

# Taking It Home: Families and Faith

## Tools for Deepening Your Faith at Home

# Let's Talk About Families and Loss

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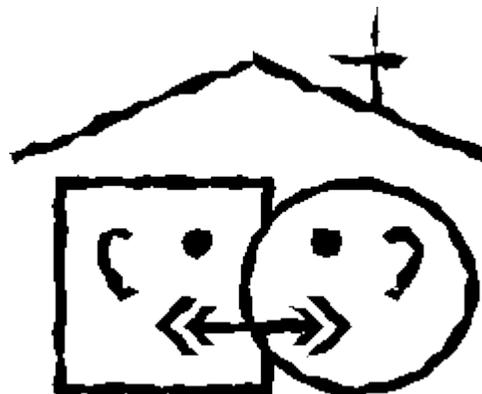
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*Nothing lasts, and yet nothing passes, either. And nothing passes just because nothing lasts.*  
--Philip Roth, *The Human Stain*

*Happiness is salutary for the body but sorrow grows the spirit.*  
--Marcel Proust, *Letters*

*We are broken people, you and I. What matters somehow is whether we become weak or strong at the broken places.*  
--Rev. Tom Owen-Towle



## How to Use This Guide

Let's face it. Life is a risky business. In every week, if not every day, we all face a number of losses, big and small. Our ministerial intern leaves after a year of sharing her insights, grace, and

wisdom. Our family home is destroyed by fire, burning all our treasured photos. We question our belief in God as our marriage crumbles or our daughter is diagnosed with a crippling disease. Our youngest child leaves for college, signifying a new and unwelcome phase of our life.

Since we all have so much experience with it, you might expect that we'd be comfortable acknowledging loss and the changes it brings. But you'd be wrong. Instead of accepting its inevitability, we often greet our losses with a profound silence—a silence that suggests that loss is too scary, too unpredictable, too uncontrollable for us to handle. Better to deny its existence than to let in—and be destroyed by—those overwhelming feelings.

Despite what we want to believe, however, we all experience loss throughout our lives. Sometimes these losses are relatively minor and predictable—at age five, we must leave the familiarity of our home, pre-school, or day-care center to start kindergarten. Sometimes these losses are major and totally unexpected—we lose our home, our job, our spouse, our child.

This guide prepares family members to explore the topic of loss with one another. It offers information about how children understand loss. This booklet also provides [Activities](#) and [Resources](#) to help families and congregations examine their own histories of, and reactions to, loss over their lifetimes.

Families have so much to gain from these discussions. As adults, you will have a chance to reflect on your own assumptions and beliefs about loss, gain greater understanding of your responses to it, and become more comfortable sharing your thoughts and feelings with others. If your family includes children, parents (and grandparents) can help children accept loss as a part of life and find ways to cope with it rather than deny its impact. Just as importantly, you can communicate your willingness to accompany children not only through the joys of life but also through its struggles and hardships. Fred Rogers, in a broadcast of *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* following the assassination of John F. Kennedy, agreed:

*The best thing in the world is for your children to be included in your family ways of coping with the problems that present themselves... particularly now, in this very difficult time, in our nation. There are those who will find a great comfort in being able to sit and watch a television mass, or a funeral—so long as it is included in the family.... For other families, maybe a walk by a river, a walk in a favorite place. For others, maybe just a strong arm around the body of a small child as you walk.*

### **How to Begin**

Most of us fear loss. After all, it changes our world, and even when our lives are less than perfect, we still find greater comfort in the known than the unknown. As a result, many adults actively avoid change and the pain it causes, working instead to keep things "just the way they are."

Think back on your own experiences. Did an aunt or uncle die when you were a child? Did no one talk to you about this death or acknowledge its impact on your life? Did you have a gay relative who distanced himself from you and your family for fear of being judged and rejected?

Was your sister, born with Down syndrome, labeled as "special" and did you ever really know what this meant?

If you experienced this type of silence, a silence that sent a clear message of shame, fear, and discomfort, then you may also remember the terror of facing your losses alone. With no one to share them with, your losses may have assumed a power that continues to influence your thoughts, feelings, and behavior to this day.

**Try This:** *When you have a few moments of quiet, think back to losses you have experienced throughout your life. Write them down. Now choose one that you find particularly significant. With this loss in mind, ask yourself the following questions: How did you hear of this loss? Who told you about it? What language did he or she use to describe this loss? What was the mood of the discussion?*

**What Do You Think?** *If no one openly discussed this loss with you, what did you conclude from this silence? How do these conclusions continue to influence your reactions to current losses?*

Wouldn't it be wiser to bring our losses to those who love and support us? Perhaps--sadly-- this may be hard to do. Those mourning a loss often find that friends are overwhelmed by our misfortune, may not know how to help us, or fear that they will lose control. The result is that we often deal with our losses in isolation and by example, teach our children to do so as well.

This guide offers no universal truths, nor can it guarantee that you will become entirely comfortable with the topic of loss. Rather it will offer families tools they may find useful to understand their loss history, recognize how this history influences their reactions to current losses, and discover how to help their children learn to cope with loss in a healthy, deliberate way.

Before planning any discussions and activities with your family, read through the entire booklet. In some places, you will be asked to consider questions related to your own experiences with loss (**What Do You Think?** or **Try This.**) Take time to reflect on those questions that seem most relevant to you. Jot down some notes or keep a journal if you find that helpful. When you do so, you will be better prepared to join with your partner and/or your children to explore this difficult but vitally important topic.

Remember, however, that all families are different and come from different cultural and personal traditions. As a result, do not view this booklet as the final authority on loss but rather as a set of suggestions to help you approach this topic in a way that respects your family's unique style and circumstances.

## **What Is Loss?**

*Then a woman said, "Speak to us of joy and sorrow." And he answered, "Your joy is your sorrow unmasked. And the self-same well from which your laughter rises was often times filled with your tears."*

**Try This:** Think about the word "loss." What immediately comes to mind? Write down the first five or six words that jump out at you. What do you notice about these words?

In an excerpt from a Minns Lecture called "Liberal Religion's Response to Loss," Rev. John Nichols writes,

*We are not accustomed to thinking of grief in any way other than that associated with death. Nevertheless, people grieve when they clearly cease to have the protections of childhood. They grieve when they go away from home for the first time. They grieve when they have to give up their first love. They grieve when they suffer a serious illness or injury. They grieve when they leave each stage of life for another. People grieve when they change jobs or homes; when they leave one beloved and comfortable community for another. For a teenager the end of an infatuation or friendship can bring on a grief as profound and as serious as the grief which may follow the death of a grandparent.<sup>1</sup>*

Rev. Ruth Cohen refers to these types of losses as "little deaths," as experiences that we will carry with us throughout our lives. And these losses are not reserved for adulthood. At birth, children experience the loss of the warmth and protection of the womb. This loss is rapidly followed by many others, which

*occur when we cannot possibly have the perspective to reason about them, to "put them into context," to understand them, to see the good in them. And so, depending on our temperaments, and on how wisely and gracefully the adults around us handle our growing pains, we will be carrying within us reactions to loss to various degrees-our denial, our anger, our hurt, our sadness, our desire to "hold on."*  
--Ruth Cohen, "Little Deaths"<sup>2</sup>

**Try This:** Review your list of words that you associate with "loss." How many are directly related to death and dying? How many represent "little deaths"? What does this tell you about your overall reactions when you hear the word "loss"? How might these reactions affect your subsequent actions and thoughts?

**What Do You Think?** Do you agree with Rev. Nichols' and Rev. Cohen's descriptions of loss? What would you add or change?

From their perspectives, these two UU ministers suggest that there are four broad categories of loss:

1. Loss of a person or relationship
2. Loss of some aspect of one's self, such as self-esteem or an important belief

3. Loss of an external object, such as a home or possession
4. Developmental loss, such as the loss of childhood, the loss of certain parenting responsibilities when the youngest child leaves home, or the loss of physical strengths and abilities as one grows older

We can anticipate some of these losses, while others catch us unaware. A loss also involves far more than the actual object, person, or relationship. For example, when her best friend moves far away, your daughter loses not only the companionship of her friend but also the opportunity to grow up together, sharing important life events and disappointments.

***Try This:** Think of a loss you have had in the past. Now identify the many other losses that resulted from this initial event.*

***What Do You Think?** Are some categories of loss more "significant" than others? Why?*

Each person affected by a loss loses something different because he or she has a unique relationship with the lost person or object. Other factors, such as the mourner's age, religious beliefs, and cultural traditions, also affect the ways in which someone reacts to a loss. As a result, even people living within the same household may have entirely different reactions when they face the same challenge. In fact, some members may not even realize a loss has occurred!

