

SUMMERTIME AND GRIEF



Summer is a season of mixed emotions for many families in grief. The end of school and after-school activities can be a relief for some, especially if they struggled with having enough energy and concentration for class and homework. Others will miss the structure and social time that school and sports provide. For adults, summer might mean a less demanding schedule, but could also add the stress of finding childcare or having enough financial resources for camps and trips.

Families may also wrestle with whether to continue summer traditions they shared with the person who died. These can range from special vacations they took each year to memories of simple things, such as watching the person mow the lawn or wear their favorite t-shirt. Similar to the approach of winter holidays, summer provides a great opportunity for families to discuss their hopes and expectations for the season. If you are the parent or caregiver for grieving children or teens, set aside time to talk about memories and traditions.

Everyone might have different needs, which can require some negotiating and group problem-solving. If one child really wants to go camping at their mom's favorite lake, but another doesn't, perhaps the one who doesn't can stay with a family member or friend while you go with the one who does. Reassure yourself and others that there is no right way to do summer and that it's okay to figure it out together.

Here are two summer activities that grieving people of any age might find helpful:

Bubble Messages:

Bubbles are a great way to share memories and messages in a group or on your own, while also being outside. As a group, invite people to say a memory or a message to the person who died out loud or to themselves while they blow a bubble. This is also a good option for children to do on their own whenever they want to say something to the person who died.

Sidewalk Chalk Memories:

For this activity all you need is a sunny day, some chalk, and a sidewalk or driveway. Whether as a family or individually, people can draw pictures of summer memories with the person who died or write messages. For those who struggle with painful images or regrets, they can write or draw those and then use a hose or a bucket of water to wash them away. Acknowledging and then intentionally erasing those images and regrets may help lessen their intensity.



Whether you are eagerly anticipating or dreading the approach of summer, start with thinking through what's important to you and your family. Being aware of how structure, or the lack of it, affects children and teens is helpful. If you have a child who likes structure and the free time of summer is difficult, work together to come up with a daily schedule they can follow. You could also consider getting a special calendar they can write or draw on and put in all the scheduled events for summer. This visual reminder of what is coming up can help children to feel more at ease.

If you or someone you know has questions or concerns about the approach of summer, please contact us at 503.775.5683 or help@dougy.org.



The National Grief Center
for Children & Families

Our Mission

Dougy Center provides grief support in a safe place where children, teens, young adults, and their families can share their experiences before and after a death. We provide support and training locally, nationally, and internationally to individuals and organizations seeking to assist children who are grieving.

Dougy Center Bookstore/Resources

Dougy Center has been helping children, teens, young adults and their parents cope with death since 1982. Our practical, easy-to-use materials are based on what we have learned from more than 60,000 Dougy Center participants. To order online, visit dougy.org or dougybookstore.org, or call 503.775.5683.

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