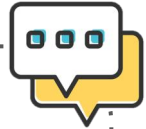
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Situation: You go to the ice cream store and you're given your favourite ice cream without a bowl or cone. Obviously, this doesn't work; it lacks a foundation. The same is true for beliefs: you need a solid foundation, which are facts. There are all kinds of beliefs, just like ice cream flavours. Everyone's taste is different.

HOW TO TALK ABOUT IT WITH CHILDREN

Details for children

“Death is when the body stops working: the heart stops beating, the lungs stop breathing, etc. That's clearly what we know. However, I like to think that your grandpa is in heaven. It's my belief because it makes me feel good. Does it make you feel good too? Is there another belief that would help you?”



Beliefs

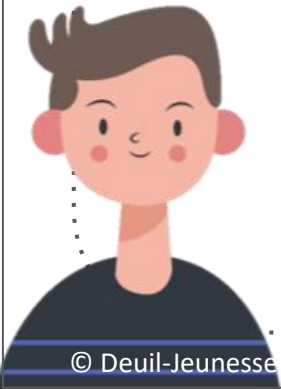


HOW TO TALK ABOUT IT WITH CHILDREN

Details for teens

Example of a teen's search for meaning

“My parents separated when I was 7 years old. At first, I felt it was unfair and I was mad at my mom, who decided to leave my dad. In my early teens, my mom and dad had new people in their lives. I didn't understand why they would bother if it wasn't going to last. In the end, I got to know my in-laws and they became important adults for me. Today, my parents' separation has a more positive than negative impact on my entire family.”



If they don't want to talk about it

Talking about it doesn't always require a great deal of discussion. It may simply be sharing memories (a favourite meal, a song the person liked, etc.) or a common personality trait.



- Respect their decision and pace;
- Continue to talk to them about it with balance;
- Give them vocabulary;
- Pay attention to their physical reactions; this may be how they expresses themselves (e.g. stomach aches);
- If everything is properly prepared, they'll talk about it when they're ready.

Returning to daily life following the COVID-19 pandemic

This section is intended for the return to normal life following the COVID-19 pandemic. Some pandemic details will be addressed as well as examples related to isolated incidents and those affecting a community.

When an incident occurs, whether isolated or affecting an entire community, a return to daily life is desirable or even necessary. This return to daily life may involve adjustments or changes that will require everyone's coping skills. An isolated incident is a reality of life that involves a personal experience and affects an individual or a family. An incident affecting a community refers to an experience shared by a greater number of individuals or even a community.

Returning to daily life

ISOLATED INCIDENTS

- Death of a family member;
- Serious illness of a family member;
- A fire in a family home;
- A car accident;
- A parental separation.

INCIDENTS AFFECTING A COMMUNITY

- Death of a child in a school;
- A pandemic, such as COVID-19;
- A natural disaster, such as a tornado;
- A large-scale accident, such as in Mégantic;
- A change of teacher (community-class).

COVID-19 DETAILS

- Concerns, fear and stress;
- Social isolation;
- Various health measures and organizations;
- Cancellation of important events;
- Frequently publicized by various media;
- Global impact;
- Unknown;
- Proximity to parents.

Children's role in facilitating a return to daily life

Whether it's an isolated incident or an incident affecting a community, children's needs and reactions will be personal; they'll be different for everyone



- Identify their needs and talk about difficult experiences;
- Determine their concerns and find ways to deal with them;
- Establish a new routine;
- Determine positive aspects of the current situation;
- If necessary, consult a professional.

Examples:

- Make a list of alternatives to meet their needs (e.g. the need to socialize could be met by video conferencing, texting, phone calls, meetings in accordance with health guidelines, etc.);
- Recreate cancelled events on a small scale (e.g. gather in small groups to watch the cancelled show online or re-create a personalized graduation);
- Determine ways to help organize their new routine (e.g. keep an agenda, use an app on a smart device, use visual memos, etc.).



Parents' role in facilitating a return to daily life



ISOLATED INCIDENTS

- Respect children's pace for returning to daily life while maintaining a certain balance;
- Acknowledge children's needs;
- Prepare the return to daily life and ask children what they want to talk about publicly;
- Support them but don't make decisions for them;
- Find out who the caregivers are in the children's network;
- Be present (listen, discuss, provide information, etc.);
- Be authentic and identify your concerns;

Questions to ask about returning to school:

“What would you like to talk about when you go back to school?,” “With whom would you like to talk about it?” “Would you like your teacher/class to know?,” “Would you like to be present when the announcement is made?,” “Would you like to make the announcement?,” “When would you like the announcement to be made?,” etc.

Parents' role in facilitating a return to daily life



INCIDENTS AFFECTING A COMMUNITY



- Prepare the return to daily life;
- Be present (listen, discuss, provide information, etc.);
- Announce upcoming changes;
- Based on an agreement with the children, ask them how their half-day, day or week went;
- Identify the children's skills that will help them adjust to the new reality.