***Try This:** Think of a loss that your family has experienced. How did your reactions and understanding of the loss differ from those of your partner and/or children? Was anyone unaware of the loss?*

### **Assumptions about Loss**

We all develop patterns of behavior that are based on our early experiences and understandings. For example, if we are lucky enough to enjoy a nurturing childhood, we believe that the world is basically safe. Therefore we assume that others will treat us with kindness and sympathy. We will continue to hold these assumptions unless they are challenged by new information.

If, for instance, a young stay-at-home mother develops muscular sclerosis and her distraught husband is unable to take on the additional emotional and physical needs of his children, these children might unconsciously reassess their early lives and decide that people are indifferent to their pain. If children maintain this assumption, it will influence the way they make choices throughout their lives.

Consider some assumptions that exist within certain segments of our population:

- It is best to "get over" a loss as quickly as possible.
- Loss only happens to losers.

- Mourners need to talk about their losses if they hope to move on with their lives.
- Children aren't affected by loss.
- Everyone responds to loss in a predictable, structured way.
- Dwelling on a loss only makes it worse.
- Mourners become upset when you mention or remind them of a loss.

Obviously, not all Americans share these assumptions. And those living in other parts of the world may have entirely different assumptions about loss.

***What Do You Think?*** *With which of the assumptions listed above do you agree? Why? With which do you disagree? Why?*

### **Past Losses**

Much of the time, we make sense of life events on an unconscious or semiconscious level. As a result, while we may believe that it is unfair to burden others with our problems, we may not know exactly when or why we came to this conclusion. We also may never have considered whether these assumptions are still appropriate or helpful to us as we respond to the ups and downs of life. We can learn a lot about ourselves by deliberately reflecting on our past experiences and identifying how they may have influenced our present-day responses.

***Try This:*** *Take a few minutes to think about your assumptions about loss. Write them down. Are you surprised by any of them? Do you know why you hold these assumptions? Do your assumptions "make sense"? Why or why not?*

***What Do You Think?*** *How helpful are your assumptions about loss in your present life? Which ones would you change? How? Which ones will you keep the same?*

### **Loss and Unitarian Universalist Faith**

*In the final analysis, the question of why bad things happen to good people translates itself into some very different questions, no longer asking why something happened, but asking how we will respond, what we intend to do now that it has happened.*

--Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*

*Suffering ceases to be suffering in some way at the moment it finds a meaning.*

--Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*

*For something always, always sings. This is the message Easter brings: from deep despair and perished things, a green shoot always, always springs.*

-Alicia S. Carpenter, "A Promise through the Ages Rings"

A central reason for joining a faith community is to find a place to feel safe exposing our flaws and uncovering our pain. We seek a community where people will "walk through the nettles" with us, where we can drop all pretense and admit that when we fully enter into life, we also fully enter into loss. A major challenge of any faith community is to provide such needed support to those who are broken and without hope.

Faith communities approach this awesome responsibility in different ways, with some prescribing a very specific sequence of events in times of crisis. Unitarian Universalism does not share this approach. Because UUism is a noncreedal, nondoctrinal faith, members sometimes find it difficult to succinctly summarize UU beliefs. In fact, non-UUs often believe that Unitarian Universalism is more defined by what it isn't than by what it is. As a result, people are inclined to say, "Most UUs don't believe in Judgment Day" or "The majority of UUs don't believe that God is manipulating the daily events of our lives."

This approach to theology ignores that our faith holds many beliefs and engages in many practices that comfort those mourning a loss. It belittles the value of reflecting on a loss and learning from it, as eloquently described by Rev. Nichols:

*Grieving is putting the world back together again...[it] is not, as is commonly believed, the weak side of human nature. It is the process by which we strengthen ourselves for the task of living courageously in a universe in which there is very little security even as there is a great deal of happiness and love.*

While Unitarian Universalism offers no detailed and defined approach to facing loss, our seven Principles lead quite naturally to beliefs about loss and our response to it. The following beliefs are relatively widespread throughout our congregations:

- No one holds the ultimate truth about life, death, and the existence of the soul.
- We have the right to change our minds.
- We have the right to our individual opinions and beliefs.
- We believe that a deep reserve of strength exists within each of us.

- Every person has the courage and ability to contemplate the unknowable.
- Life is hard and loss is inevitable.
- Life is good and worth living.
- God (however one defines that concept) is characterized by love, not ultimate power.
- Our job is to live on earth with truth, beauty, and goodness.
- We can and do draw inspiration and strength from a wide variety of sources, including nature, individual fortitude, and other faiths.
- There are no "chosen" people: UUs are no more deserving of salvation or preference than people of other faiths (or of no faith).
- Because UUs tend to accept scientific explanations of occurrences, most members of our faith hold to an evolutionary view of the creation of the universe and do not readily affirm the existence of heaven, hell, or purgatory.
- As expressed by James Freeman Clarke in the nineteenth century, many of us believe in "salvation by character," in which UUs place greatest emphasis on the way we live our lives today here on earth.

We can help each other during times of loss by:

- offering support through our Caring Communities
- recognizing the wrenching pain of loss
- acknowledging differences of opinion in an atmosphere of respect and acceptance
- sharing our emotions, both pleasant and painful

- "walking through the nettles" with each other

However, some people question whether this is enough to offer those who are facing major losses. Rev. John Nichols poses this question when he suggests,

*In 1963, a Unitarian minister wrote, "The liberal church is not for the intellectually or emotionally faint-hearted, for those who wish to be soothed rather than stimulated on Sunday mornings. It is not the place to come to find strength but to develop it in oneself."*

***What Do You Think?*** Do you agree with the minister quoted above? When you have faced an important loss, how has your faith supported you? Was this "enough"? Did you feel you had to find your own way? Would you have liked more direction or structure from UU theology?

***What Do You Think?*** Identify losses you have had while you were a member of a UU congregation. What helped you during these times? To what degree was your UU church involved in offering this support?

Several of our Principles offer direct guidance to those facing loss. For instance, "acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations" directly addresses our goal of respecting others' beliefs, even when they differ from our own. This translates into congregations in which those who believe that "we are never challenged with more than we can handle" worship peacefully alongside those who accept the random nature of events.

***Try This:*** Look over the seven UU Principles (included at the [end of this booklet](#)). Which offer you solace in times of pain and loss? How?

**Try This:** Read the following sermon excerpt. How does the hospital chaplain draw on UU Principles to respond to Vinnie? If you were the patient, how would you have reacted to this explanation? How else could the chaplain have responded in a way consistent with Unitarian Universalist theology?

*When [my patient] was telling me a few more painful stories about his oldest and twice-divorced daughter, he stopped, looked at me, and asked the question that strikes fear in the heart of every new [hospital] chaplain. He looked at me and asked, "Why? What's life for, anyway? Why is it this hard? Did I do something wrong? Why?"*

*He asked me as if I could answer him. His soul cried out in wanting to know clear reasons, clear answers. Why? Why have I been forsaken?*

*Well, my first reaction was to want to tell him that I'd call in my supervisor to talk with him, but I knew I couldn't do that. I am the chaplain, I reminded myself. So I took a deep breath, and decided to be honest and share with Vinnie what I believed, with only one year of seminary under my belt, for whatever it was worth. I told him, "Vinnie, I don't know why." He looked disappointed, but obviously not surprised.*

*I said, "I look at it this way, Vinnie. I think of all of creation, the people, animals, plants, everything, as a field of grass. Each of us is like a blade of the grass. Sometimes a deer walks across the field, and some of us get stepped on, you know? It's nobody's fault-it just happens-and it's random. Some people are lucky enough to be in a sunny protected place until they die, and some are in muddy bogs the whole time. Some do okay until something steps on them or a tree falls on them. I don't believe anyone's punishing you for something you did wrong. You may not be responsible for all your problems, but I think you're responsible **to** them. It doesn't seem to me that the real question is 'Why?' so much as it is 'What now?' This is how it is for you right now, Vinnie-it just is. You can choose to plow through or not. So, to answer your question, I don't know **why**, but I do know it won't always be like this. Everything changes. I can tell that you feel about as low as you can go right now. But it won't always be this way."*

*And darned if he didn't look right into my eyes as his began to well up with tears. This big, tough, hard-working gruff swearing guy reached out his rough callused hand to mine and just gripped it for at least a minute as a few healing tears rolled down his cheeks and he wordlessly held on to me.*

-Elsa Hagberg, "Endings and Beginnings" <sup>3</sup>

**What Do You Think?** What are the strengths of Unitarian Universalism as it supports those experiencing excruciating loss? How can we, as congregants, tap into the wisdom of this theology?

