

Together in Faith:
Finding Home in Times of
Trauma or Disaster

A Program for Intergenerational or Children's Groups

by Tracey L. Hurd, Ph.D.

An Introduction

When our world or community is shaken by trauma or disaster, we all need to come together—children, youth, and adults. We need to be able to be vulnerable. We need to make meaning. And we need simply to gather face-to-face with each other and find a feeling of “home.” Our congregations serve children and families by enveloping them in messages about life as a cycle of change, growth, death, birth, sadness, and joy. We can understand unexpected events in the context of this cycle of life. The rhythms of our days and years are important, and in times of stress, children often find the continuation of life “as normal” to be deeply comforting. Daily routines provide predictability and continuity—two commodities that can feel scarce or threatened in times of community stress or trauma. As we provide this continuity for children, adults are comforted too. Unitarian Universalist minister Victoria Safford writes:

We are trying to remember our true and real life. We are trying to touch that, to call it up, trying to know we are alive, hoping to mold that knowing into good work—hopeful, brave, and helpful later on. We are trying to remember what we love and what to do, and how to be ourselves, good gifts.

The Program

This workshop is designed for children, families, and intergenerational groups as a way to pause and gather with intention to make sense of trauma or disaster. It offers the opportunity to step toward wholeness during a time when daily routines and the blessings of life need amplification. It does not offer a cure.

Children, whose lives are held in the rhythms of everyday life, often experience trauma as the loss of the familiar. With trauma or disaster life feels different. There may be direct affects or simply changes in the tenor of everyday life. Trauma or disaster invokes a loss of the feeling of home. This program centers the experience of trauma or disaster on that loss. Direct experiences are real and painful; they matter. Focusing on the loss allows participants to dwell directly on the pain and to do so without necessarily revisiting images or experiences that may be too hard to confront at the moment. It may open doors to beginning the process of reclaiming a sense of home and everyday life. And from this place, those who have experienced direct trauma may be better able to confront it, make meaning, and heal.

The workshop helps participants of all ages companion themselves with others as they look compassionately and directly at the experience of loss and its meaning for them. This approach is based on a theological reflection process developed by Christian seminarians Patricia Killen and John de Beer. It takes participants from individual experience to feelings (the heart of the matter), images, insight, and action. To engage children in the process of theological reflection requires trust that children experience

things they do not know how to express in words and that leading them through the process will be meaningful in ways they may never directly express. Adults also grow and learn as we participate in that process with and for children.

Facilitation

This workshop can be used with multigenerational groups, including families, or with children's groups. Two facilitators are needed to share the roles of leading and supporting the group. Large groups may require additional facilitators to help with small group craft work and discussion. The role of facilitators is to create an atmosphere of trust and care in which all participants—and children in particular—can share ideas and raise questions or concerns. It is important for children to be held in community and trust. It is not important, however, for children to have all questions answered. We don't know all of life's unfolding, and this is particularly true in times of crisis. It is better for children to "live the questions" than receive comforting, easy answers. Sharing and struggling together within caring community are at the heart of the program.

In intergenerational groups, all who gather are participants, whether adults or children. Well-meaning adults should resist the tendency to speak for children or "help" them by suggesting questions or ideas. Gently encourage adults to allow children to speak for themselves. Let the sacredness of each person's perspective be the basis of the time together. This allows all who gather—young and old—to participate fully, creating a sense of safety and comfort.

Workshop Structure

The time requirement of the workshop will range between two and three hours. It is a good idea to provide short energy breaks that offer opportunities for movement. In addition, children often benefit from a snack break about halfway through the workshop.

Activities

- Welcome and Opening Worship (5–10 minutes)
- Narrating Our Story: Why are we here today? (20 minutes)
- Sharing a Story (10 minutes)
- Candles of Joys and Concerns (10 minutes)
- The Heart of the Matter: Accessing Images and Reflections (10–15 minutes)
- Representing Images and Reflections (20–30 minutes)
- Sharing and Reflections (10–20 minutes)
- Our Faith Together: Theological Reflection (10–30 minutes)
- Optional: Large Group Prayer Writing (10–20 minutes)
- Closing Worship (10 minutes)
- Snack (10–30 minutes)