Examples :

- Mention what has changed and what will remain the same;
- Identify with the children new ways of doing things in order to adjust to changes (e.g. FaceTime with friends, small year-end celebration with a limited number of people, etc.).

Professionals' role in facilitating a return to daily life

What we sometimes believe to be best for children is not always so. Don't hesitate to take the lead and ask children what they need.



ISOLATED EVENTS

- Don't pretend that nothing has happened; stay in touch with the family;
- Inform them about needs and ways to help a friend;
- Respect children who don't want to talk about it;
- Keep the door open for them ("I'm here if you need to talk about it")

Examples:

-Let children decide whether or not to share their experience with the class, depending on their needs and limitations;

-Give an educational workshop on loss (e.g. appropriate questions to ask a friend, what to do to help, respecting their pace and needs, etc.);

-Have a discussion on upcoming holidays that may be difficult (e.g. Christmas, Father's Day, birthday, etc.) and find out how certain activities can be tailored to the children's wishes.



Professionals' role in facilitating a return to daily life

INCIDENTS AFFECTING A COMMUNITY



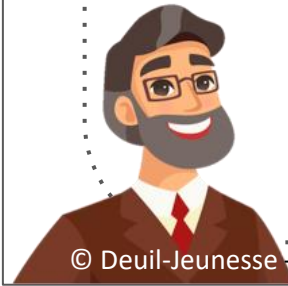
- Don't act as if nothing has happened; returning with the affected people is necessary;
- Explore common and individual needs;
- Announce and prepare for the new reality.

Examples :

- Discuss how the students' summer went, explore changes in connection with

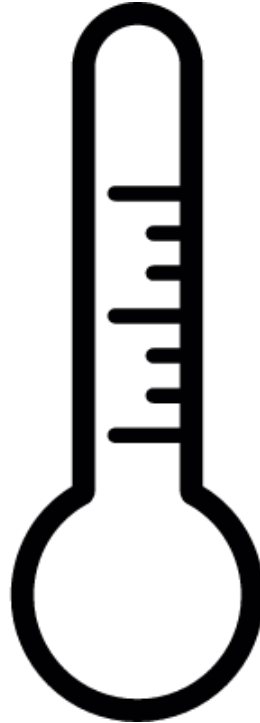
COVID-19 and changes that will remain in place. The means of expression can be tailored to everyone's age and creativity (e.g. drawing, writing, group discussion, etc.);

- Hand out a questionnaire on students' needs and concerns related to the community incident. The questionnaire will determine how to help students (e.g. referral to professional service, one-time consultation with a significant adult in school, answering certain questions, etc.).



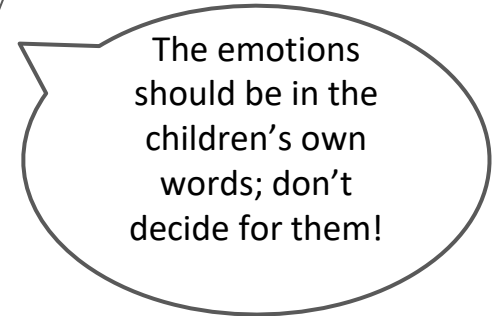
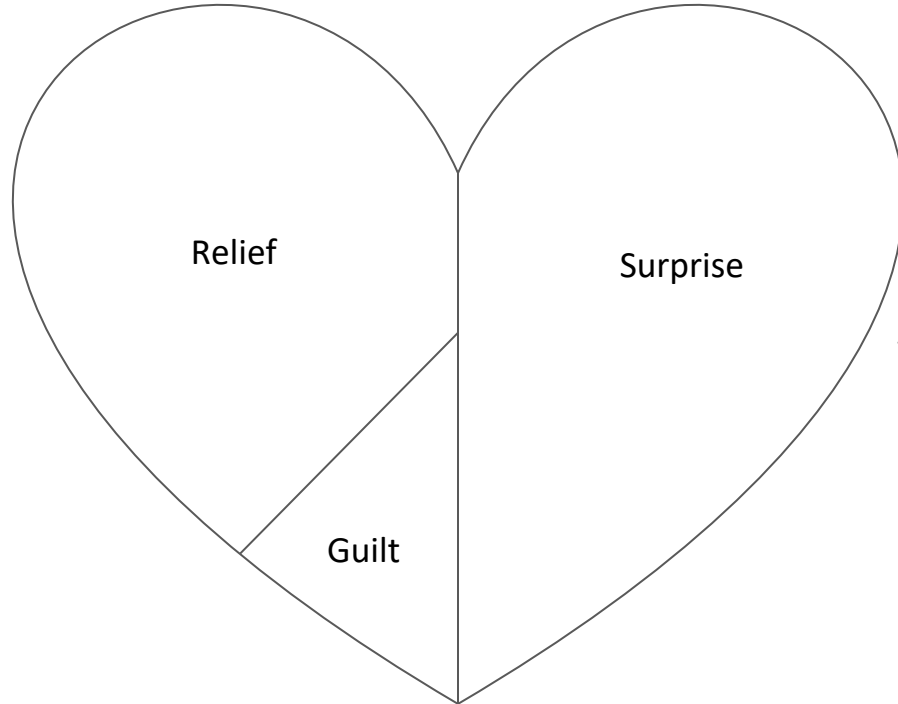
Emotions Thermometer

The emotions thermometer allows you to measure your current feelings on a scale of 0 to 10. Rather than simply relying on our adult perceptions and interpretations, you can have a conversation with children to better understand what they are going through.