## Loss Across the Lifespan

Children of different ages have different understandings of events around them. A child of six will take in the death of her grandmother quite differently than her fourteen-year-old brother. A fifth grader will have a different response to moving out of his school district than his soon-to-graduate eighteen-year-old sister.

As a result, when you engage with your family around issues of loss, it helps if you have a fundamental understanding of child development. The following summarizes some general differences in the ways in which children of different ages interpret events.

Remember, however, that all girls and boys are different and mature at different rates. So view this information as representing a continuum of development: the description of the typical elementary student may more accurately fit your four-year-old than that of the typical pre-schooler.

### Pre-Schoolers Ages Three to Five

Pre-school children tend to see themselves at the center of their worlds. As a result, they often believe that their thoughts directly cause events around them. If, for example, a four-year-old gets mad at her daddy and wishes that she didn't have to live with him anymore, she may assume her wish caused her parents' subsequent divorce. A young boy whose mother breaks her leg may be more concerned that she now can't take him to the pool than whether she is in any pain.

Young children also often see events as temporary and reversible and have little sense of permanence. You may find that you need to repeat the same information over and over to your young child, who may still forget that the situation has permanently changed. ("Remember, Maria, that your friend Selena moved far away and someone else lives in her house now.")

If you have children of this age, you might notice that they think concretely and literally. For instance, if you explain their grandmother's death by saying "she went to a better place," children frequently assume that Grandma moved to someplace she likes better, such as Disneyland or Las Vegas. To avoid misunderstandings, it helps to speak as clearly and directly as possible.

Often children of this age generally don't talk about or show their response to a loss in readily identifiable ways. Pre-schoolers frequently express their thoughts and feelings more effectively through play or drawings.

***Try This:*** *The next time your young child suffers a loss, don't ask him or her to describe it in words. Instead, suggest that your child make a drawing or put on a puppet show to explain what happened and how he or she is responding.*

When a pre-schooler suffers a significant loss, he or she may become more aggressive or combative. It is also common for grieving pre-schoolers to regress to a younger stage of development. While many parents are tempted to take it easy on a child who has had a significant

loss, most children find comfort in structure and clarity.

Explain what happened using easy-to-understand, concrete words. For instance, it might be helpful to say, "Your brother fell and hurt his arm. He can't play catch with you right now because he has a big white cast on his arm that keeps him from bending and moving it. When the cast is gone, he'll be able to play again."

Don't view your child's loss as an excuse for poor behavior, however. Be clear about what you expect, and don't back off from your standards. At the same time, don't hesitate to express your sympathy and concern to your child, even well after the time of the loss.

**Try This:** *Think back to a time when your pre-schooler suffered a loss—even if it was one you considered fairly minor. How did your child react? How did you, in turn, respond?*

**What Do You Think?** *As you reflect on this experience, are there ways in which you wish you had reacted differently?*

In general, before a significant loss occurs in your pre-schooler's life, it is helpful to find teachable moments to introduce the concept of change and loss.

**Try This:** *As you walk outside together, point out signs of changing seasons or the cycles of life. As you rustle through a pile of leaves in the autumn or notice a dead animal by the side of the road, ask your son or daughter what happened. Be gentle but correct any misinformation, emphasizing that loss is ever present and affects each of us throughout our lives. Don't hesitate to repeat this message over and over, as young children have a hard time understanding the concept of permanence.*

## **Elementary School Children Ages Five to Ten**

Once children enter school, they usually understand that losses are permanent and irreversible. However, younger elementary school children still often exhibit "magical thinking," in which they believe their thoughts and feelings are the cause of unhappy events. Perhaps even more upsetting, children in the early grades often feel responsible for others' silence or sadness. ("Ever since Davie left for college, Mommy has been sad. I guess she loves him more than me, or she wouldn't be so upset.")

While school-age children are more independent than pre-schoolers, they still need the reassurance of consistent and nurturing care. When they are unsettled by a loss, spend extra time with your children whenever possible, listening and sympathizing with their sadness. (It is not particularly helpful to tell people of any age to "get over it" or to question why they are so upset.) Try to maintain consistency in day-to-day routines as much as possible, and encourage your children's continued involvement with friends and favorite activities.

**Try This:** *Think back over the past month, and identify a loss that affected your elementary school child. How did you view this loss? What did you say to your child about it? What did you do?*

Younger elementary students love talking about and sharing their experiences, including those that involve loss. As they move toward the upper grades, elementary students typically become more hesitant to open up to others about experiences that stimulate intense feeling. Their tendency to intellectualize or compartmentalize their losses, or to distract themselves with activities and school, is a hallmark of their beginning the transition toward early adolescence.

So bring up the loss with your elementary school children, anticipate their questions, and communicate your willingness to talk about it. Give your children more details than you would have when your sons and daughters were younger. Let your children learn how to respond to loss by watching you. When possible, share your feelings without losing control. If this is not possible for you, enlist the help of another relative or friend who may be more able to respond authentically without overwhelming your children.

***What Do You Think?*** Do you agree that you should discuss painful or difficult losses with your school-aged children? Why or why not? If you have ever talked with them about specific losses, how did they respond? How did you react to the conversation? What did you learn?

Remember that children's thoughts and feelings are fleeting, and your son or daughter may be crying over the loss of a pet in one moment and skipping out the door to play with a friend the next. Don't judge the intensity or length of their reactions, but encourage their ability and willingness to continue with "normal" activities.

***Try This:*** Think of a time when your child moved quickly from upset to joy (or some other contrasting emotion). What were the circumstances? How did you interpret your child's changing reactions? Looking back, how do you understand your child's behavior now?

If the loss involves a death or permanent separation from a pet, relative, or friend, ask for your elementary school children's assistance in planning and conducting rituals of memory or commemoration. If they are willing, encourage them to take the lead.

***Try This:*** The next time your child suffers a loss, ask him or her how to honor this loss. If your child has no ideas, suggest some of your own. Then follow through together. For example, you and your son might write a note and send some drawings to his favorite uncle, who now lives several states away. Follow up in a few weeks or months to see if your son would like to continue writing or maintaining contact in some way.

### **Middle Schoolers Ages Ten to Fourteen**

By the time students are in middle school, most are beginning to adopt an adult perspective on loss. They are much more realistic than their younger siblings and know that when someone dies, this person will never come back to life.

Middle schoolers are increasingly capable of thinking logically and more easily understand true cause and effect. For instance, a seventh-grader may accept that his parents need to spend lots of time with his sister who is developmentally disabled. However, he might still resent his parents'

preoccupation and wish for more of their attention.

Younger middle schoolers often demand information, especially if they feel they are not being properly informed. As they grow older, however, most middle schoolers become more reluctant to ask about and discuss loss. You, like other parents, may have even worried that your outwardly indifferent children lack compassion and empathy.

**Try This:** *Think back on how your middle schooler reacted when he or she lost something or someone important. How open was he or she to discussing this loss, either with you or with other adults and friends? How did you interpret your child's reactions?*

This increased hesitancy to share represents a different underlying dynamic than when you observe the same behavior in your elementary school child. When middle schoolers distance themselves from a loss, they are beginning to develop ways to defend themselves against their potentially overwhelming reactions. They also might intellectualize a loss as a way to make it more tolerable. Because they may fear losing control in front of others, middle schoolers may mourn a loss alone.

Toward the end of middle school, most children begin to separate from their families and increasingly turn to peers and other adults for support. Their world outside the home becomes more and more important, and conflict with parents and siblings may intensify. Hormonal changes can also add to their emotional volatility, and you may feel that you are the last person your child turns to for support. Even as they shun your intrusion in their lives, your middle schoolers long for and need continued support and love. In part, this conflict represents your child's mixed reactions to his or her increasing independence.

**What Do You Think?** *How do you respond when your middle schooler seems unwilling to share losses with you but then turns to a favorite teacher or coach for support?*

As part of the increased importance of friends during these years, most middle schoolers develop a strong need to fit in. Conformity is at its peak in middle school. As a result, children of this age may avoid telling schoolmates about a significant loss such as the death of a parent or sibling or about their family's different religious or ethnic beliefs for fear of "seeming different."

**What Do You Think?** *Have your middle schoolers experienced any losses that resulted in their being rejected by their peers? If so, how did your children react? What did you do as a result?*

**Try This:** *The next time your middle-school child seems reluctant to share a distressing event with you, try asking a few open-ended, neutral questions. Possibilities include, "What do you know about this event? What have you heard? What are you worried about? What else do you need to know?" How does your son or daughter react? How does this differ from previous conversations about loss?*

**Try This:** *The next time you suffer a loss, tell your middle schooler about it. For example, you might say, "My best friend from work just accepted a job in another state. I am very happy for her but feel very sad that I won't see her as much any more." What might this communicate to your child? How do you expect that he or she will react in the moment? Over time?*

## High Schoolers Ages Fourteen to Eighteen

In our Western culture, high schoolers typically continue to separate from their parents while beginning to form intimate relationships with peers. Increasingly teens choose their friends, determine how to spend their free time, and develop interests independently of their parents and relatives. Making this transition from childhood to adulthood is difficult but rewarding. As teens gain more confidence and a stronger sense of self, they find it easier to consider a life separate from their parents and family.