Materials

- Chalice with candle and matches
- Optional: Candles for joys and concerns
- Story (choose one of the following):

- “Where My Fears Are Planted,” by Rebecca Pournoor at <http://www.uua.org/re/faithworks/fall03/worshipc.html>. In this story a girl learns from an elder neighbor how to honor (hold) and plant (let go of) her fears.
- “The Mustard Seed Medicine: A Tale from India,” as retold in drama by Rev. Leslie Takahashi Morris. This script is found at the end of this document. In this story, a woman desperate to revive her deceased child is told by a wise man to procure mustard seed from a home in which the family has not suffered loss and death. Finding no homes that have not suffered loss, she realizes the universal nature of her loss and grief. This story is presented as a dramatization and requires four readers. This story also appears in the UUA book, *From Long Ago and Many Lands* (Sophia Fahs, editor).
- Large smooth stones
- An area to display the creations of the group
- A large cloth for the altar
- A tray (like a cookie sheet) lined with a cloth (like a hand towel) filled with small pebbles (like those in a fish tank) or sand
- For drawing exercise (option one): Paper, markers, pastels, crayons, pencils, and large poster board and/or a large bulletin board covered with paper for a collaborative display
- For rock decorating exercise (option two): Smooth large rocks or stones, non-water soluble markers or paints with brushes, and a portable surface on which to build a rock display

- For sculpture (option three): Newspaper, masking tape, and markers; or alternatively, polymer clay such as Sculpey™, small twigs, and other small natural objects; a surface or area on which to link and display of sculptures
- Provisions for snack, including food, beverages, and paper goods
- Optional: The activity, Group Prayer, requires markers, a poster that lists the parts of the prayer, and one poster board or flipchart with paper on which to write the prayer

WORKSHOP PLAN

Welcome and Opening Worship

5–10 minutes

- Offer brief words of welcome. Explain that we have gathered today to share time together and to mark this moment in our lives.
- Offer opening words of your choice or the following Opening by Tracey L. Hurd:

We gather today to mark this moment in our lives,

to share our vulnerabilities,

and to remind ourselves and each other

that we are not alone.

We come today to remember that we are all a part of life's unfolding

story—

connected to each other and the web of all existence.

We gather together,

face-to-face,

assured that love prevails.

- Lead participants in one or two simple songs that the children know or can learn easily. Possibilities from the UUA hymnbook, *Singing the Living Tradition*, include:

- #389, Gathered Here
- #155, Come, Come Whoever You Are
- #123, Spirit of Life

Possibilities from *Singing the Journey* include:

- #1003, Where Do We Come From?
 - #1002, Comfort Me
 - #1009, Meditation on Breathing
-
- Light the chalice. If your congregation has a well-loved chalice lighting, offer those words as you light the chalice. Using familiar chalice lighting words may offer comfort to participants. Two alternatives are offered below. There are many wonderful chalice lightings in *Singing the Living Tradition*, including the first by Christine Robinson:

- #448

We gather this hour as people of faith

With joys and sorrow,

Gifts and needs.

We light this beacon of hope,

Sign of our quest for truth and meaning,

In celebration of the life we share,

Together.

- Or this one by Tracey L. Hurd

Welcome to this place,

Made holy by our care and kindness,

Made sacred by our trust in one another,

Made human by our honesty,

Made loving by our presence together.

Narrating Our Story: Why are we here today?

20 minutes

- Tell a story, in simple terms, about what has happened and why the group has gathered. This is the basic narration of “what’s happened,” with an emphasis on coming together to create a sense of comfort and home. The facilitator should decide how to present this, but for children there should be an underlying message that when “big things” happen we feel a sense of loss—as well as a sense of losing what is familiar—and we need to regroup and find comfort, strength, and a sense of home together.

Here is a brief sample text that uses Hurricane Katrina as a model:

We have come together today because of Hurricane Katrina. It came quickly, and many people tried to leave the area but were unable to do so. We see pictures on the news. We are worried about everyone who directly experienced the hurricane. And although we live far away, we are affected by it. We may feel uneasy or worried. We may be feeling like we don’t know how to help. We may be sad, angry, or confused. So we have come together to share what we are thinking and feeling, to know that we are not alone, and to share kindness together.