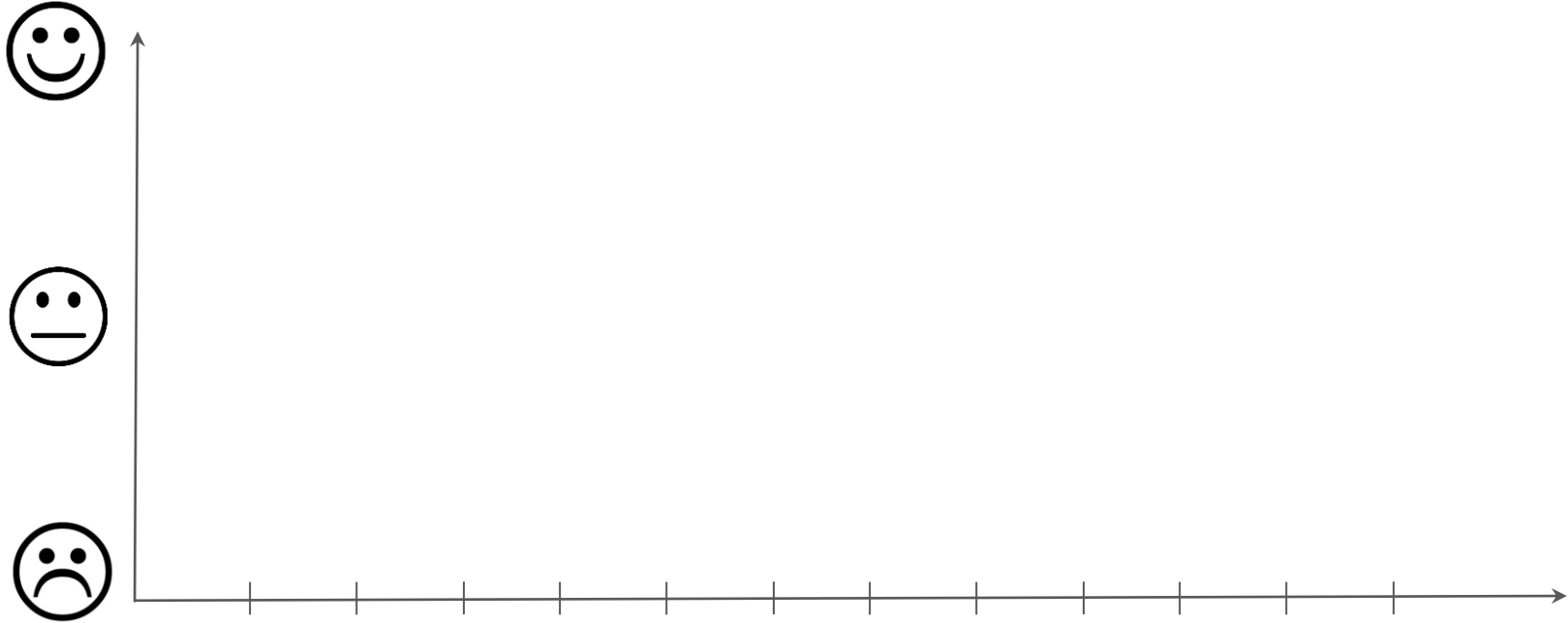
Pizza Heart

The heart drawing represents the children's heart. It should be divided up into slices like a pizza, depending on the intensity of their emotions. Sometimes it's easier for children or teens to illustrate their feelings rather than name them.



Changes in my experiences

This timeline tracks changes in children's well-being in connection with significant incidents related to their grief or loss experiences (e.g. announcement, funeral rites, move, a parent's departure, etc.).



Feel free to contact us
if needed.



Deuil-Jeunesse



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Deuil-Jeunesse is a unique professional intervention charity that helps children and families who are dealing with serious illness, disappearance or death of a loved one or losses related to parental separation, abandonment or adoption. We work with the children themselves, their parents and friends by unique means, including awareness-raising, support, information and intervention. We also provide our expertise to organizations, professionals and stakeholders in Quebec and abroad.

This booklet is intended to be a foundation for intervention with children dealing with various realities of life. If you need additional support, you can contact a Deuil-Jeunesse professional, who will be pleased to help you.