When teens suffer significant losses, such as the death of a parent or the suicide of a close friend, their world suddenly feels less safe, delaying or preventing their move toward independence. Because they have a harder time facing the normal developmental tasks of adolescence, teens who experience difficult losses may act out with drugs, alcohol, or other high-risk behaviors.

**Try This:** *Think about the lives of your teen-age children. Identify any significant losses they have faced and consider the effect of these losses on your sons' and daughters' view of the world and their place in it.*

**What Do You Think?** *What would help your teens survive these losses emotionally and intellectually? How can you support them? How do your ideas differ from what you have done in the past? How do your ideas differ from how you would support a younger child?*

Teenagers can be philosophical about their lives and increasingly explore and understand their world through abstract thinking. As a result, high schoolers are more able to internalize and cherish a lost object, relationship, or person. This way of making sense of a loss offers a valuable tool to youth as they enter the more complicated world of adulthood.

Most teens want to understand and are capable of reflecting on tragedy and injustice. They can think more deeply and better understand that such concepts as "truth," "right and wrong," and "faith" have different meanings to different people. They often respond well to open-ended questions such as "What is my purpose here on earth?" "Why do bad things happen to good people?" "What happens to the soul after death?" When adults share their thoughts and listen sensitively, youth articulate their own views and gain an increased sense of mastery and purpose.

**Try This:** *Identify a major world event that is currently being covered in the news media. Share the news article with your teen and briefly offer your understanding of this event. ("I often wonder why some people seem to get hit with so many challenges. It doesn't seem fair to me. How do you make sense of it?") Don't be discouraged if your teen doesn't respond to your first attempt, especially if you and your children are not used to sharing in this way.*

**Try This:** *Listen to some of your teen's favorite music. Identify themes of loss and consider how these themes are addressed by the musician. What does this tell you about your teen and his or her worldview?*

If you have already raised teenagers, you have probably witnessed their intense reactions to situations they see as unfair or meaningless. They also have increasingly strong attachments to

friends and can become distraught when important relationships go awry. Often teens' strong reactions interfere with their ability to function in school, at home, or on the athletic field. View these strong peer relationships as a strength, not a threat to your authority. Try to find ways to encourage your teens and their friends to watch out for each other and to question risky behavior.

***What Do You Think?*** Think about the ways in which teens flirt with dangerous behavior and activities. How would you like your son or daughter to reach out to their troubled friends? How would you like their friends to reach out to them? How can you communicate your thoughts to your teen?

## **Adults**

As an adult you know there is no way to avoid loss. The experience of loss is part of being human. Rev. William Murry articulates this well in his book *A Faith for All Seasons: Liberal Religion and the Crises of Life*:

*To be human is to know loss, and indeed, the more fully human we are, the more loss we will know and the deeper we will feel the losses; for the more we love and care, the more we have to lose. All the things to which we become attached are transient; they pass; they decay; they die. And when we lose someone or something we love, our response is grief. Grief is difficult to handle because it is not one emotion but many--sadness, depression, bewilderment, despair, helplessness, loneliness, emptiness, meaninglessness, and probably guilt. All of these are common to grief. We experience them in varying degrees of intensity according to the importance of our loss, and we experience them in no particular order or pattern.<sup>4</sup>*

***What Do You Think?*** When you think back to your losses, what emotions do you remember experiencing at those times? What helped most in coping with your loss? What did other people do that helped you?

If you read the previous section defining loss, you already have given considerable thought to your assumptions and typical responses to life's challenges. You probably also realize that adults are no more predictable than children, and that one forty-year-old will respond to a loss very differently than another. We are products of our personal, cultural, and historical experiences, and no one has the right or the ability to tell others how to think, feel, or react to life's many challenges.

***What Do You Think?*** What do you find most comforting when you face a significant loss? What do you offer to others when they are in mourning? What is your goal when you offer comfort to another?

**Try This:** Next time you hear of a friend's loss, visit your friend and listen, don't talk. (This means that you and your friend may both remain silent for long periods of time.) Then reflect on how you reacted to this approach. Were you comfortable listening and remaining silent? How did this encounter differ from previous times you offered comfort to a friend?

**What Do You Think?** Should we modify our attempts to comfort our friends and relatives during troubling times, depending on the nature of the loss? Why or why not? How would you modify your responses, and under what circumstances?

## Elders

Elders have a unique place in family relations in accepting life's many losses and facing mortality. Often elders acknowledge the inevitability of death and talk openly with family members about death as a part of life. Yet even an anticipated death of an elderly person has many repercussions in the lives of family members. Elderly couples, siblings, and/or friends know the emptiness and loneliness that comes with being the last in line, the ancestor. The following grieving prayer was shared by my friend's mother with her children and grandchildren upon the death of her beloved partner of 55 years.

*One or the other must leave  
One or the other must stay  
One or the other must grieve  
That is forever the way  
That is the vows that were made  
Faithful till death do us part  
Craving what had to be borne  
Hiding the ache in the heart  
One howsoever adored  
First must be summoned away  
That is the will of the Holy  
One or the other must stay.*

**Try This:** Honor the wisdom of elders in your family, your congregation, and/or your community by spending time with them and talking about the seasons of their lives. How have they coped with their losses? Who and what helped them in times of pain, suffering, and tragedy? How might their life experiences inform your own perspectives?

## Activities

### At Home

The previous sections have outlined ways to prepare yourself to engage with your family and/or extended family around issues of loss. Now you may be ready to bring your family together to talk and share your thoughts and feelings. This section offers suggestions for such family

activities.

As with all previous suggestions, read through the activities and then adapt them to your particular circumstances. Some families, for example, are more comfortable doing things together rather than talking about them. So use these activities selectively, and modify them as you see fit.

While reviewing these ideas, think about how your family comes together most easily. Do you all prefer to define a regular time each week, such as a Saturday morning or a Tuesday evening, for these activities? Is your family more spontaneous, so that you will have greater success if you establish a general time frame and then decide on specific times and dates as you go along? (For instance, your family might agree to come together at least four times over the next eight weeks to engage in a specific set of activities.) You know what will work with your children and partner, so be creative!



*Something's Different:* Loss comes in all shapes and sizes, many of which we don't even recognize as a loss. But loss is ever-present, even for very young children. This activity helps you and your family identify different types of loss, reflect together on their impact, and develop some ideas about how to support each other at these difficult times.

To prepare for this activity, gather several magazines with lots of illustrations showing different people of differing ages and ethnicities in a variety of circumstances. Examples of appropriate pictures include:

- a newborn baby and her father
- a moving van
- a wedding or graduation
- a person lying in a hospital bed
- a birthday party
- a natural disaster such as a hurricane or tsunami

Bring these magazines, along with several sets of scissors, some construction paper, and glue sticks, to your family gathering. Give everyone two or three magazines and ask them to find several pictures that illustrate loss. If you have very young children, briefly review the different types of loss (e.g., loss of person or relationship, loss of idea or belief, loss of physical object, loss of part of self). Then ask them to cut out these pictures and arrange them in a collage, using glue and construction paper.

When everyone is finished, ask family members to show their collages, identify the losses involved, and explain why these losses are important. As each person concludes this explanation, ask others to identify the possible good and bad outcomes of these changes. For example, if your young daughter selected a picture of a baby in a stroller with an older child walking forlornly behind, someone might suggest that it's fun to have an infant in the house, while someone else might say that it can be hard for other children to share their parents' time.

After everyone presents his or her collage, point out that each person has created a different mosaic of loss. Be sure to emphasize that loss is in the eye of the beholder, and that if it feels like a loss, it is, even if others don't see it that way. Also point out that everyone—even the very youngest child—faces loss and the changes loss that creates.

*Loss Affects Everyone:* Identify a few of your children's and partner's favorite books or music CDs. Select at least one for each family member that touches on the subject of loss. (If you need help identifying appropriate books and music, refer to the [Resources](#) section of this brochure or ask your religious educator if the congregation owns a copy of the lifespan curriculum *Lessons of Loss* and read through it for age-appropriate book and music suggestions.)