- At the conclusion of the story, place a stone on the tray that is lined with a cloth and pebbles or sand. Say, “As I have shared some of my story, I am placing this

stone here.” Then invite others to come forward and share part of their story—their own reflection on what happened or why they are here—and then place a stone on the tray. This ritual is also beautiful when the stones are placed in water.

- After everyone who wishes to share has done so, the leader may offer some summary words, such as, “We have shared our stories, represented by the individual stones, and in doing so we have created our own *collective* story, represented by the combined beauty of the stones.”

Sharing a Story

10 minutes

- One way that we make meaning of our individual stories is to place them in the context of the greater stories about life. This activity uses such a greater story to illustrate that all lives are cycles of change and that we are all, at some time, touched by sadness and pain.

- Introduce the story by offering your own or the following words:

Today we shared our stories. All people have lives shaped by change and touched by joy and pain. The story I am about to tell reminds us that our story—the one we just told together—is part of a cycle of life and change. This story also tells about how other people go forward in sad times.

- Prepare to tell one of the following stories or another of your choice.

Story: “Where My Fears are Planted,” by Rebecca Pournoor, follows this workshop plan.

Story: “The Mustard Seed Medicine: A Tale from India,” as retold in drama by Rev. Leslie Takahashi Morris (at http://www.uucharlotteville.org/sermons/2005/sermon_2005-11-06a.html) (included at end of this document) or as told in the UUA book, *From Long Ago and Many Lands*.

- After sharing the story, invite comments. Then proceed to Candles of Joys and Concerns or to the next activity, which also offers opportunities for sharing reflections on the story.

Candles of Joys and Concerns

10 minutes

If the group seems ready for physical activity, you may wish to skip this section for now. Candles of joys and concerns can be used as a closing exercise.

- Begin by saying, “I am going to start the lighting of candles of joys and concerns. I light this candle because I am happy that this church is a place where I can be connected to all of you.” Invite everyone who wishes to light a candle and/or share a joy or concern to do so. Pauses and silences are okay. It is also okay if the sharing strays from the topic. It is important for children to feel authentically welcome in this circle of sharing.
- Close this ritual with a simple statement such as, “We bring all of these thoughts to our time together today.” Alternatively, you may want to light a final candle dedicated to any thoughts that remain unspoken.

Snack

10–30 minutes

Depending on the needs of the group, break for snack now or offer it at the end of the workshop. If you do not break for snack now, participants may welcome a short energy or comfort break instead.

The Heart of the Matter: Accessing Images and Reflections 10–15 minutes

- **Overview** This activity invites participants to work in small groups to:
 - (1) Access images of loss and of comfort/home
 - (2) Use different artistic media to represent those images, ideas, or feelings
 - (3) Share their representations
 - (4) Combine their individual representations with others' in a group display

- **Set Up** Have participants form small groups. Groups of four to six people are ideal. You may wish to encourage children of different ages to work together, or you may prefer same-age children's groupings. Either approach works. However, if the group is intergenerational, the small groups should be intergenerational as well.

- **Art Form** Although a variety of art forms may be produced in the small-group representation work, choosing one for use by all streamlines the process. Choose an art form that will work best for your group, your space, and your own threshold for material-centered involvement. Drawing, rock decoration, and sculpture are the three art forms suggested here. The first two possibilities are neater and more contained than the sculpture creation.

- **The Process** Explain that participants will first experience a guided meditation to help them think about what happened and what they wish for. Next, they will work with art materials to create representations. Finally they will have an opportunity to share and link together the images or personal stories. Invite and address questions about the process.
- **Sample Guided Meditation**

Invite participants to get comfortable.

Read the following meditation, or one of your own choosing, slowly and calmly to set a reflective tone.

We are in this safe space. Being here reminds us of all that is good:

being together, knowing that it is human to be happy, to be sad or confused, to feel whatever we feel.

We have come here because we seek peace. We want to feel at home.

We want to rest assured, even though so much has happened.

We miss feeling normal. And we know that because we have experienced [a hurricane, the death of... and so on.] we are changed.

Take a moment and think of worries you would like to let go of.

Now think about what you would like to hold on to: maybe your friends, or some one thing that is special.

As you breathe in, breathe in peace.