When your family gets together, hand out your selections to your children and partner. Ask them to either listen to the music or quickly look through the book to identify ways in which loss is described or presented. Ask them to share their findings with the family. Then ask if the losses presented in these books and music remind them of any losses they have experienced and to describe them. Ask if their responses to the loss were the same, or different, from the responses of the character in the book or song.

When everyone has had a chance to share, point out the variety of losses that you and your family have identified and how each person has his or her own way of responding.

*Feelings Matter:* Buy a pack of small index cards. On each, write one of the following emotions:

- anger
  
- despair
  
- joy
  
- relief

- disappointment
- humiliation
- loneliness
- fear
- shame
- love
- worry
- embarrassment

Give at least two cards to each family member. Ask everyone to describe a situation in which they felt this emotion without mentioning it by name. For example, your young son may say, "I felt this way on Christmas!" to describe "joy." Other family members then try to guess which emotion he or she is describing. Then ask the presenter:

- Did you know you were feeling this at the time?
- How did you show this feeling to the family? If you didn't show this feeling, why not?
- If you did share your feelings, how did family members react?

When everyone has had a chance to tell a story about the emotion listed on their card, ask family members if they believe it helps to let others know how they are feeling and why.

*Creating Family Rituals:* Gather your family together and ask if anyone remembers attending a funeral or burial. If so, ask him or her to describe it and to explain why people perform such rituals. Make sure that someone mentions the importance of officially recognizing a loss and coming together to support each other in the hard times.

Now mention a loss that you have not previously identified to your family. Explain why you didn't mention it (it seemed too small, you didn't want to worry them, you didn't realize at the

time how important the loss was). Then tell them what would have helped you at the time if you had been more able or willing to share your loss with your family and friends.

Ask others to share their experiences. Then suggest that you decide how to honor each other's losses by creating a ritual that you can perform together. It can be something as simple as taking a moment over dinner to light a candle and share the loss or observe a period of respectful silence. It can involve creating a space within your apartment or house where family members can leave an object or note representing a loss so that others know that something happened. It can be much more involved and ornate—there are no rules, and what works for your family doesn't have to appeal to anyone else. When rituals are created with your own family's needs and circumstances in mind, they can hold great significance and power.

*Days of the Dead Celebration:* Explain that in many cultures, people come together to remember important losses and/or to revisit people who have passed out of their lives. If you can find a book on the Mexican tradition of "Days of the Dead," show it to your family. (See the [Resources](#) section or *Lessons of Loss* for several excellent books on this topic.) Suggest that your family hold its own "Days of the Dead" ceremony, and ask for help in planning this event. Ask them:

- What would you like to commemorate in this ceremony? (You can honor all sorts of losses. Each person can use this celebration in a way that is most meaningful to them.)
- What do you need to do to prepare for the ceremony? Do you have to make something, such as a drawing, or write something, such as a letter? How much time do you need for this preparation?
- What will the ceremony involve? Lighting candles? Gathering symbols of the loss and leaving them in a common altar-like place? Speaking a few words about the loss? Other ideas?
- When and where should we hold this celebration?

While you can follow the structure of a typical Days of the Dead celebration (in which, for example, families gather favorite food and possessions of the deceased), feel free to adapt this ceremony to be consistent with your family's beliefs, ethnic heritage, and interests. Make the ceremony your own, while maintaining the goal of sharing and honoring each other's losses.

*Movie Madness:* Many people, including adults as well as children, find it easier to share their thoughts and feelings by watching movies or reading books together rather than through sharing personal stories. If this is the case for your family, consider renting a movie that focuses on loss and watching it together. Even if you never discuss it at length, you now have a shared experience to which you can refer on many future occasions.

You have many choices, as loss is a universal topic addressed in one way or another in almost every movie. Make a choice based on the age and interests of your family. Also consider

television shows that introduce the topic of loss, such as "Life Goes On." Some other possibilities:

- *The Accidental Tourist*
- *Bambi*
- *Casablanca*
- *Corina, Corina*
- *The Drum Bangs Slowly*
- *Friday Night Lights*
- *Good Will Hunting*
- *The Joy Luck Club*
- *Kramer vs. Kramer*
- *The Lion King*
- *The Lou Gehrig Story*
- *Mrs. Doubtfire*
- *My Life as a Dog*
- *Of Mice and Men*
- *Ordinary People*

- *Romeo and Juliet*
- *Titanic*
- *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*

*No One Is Ever Alone:* Most of us have experienced times when we thought we were totally alone with our pain. At the time, we could not recognize that there were people who would have helped us survive those dark days. So why not spend some time now identifying people in your personal support systems so that you are better able to reach out the next time you feel overwhelmed?

When you come together as a family, hand out paper and pencils to everyone. (If some of your children are too young to write, either plan to help them or provide crayons so they can draw their ideas.) Ask your family to jot down some thoughts about the following questions:

- What groups or organizations do you belong to? (Some examples include "middle school chorus," "PTO," "UU youth group," "women's fitness center.")
- What do these groups offer to you when you're feeling down? What other ways could these groups help you if you asked?
- Which people within these groups are particularly important to and supportive of you?
- What sometimes gets in the way of these people or groups supporting you when you need help?
- How can you make it easier for people to know when you need help?



Ask your family members to keep their notes someplace where they can refer to them easily. Remind them that when we are in the middle of a crisis, we often don't think as clearly as we do at other times, and these notes can help us figure out what to do the next time we feel alone and overwhelmed.

### **In Your Congregation**

Many of the ideas suggested in this booklet can be modified for use within your wider

congregation. The following suggestions might be appropriate as well. Identify a congregant who will act as facilitator for these activities and encourage him or her to make the changes necessary to ensure that the activities fit the interests and needs of your congregation.

*Identify Yourself:* Although we all experience loss throughout our lives, we often don't share our losses with others or acknowledge the universality of loss. When we stop to realize how much experience we have, we gain empathy and compassion for each other as we face the everyday challenges of life.

Ask everyone to stand in a line at one end of a large, preferably empty room (such as a Parish Hall or meeting room). Ask people to take a step forward if they:

- have lost a loved one to illness or accident
- have moved in the last five years
- have relatives in more than three different states
- did not grow up speaking English as a first language
- have held more than four jobs
- have "put down" a pet
- have lost a favorite keepsake
- observe rituals and hold ceremonies that friends don't recognize or understand
- have totaled a car
- weren't chosen for the sports team or cast for the annual musical
- have ended an important friendship over a difference in political, personal, or religious beliefs

- have moved away from families of origin
- are unable to do some things that were quite easy in the past (read small print, climb ladders, etc.)
- have been deeply disappointed by a close friend or relative
- have radically changed religious, moral, or political beliefs
- have immigrated to a different country
- have said goodbye to a close friend when he or she moved away
- have felt like an outsider

After you have read through this list of losses and everyone has taken a step forward for each relevant statement, ask participants to look around the room and see how the string of people has changed since the beginning of the exercise. Is there anyone who is still at the original starting line? Are there people who took a step forward on most, if not all, of the statements? What does this tell us about the presence of loss in our lives?

*Loss Is Everywhere:* Before the intergenerational group convenes for the first time, identify several different losses that might be experienced by people in your congregation. Write a brief description of six or seven of these losses, as well as a few questions related to each. Examples:

- Job transfer (e.g., "You have just been promoted to head your department at work, but it means you will have to move several towns away. How will this change your daily and weekly routines? How will it affect your professional and personal relationships? How do you react to this news? How will your family react?")
- Death of a pet (e.g., "You got your beloved puppy when you were seven years old. Now your Bassett is almost eleven years old and is slowly losing his ability to walk. You are having a hard enough time thinking about leaving home for college. The thought of losing your dog as well really puts you over the edge. How do you react as your dog has a harder and harder time standing up? What can you do to help him?")

Other possible loss scenarios include:

- car accident, leading to chronic pain or physical disability

- college rejection
- teasing on the elementary school playground
- divorce
- financial crisis leading to bankruptcy
- elderly relative's increasing senility
- youngest child's move out of state
- career-ending athletic injury

Divide your congregants into several small groups of four to five people, trying as much as possible to mix ages and genders. Give each person in a group a different type of loss. Ask participants to read the description of their loss and then to think about how they would typically respond. Then invite each member of the small group to share his or her situation and reactions with fellow members.

After all small groups have concluded this exercise, bring everyone back together and ask for observations and comments. Ask if anyone can identify ways in which the seven UU Principles might provide guidance as congregants face loss and life challenges.

*My History of Loss:* All of our losses stay with us, and influence our subsequent actions and beliefs. And yet, often, we don't even realize how much loss we have encountered, much less recognize how our current responses are grounded in our personal histories.

Bring paper and pencils to your intergenerational gathering. When people are seated, pass out the supplies and ask each person to draw a line down the middle of the sheet of paper (the long way). Now ask participants to think about this line as representing their lives from birth to the present. Ask them to divide the line into ten equal segments, each corresponding to several years of their lives.

Now ask participants to identify at least one loss for each segment of time. These losses can be small ("I started kindergarten") or major ("I had my third miscarriage and learned that I would never carry a pregnancy to term"). Give participants at least fifteen minutes to fill in their loss lines.

Now ask participants to turn to a neighbor and share their reactions to this exercise. Were they surprised at how many losses they had? At the types of losses they remembered? Ask participants

to identify a loss to their partners that they did not acknowledge at the time but now believe has had a significant impact on their lives. How does this loss continue to hold power over them? Does it exert a positive, negative, or mixed influence? How? Are there ways in which participants could modify the impact of this loss if they so choose?

When the group comes back together, ask for observations, comments, and questions.

*My Life as a Picture:* Gather a collection of magazines and newspapers that have many illustrations of people, animals, and nature, and bring them to your intergenerational gathering. Also bring construction paper and glue or staplers. Ask participants to describe the effects of loss, making sure that someone (you, if necessary) points out that loss almost always leads to change.

Now invite participants to help themselves to a few magazines and newspapers. Ask them to find pictures of losses they have experienced and to cut them out to make a scrapbook of their lives. Hand out the scrapbook supplies and indicate that when everyone is done, those who wish to do so can present their "visual autobiographies," briefly describing each loss and explaining its importance.

After all volunteers have had a chance to share, ask for comments, observations, and questions.

*This Is My Story:* Every congregation includes members who have experienced losses both large and small. Often people have little opportunity to share these experiences.

With the help of your minister and other staff, identify five or six people (of different ages, if possible) from your congregation who have had different types of loss. Call or write to them, asking if they would be willing to share their stories with your intergenerational group. Let them know how much time they will have to present their losses and to describe how their reactions to and understanding of these losses have changed over time. If possible, talk with them about the type of loss they plan to discuss, so that you can encourage a mix of experiences.

When your group convenes, introduce your special guests and invite them to share their stories. Be sure to leave enough time at the end so that participants can offer comments, ask questions, and share their own experiences.

*Who Can Help?* Most communities have access to a range of services for those in need. However, many of us are unaware of these resources and therefore cannot make appropriate use of them. In this activity, which will extend over at least two meetings, your congregants will assemble a file of resources covering different types of services for use by fellow congregants.

When you gather participants, explain the purpose of the activity and ask what types of services they would like to include in their resource list. Examples might include:

- utility subsidies
- mental health services

- suicide prevention programs
- low-cost medical care
- legal assistance
- consignment and second-hand stores
- discount web sites and retailers
- illness-specific organizations (Alcoholics Anonymous, Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, etc.)
- medical screening clinics (for mammograms, high blood pressure, diabetes, etc.)
- bereavement services for adults and children
- subsidized day care
- public speakers and workshop leaders

Then ask each participant to identify an area that he or she would like to investigate. If more than one person wants to find out about the same type of service or program, ask them to work together. Also ask for a volunteer to compile the information once it is gathered.

Specify the types of information congregants should gather. You might even produce a data collection form to hand out for people to use as they conduct their research. This will make it much easier to integrate the information into a notebook or pamphlet at a future point.

Types of information you might ask participants to collect:

- Name of organization or individual offering such services
- Detailed description of services provided

- Contact information, including phone numbers, mailing addresses, web sites, and e-mail (as possible)
- Cost of services
- Availability of services (for example, existence of waiting lists, frequency of workshops, date of next offering)
- Other important information (such as availability of small grants in cases of extreme emergencies)

With the group, determine a deadline for collecting this information and coming back as a group. When you reconvene, ask for comments about the process, any surprise discoveries, and vital information that the entire congregation should obtain immediately, perhaps through weekly announcements in the sanctuary or through the church newsletter. Then discuss a process for distributing the information to the congregation, and hand over the data to the previously identified volunteer.

At a minimum, notify the congregation through announcements or the newsletter of the existence and availability of this resource list. If possible, ask for volunteers to periodically update the master list.

*Candles of Memory:* Our society seems particularly reluctant to allow mourners to cherish their memories of things and people lost. However, if the truth be known, many of us continue to hold important people and relationships—even beliefs—in our hearts long after they play an active role in our physical lives.

People gain strength from recognizing that others, too, are touched by loss, and can gain comfort in the company of other mourners. The Candles of Memory ritual offers such an opportunity.

Prior to this gathering, ask participants to bring a memento that reminds them of a significant loss. This loss can be a person, an ideal, a part of their identity, or anything else that they consider precious. Announce when and where the ceremony will be held.

Before this time, set up an altar similar to what you would use for your "Joys and Concerns" time during regular services. When people gather, open with a short prayer. (Elizabeth Tarbox and Mary Oliver have books of meditations with many appropriate selections. See the [Resources](#) section for specific citations.) Then explain that this ceremony is a time for collective sharing and honoring important losses in our lives, and invite people to come forward with their mementoes to place on the altar. Encourage them to light a candle and share a few words, as they wish.

Do not rush this ceremony. Many people will need time to collect their thoughts, and appreciate an initial period of silence. Allow the process to unfold naturally, without force. When you are certain that those who want to come forward have done so, place your own memento and share

your thoughts, as appropriate.

Conclude the ceremony with another brief reading or prayer.

## Footnotes

1. A complete transcript of this lecture is included in *Lessons of Loss: A Life-span Curriculum on Death, Dying, and Loss for the UU Community*. Many congregations use this curriculum in their church schools, so ask your religious educator if your congregation owns it. If not, you can contact the UU Society of Wellesley, MA, or the author, Carol Galginaitis, at [carolgal@comcast.net](mailto:carolgal@comcast.net).
2. A complete transcript of this sermon is included in *Lessons of Loss: A Life-span Curriculum on Death, Dying, and Loss for the UU Community*. (See previous footnote.) You can also contact the First Parish in Lexington, MA, for more information.
3. A complete transcript of this sermon is included in *Lessons of Loss: A Life-span Curriculum on Death, Dying, and Loss for the UU Community*. You can contact the UU Society of Wellesley Hills, Wellesley, MA for more information.
4. William Murry, *A Faith for All Seasons*, Bethesda, MD: River Road Press, 1990, 92.

## Resources

### For Children

- Alexander, Sue. *Nadia the Willful*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1983. (fiction, picture book, death of sibling, importance of sharing memories)
- Ancona, George. *Pablo Remembers*. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, 1993. (fiction, picture book, Days of the Dead celebration)
- Angelou, Maya. *Life Doesn't Frighten Me*. New York: Stewart, Tabor, and Chang, 1993. (poetry, celebration of life)
- Babbitt, Natalie. *Tuck Everlasting*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975. (fiction, chapter book, immortality)

- Blume, Judy. *Are You There, God, It's Me, Margaret*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Bradbury Press, 1970. (fiction, chapter book, loss of childhood)
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Tiger Eyes*. Scarsdale, New York: Bradbury Press, 1981. (fiction, chapter book, violent death of father)
- Bunting, Eve. *Fly Away Home*. New York: Clarion Books, 1991. (fiction, picture book, homelessness)
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Happy Funeral*. New York: Harper & Row, 1982. (fiction, picture book, death of grandfather, Chinese-American funeral practices)
- Burnett, Frances Hodgson. *The Secret Garden*. New York: Dell, 1987. (fiction, chapter book, death of relative)
- Buscaglia, Leo. *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf*. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1982. (fiction, picture book, life cycle)
- Carrick, Carol. *The Accident*. New York: Houghton Mifflin/Clarion Books, 1976. (fiction, picture book, death of pet)
- Carson, Jo. *You Hold Me and I'll Hold You*. New York: Orchard Books, 1992. (fiction, picture book, divorce, death, and value of comforting each other)
- Cleary, Beverly. *Dear Mr. Henshaw*. New York: Morrow, 1983. (fiction, chapter book, divorce)
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Strider*. New York: Morrow Junior Books, 1991. (fiction, chapter book)
- Clifton, Lucille. *Everett Anderson's Good-bye*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983. (fiction, picture book, death of father)
- Cohen, Miriam. *Jim's Dog Muffins*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1984. (fiction, picture book, death of pet)

- Collier, James and Christopher Collier. *My Brother Sam Is Dead*. New York: Scholastic, 1997. (fiction, chapter book, war, death)
- Dahl, Roahl. *Matilda*. New York: Viking Kestrel, 1988. (fiction, chapter book, alienation from family)
- Fox, Mem. *Tough Boris*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994. (fiction, picture book, death of pet)
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- Fry, Virginia Lynn. *Part of Me Died, Too*. New York: Dutton Children's Books, 1995.
- Girion, Barbara. *A Tangle of Roots*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1976 (chapter 2). (fiction, chapter book)
- Goble, Paul. *Beyond the Ridge*. New York: Bradbury Press, 1989. (fiction, picture book, Native American depiction of afterlife)
- Green, Constance. *Beat the Turtle Drum*. New York: Viking Press, 1976. (fiction, chapter book, death of sibling)
- Heegaard, Marge. *When Someone Very Special Dies*. Minneapolis, MN: Woodland Press, 1991. (workbook for children who have suffered the death of a loved one)
- \_\_\_\_\_ . *When Something Terrible Happens*. Minneapolis, MN: Woodland Press, 1991. (workbook to help children identify and express their feelings about a significant loss)
- Hipp, Earl. *Help for The Hard Times*. Center City, MN: Hazelden, 1995.
- Hoyt-Goldsmith, Diane. *Day of the Dead*. New York: Holiday House, New York, 1994.

- Jukes, Mavis. *I'll See You in My Dreams*. New York: Knopf, 1993. (fiction, picture book, death of relative)
- Kohlenberg, Sherry. *Sammy's Mommy Has Cancer*. New York: Imagination Press, 1993. (picture book)
- Konigsburg, E. *From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*. New York: Dell, 1977. (fiction, chapter book, alienation from family)
- Krasny Brown, Laurie and Marc Brown. *Dinosaurs Divorce*. Trumpet Club, 1986. (non-fiction, picture book, identifies and discusses many issues children face when their parents divorce)
- \_\_\_\_\_ . *When Dinosaurs Die*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1996. (non-fiction, picture book, explanation of death and dying)
- Kremetz, Jill. *How It Feels When Parents Divorce*. New York: Knopf, 1988. (non-fiction, chapter book, children talking about their parents' divorce)
- \_\_\_\_\_ . *How It Feels When a Parent Dies*. New York: Knopf, 1981. (non-fiction, chapter book, children talking about death of parent)
- Krull, Kathleen. *Maria Molina and the Days of the Dead*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1994. (fiction, picture book, Days of the Dead celebration)
- Lasky, Kathryn. *Days of the Dead*. New York: Hyperion Books for Children, 1994. (fiction, picture book, Days of the Dead celebration)
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- LeTord, Bijou. *My Grandma Leonie*. New York: Bradbury Press, 1987. (fiction, picture book, death of grandmother)

- Levy, Janice. *The Spirit of Tio Fernando*. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman & Company, 1995. (fiction, picture book, Days of the Dead celebration)
- Lowry, Lois. *Number the Stars*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989. (fiction, chapter book, Holocaust)
- Mabey, Richard. *Oak & Company*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1983. (non-fiction, chapter book, life cycle)
- MacLachlan, Patricia. *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. New York: Harper & Row, 1985. (fiction, relative's blindness, elementary age)
- \_\_\_\_\_ . *Through Grandpa's Eyes*. New York: HarperCollins, 1980. (fiction, chapter book, death of mother)
- Madenski, Melissa. *Some of the Pieces*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991. (fiction, long picture book, death of father, memories)
- Mellonie, Bryan and Robert Ingpen. *Lifetimes*. New York: Bantam Books, 1983. (non-fiction, picture book, life cycle)
- Miles, Miska. *Annie and the Old One*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1971. (fiction, picture book, Native American customs, death of grandmother)
- O'Dell, Scott. *Sing Down the Moon*. New York: Dell, 1978. (fiction, chapter book, persecution, separation from family, loss of culture)
- \_\_\_\_\_ . *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960. (fiction, chapter book, death of father and separation from family)
- O'Toole, Donna. *Aarvy Aardvark Finds Hope*. Burnsville, NC: Celo Press, 1988. (fiction, chapter book, separation from family)
- Paterson, Katherine. *Bridge to Terabithia*. New York: Crowell, 1977. (fiction, chapter book, death of friend)

- \_\_\_\_\_ . *The Great Gilly Hopkins*. New York: Avon, 1978. (fiction, chapter book, foster care)
- Rappaport, Doreen. *The New King*. New York: Dial Books, 1995. (fiction, picture book, death of father)
- Rogers, Fred. *When a Pet Dies*. New York: GP Putnam's Sons, 1988. (non-fiction, photography book, death of pet)
- Speare, Elizabeth George. *Witch of Blackbird Pond*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958. (fiction, chapter book, persecution, prejudice)
- Varley, Susan. *Badger's Parting Gifts*. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, 1984. (fiction, picture book, death of friend, and existence of afterlife)
- Waber, Bernard. *Ira Says Good-bye*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988. (fiction, picture book, best friend moves away)
- Wallace-Brodeur, Ruth. *Goodbye, Mitch*. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman & Co., 1995. (fiction, picture book, anticipated death of cat)
- Waring, Shirley Baldwin. *What Happened to Benjamin*. Hanover, NH: Shirley & Thomas Waring Publishers, 1993. (fiction, picture book, loss of favorite stuffed animal)
- White, E.B. *Charlotte's Web*. New York: Dell, 1952. (fiction, chapter book, death of friend)
- \_\_\_\_\_ . *The Trumpet of The Swan*. New York: HarperCollins, 1970. (fiction, chapter book, struggling with being different, not fitting in)
- White Deer of Autumn. *The Great Change*. Hillsboro, OR: Beyond Words Publishing, 1992. (fiction, picture book, Native American customs)
- Willner-Pardo, Gina. *Hunting Grandma's Treasures*. New York: Clarion Books, 1996. (fiction, short chapter book, death of grandmother, memories)

- Wise Brown, Margaret. *The Dead Bird*. New York: Young Scott Books, 1938. (fiction, picture book, death of bird)
- Yep, Laurence. *Dragonwings*. New York: Harper and Row, 1975. (fiction, immigration experience, Chinese traditions, middle-high school)
- Zolotow, Charlotte. (ed.) *Early Sorrow: Ten Stories of Youth*. New York: Harper and Row, 1986. (Famous authors write short stories about different types of loss, high school)

### **For Parents and Facilitators**

- American Cancer Society. *Cancer in the Family*. Atlanta: ACS, 2001. (non-fiction book offering advice to parents about sharing news of cancer with children. Also includes a tear-out workbook for children)
- Arnold, Caroline. *What We Do When Someone Dies*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1987. (non-fiction, describes normal progression of events after death, including preparing body for burial and generic funeral service)
- Baylor, Byrd. *They Put On Masks*. New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1974.
- Berrill, Margaret. *Mummies, Masks, & Mourners*. New York: EP Dutton, 1989. (non-fiction, describes funeral practices throughout the world)
- Boss, Pauline. *Ambiguous Loss*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999. (presents various losses that are not officially recognized in our culture)
- Cohn, Janice. *I Had a Friend Named Peter*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1987. (non-fiction, written to offer advice/support to parent of grieving child; also includes fictionalized story of girl who loses close friend)
- Duffy, Carol Ann. *Stopping for Death*. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1996. (readings on death and loss)
- Fahs, Sophia. *From Long Ago and Many Lands*. Boston: Skinner House, 1995.

- Field, Edward. *Eskimo Songs and Stories*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1973.
- Fitzgerald, Helen. *The Grieving Child*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992.
- Grollman, Earl. *Straight Talk About Death for Teenagers*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_ . *Talking About Death: A Dialogue Between Parent and Child*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1990.
- Harris, Maxine. *The Loss That Is Forever*. New York: Penguin Books, 1995.
- Johnson, Christopher and Marsha McGee. *How Different Religions View Death and Afterlife*. Philadelphia, PA: Charles Press, 1991.
- Kroen, William. *Helping Children Cope with the Loss of a Loved One: A Guide for Grownups*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, 1996.
- Kushner, Harold. *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. New York: Avon Books, 1983.
- Lewis, C.S. *A Grief Observed*. Boston: Faber and Faber, 1961. (personal journal after death of wife)
- Liebmann, Marian. *Art Therapy for Groups*. Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books, 1986.
- McWhorter, Gay. *Healing Activities for Children in Grief*. Roanoke, TX: griefactivities@aol.com
- Murry, William R. *A Faith for All Seasons*. Bethesda, MD: River Road Press, 1990. (UU theology)
- Nichols, John. *Liberal Religion's Response to Loss*. Wellesley, MA: Minns Lectures, UU Society of Wellesley Hills, 1985.

- Oliver, Mary. *American Primitive*. Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1983. (poetry)
- Payne, S., S. Horn, and M. Relf. *Loss and Bereavement*. Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1999.
- Ryan, Elizabeth. *Straight Talk About Drugs and Alcohol*. New York: Facts on File, 1995.
- Schliefer, Jay. *Everything You Need to Know About Teen Suicide*. New York: Rosen Publishing, 1990.
- Staudacher, Carol. *A Time to Grieve*. New York: HarperCollins, 1994. (poems/readings related to loss and death)
- Styron, William. *Darkness Visible*. New York: Random House, 1990. (compelling autobiographical description of this famous author's battle against debilitating depression)
- Tarbox, Elizabeth. *Evening Tide*. Boston: Skinner House Books, 1998. (readings, meditations)
- Tarbox, Elizabeth. *Life Tides*. Boston: Skinner House Books, 1993.
- Theroux, Phyllis. *Book of Eulogies*. New York: Scribner, 1997. (compendium of famous eulogies)
- Trozzi, Maria and Kathy Massimini. *Talking with Children About Loss*. New York: Perigree Books, 1999.

## Curriculum

- Galginaitis, Carol. *The Lessons of Loss: A Life-span Curriculum on Death, Dying, and Loss for the UU Community*. Wellesley, MA, 1999:  
[www.homepage.mac.com/lessonsofloss](http://www.homepage.mac.com/lessonsofloss)
- Margolin, Sylvia. *Complete Group Counseling Program for Children of Divorce*. West Nyack, NY: Center for Applied Research in Education, 1996

## Videotapes

- *Celebrating the Day of the Dead* (videotape, 20 minutes) Educational Video Network, Inc. 1401 19th Street, Huntsville, TX 77340 (409) 295-5767. This older 20-minute video shows families commemorating their loved ones in the annual Day of the Dead celebration.
- *Death of a Friend* (videotape, 1984, 15 minutes) (TMT Enterprises, 200 Riverside Drive, Norwell, MA 02061) Susan Linn with puppets Audrey and Catalion discuss the accidental death of Audrey's best friend Allison. Touches on issues of anger, guilt, sadness.
- *Death: The Trip of a Lifetime* (four-part, four hour videotape, 1993) Ambrose Video, 1993. Produced by KCTS Television in Seattle and shown on PBS. Written and narrated by Greg Palmer.
- *Everything to live for.* (videotape, 24 minutes, suicide) MTI Teleprograms, 1982
- *Inner Views of Grief* (videotape, 30 minutes) Fanlight Productions, 47 Halifax St. Boston, MA 02130 (800) 937-4113 (<http://www.fanlight.com>)
- *No One Ever Told Us* (videotape, 21 minutes) Teen Age Grief, Inc. P.O. 22034, Newhall CA 91322-0034 (805) 253-1932
- *Saying Goodbye: Teens Talk About Grief* (videotape, 34 minutes) (Teen version) Aquarius Productions, Inc., 5 Powderhouse Lane, P.O. Box 1159, Sherborn, MA 01770 (508) 651-2963 ([www.aquariusproductions.com](http://www.aquariusproductions.com))
- *Suicide Prevention: A Teacher Training Program* (two-part video, total of 33 minutes). Human Relations Media.
- *Teenage Suicide: Danger Signs and Myths* (47-minute video). GPN, 1800 N. 33rd St., P.O. Box 80669, Lincoln, NB 68501 (800) 228-4630.
- *A Teen's View of Grief: An Educational Videotape for Bereavement Caregivers* (40 minutes). Produced by Alan Wolfelt, [www.centerforloss.com](http://www.centerforloss.com) (800-922-6051)

- *What About Me?* (videotape, 1991, 18 minutes) Film Ideas, 3710 Commercial Avenue, Suite 13, Northbrook, IL 60062. Series of 8-10 kids talking about feelings of fear, anger, sadness, and what helps after experiencing the death of a loved one.

## Websites

- The Dougy Center  
[www.dougy.org](http://www.dougy.org)  
 The Dougy Center is a privately supported non-profit organization and was the first center in the US to provide peer support groups for grieving children. The mission of The Dougy Center for Grieving Children is to provide families with needed support while grieving. Information is presented for adults, teens, and kids.
- KidsCope  
[www.kidscope.org](http://www.kidscope.org)  
 Kidscope is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to help children and families understand cancer and its treatment, and to provide support and information.
- Kids Health  
[www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)  
 A kid-friendly site to explore that includes a dictionary of medical terms explained in easy-to-understand language. Other highlights include *Health problems of grownups*, which talks about breast cancer, and *How to deal with feeling*, which discusses specific feelings such as anger, fear, and sadness, as well as how it feels when someone you know has a chronic illness.
- Kids Konnected  
[www.kidskonnected.org](http://www.kidskonnected.org)  
 This national nonprofit organization provides information and resources geared towards children of various ages, as well as listings of support groups and links to other sources of information.
- [www.bereavedfamilies.net](http://www.bereavedfamilies.net)  
 An Ontario-based site that includes links to groups, sites, and assistance in the U.S. It offers parents information about specific diseases, different types of loss, and commemoration ceremonies
- [www.barrharris.org](http://www.barrharris.org)  
 This site lists books addressing a wide range of issues related to loss, including information on child development, fiction for preschoolers, and coping traumatic deaths.

- National Association of Elementary School Principals  
www.naesp.org  
The site provides educators and principals with articles and tips on how to help children in the school context.
- www.fernside.org  
A site for grieving children that includes frequently asked questions, suggestions for non-verbal ways to express feelings, and online discussion groups. The site provides information for parents and links to other resources.

### **Other Resources**

- National Center for Death Education  
Mount Ida College  
777 Dedham Street  
Newton Centre, MA 02159  
(617) 928-4649 (phone)  
(617) 928-4713 (fax)  
<http://www.mountida.edu>  
The National Center for Death Education at Mount Ida College in Newton, MA, is a wonderful resource for anyone interested in the field of bereavement. It houses a comprehensive lending library of print and audiovisual materials on all aspects of dying, death, and bereavement. If you have trouble locating any of the resources mentioned in this curriculum, contact Judith Harding, head librarian, at NCDE.
- Rainbow Collection: Hand-picked resources to help people grow through loss and grief (catalog of books and tapes)  
477 Hannah Branch Road  
Burnsville, NC 28714  
(704) 675-5909  
(704) 675-9687 (fax)

## **Unitarian Universalist Principles and Purposes**

We, the member congregations of the UUA, covenant to affirm and promote:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person
- Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations

- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

The living tradition we share draws from many sources:

- Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life
- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love
- Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life
- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves
- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against the idolatries of the mind and spirit
- Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature

Grateful for the religious pluralism which enriches and ennobles our faith, we are inspired to deepen our understanding and expand our vision. As free congregations we enter into this covenant, promising to one another our mutual trust and support.

**From the bylaws of the Unitarian Universalist Association.**

## **Principles in Language for Children**

- Every person is important and valuable.
- All people should be treated fairly.
- Our churches are places where we should accept one another and learn together.
- Each person should be free to search for what is true and right.
- All people have the right to speak out and vote on things that matter to them.
- We should help build a peaceful, fair, and free world.
- We need to take care of the earth, the home we share with all living things.

**From *We Believe: Learning and Living Our UU Principles* edited by Ann Fields and Joan Goodwin**

### About the Author

Carol Galginaitis, EdD, MSW, is a published author of both academic and lay articles on loss, death, and dying. Based on the support and compassion she and her young sons received from their UU society in Wellesley, MA after the death of her husband, Ms. Galginaitis researched, wrote, published, and marketed *The Lessons of loss: A Life-span Curriculum on Death, Dying, and Loss for the UU Community*. Ms Galginaitis then returned to graduate school to earn a doctorate with a concentration in research methods. She now combines her clinical and research training to further our understanding of how families are affected by and accommodate to life's unexpected challenges. Dr. Galginaitis currently consults with hospitals and medical centers throughout the country to study loss and design effective support services for families.

### About the Family Matters Task Force

The mission of the UUA Family Matters Task Force is to transform Unitarian Universalism into a community of families empowered through faith, celebration, support, education, advocacy, and service. Visit their Web site at [www.uua.org/families](http://www.uua.org/families) for more information about their endeavors, programs, and resources in the service of ministry with Unitarian Universalist families.

### About the Series: *Taking It Home: Families and Faith*

The booklets in this series provide the Unitarian Universalist community with resources to support families in deepening their faith, expanding their future, and supporting their love. The next pamphlets in this series are *Let's Talk About Time/Money Balance*, *Let's Talk About Marriage and Committed Relationships*, *Let's Talk About Divorce and Broken Relationships*, *Let's Talk About Families and Loss* and *Let's Talk About Interfaith Families*.

This booklet series is sponsored by the UUA Family Matters Task Force.

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[www.uua.org/families](http://www.uua.org/families)