And as you breathe out, breathe out love.

Breathe in peace. Breathe out love.

We can create love here, together, and now. We are held in love together.

We can create peace together; we can create peace now.

We are powerful together. There is nothing more powerful than love, and we have love here.

We are at home, together.

Allow a few moments of silence. Then invite participants to return their attention to the group.

Representing Images and Reflections

20–30 minutes

Using expressive media, participants will create images to serve as a basis for reflection. There is a wide variety of media that can be used for this purpose, including a medium as simple as crayons and paper. Three image creation options are presented below. Choose an art form that works for your group and circumstances.

- **Drawing** Provide paper and drawing materials. Pastels and pencils will produce more texture than markers. Participants draw the image or images that come to mind. Remind everyone that his/her drawings do not have to be realistic. When participants are finished with their drawings, small-group leaders facilitate a process of sharing and discussion using the prompts below. Participants can put the images together into a collective “quilt.”
- **Rock Decoration** Participants decorate large stones using paint or non-water soluble markers. If participants have heard the story, “Where My Fears Are

Planted,” they may immediately see the rocks as representations of “things I want to let go of.” That’s fine. They may also be encouraged to create representations of what they yearn for or wish to hold on to. To start children thinking about the rocks, first have them look at them carefully, to see what is there. Then ask them to talk about what they would like to do to change the rocks. How can they alter the rocks to reflect what they are thinking or feeling? When the rock paintings are complete, small-group facilitators invite participants to present their “new” rocks. Facilitators use the prompts below as appropriate to the age range of the group. Then invite the group to arrange the rocks in a collective whole at the altar or centering table.

- **Sculpture** Participants can create sculpture simply with newspaper, tape, and markers. They may need help visualizing newspaper as a sculpture medium. To begin, have the group “change the shape of the paper,” using just their hands. This will lead to tearing, shredding, and crumpling. When the paper is changed, it is ready to use in sculpture. The process of changing the shape of paper can be cathartic. And the process of taking “destroyed” paper and building things that are beautiful or meaningful can be very moving.

Alternatively, have participants use polymer clay and natural materials such as twigs. Invite participants to create something that represents the images they have in their minds or the feelings they hold. Often people need time to play with the clay—work it with their hands—before using it to create something. Allow time for such exploration.

When the sculptures are finished, encourage reflection on different levels, allowing some fluidity in the sharing. When all participants have shared, ask how the different creations might be connected. How can we link our sculptures to weave together a whole?

- **Other Media** There are infinite possibilities for expression in crafts and the arts. Creating a large weaving with strips of paper or cloth that are decorated with words or designs can be a moving experience. Drama can hold expressive possibilities for older children or youth. When planning a dramatic experience, draw upon the talents of facilitators who have the experience to lead the effort. Passionate leadership instills confidence in those participating. Whatever medium you choose, make sure to provide sufficient time for participants to reflect and represent; present and share; and collaborate with others to create a group representation.
- **Reflecting on Images and Sharing** After participants have completed their representations, encourage them to reflect on, then present, what they have created. If the group seems willing, engage them in a process of intentional theological reflection. Small-group facilitators can tell participants that they will help individuals explain their work and creations by asking them a few questions. The questions will guide the reflection process that is meant to move participants to new insight and action. The prompts below encourage participants to travel the theological reflection process. The parts of that journey are named in parentheses. As participants reflect on their creations encourage them to share the following:
 - I see... (naming the experience)

- I feel... (feelings, images, heart of the matter)
- I wish I could... (insight)
- I wish that we (or our congregation) could... (praxis or action)

Sharing and Reflections

10–20 minutes

It can be delicate to get participants, and especially children, to express their thoughts and feelings. Keep to the simple message of naming losses and hanging on to what is good. Name just being together in this workshop as a simple “good.” Participants need to feel safe, comforted, and centered on the reality that we have the power to create love and a sense of home together. This is part of appropriate theological reflection for those who have experienced trauma. Children are likely to center their thoughts on themselves. This is not being selfish; they simply need to access their strongest knowledge base—their own experience—as a starting point for further understanding. They need scaffolding to lead them to think beyond themselves. Helping children express their images of loss and images of what they want to hold on to or yearn for brings them toward theological reflection, helps them claim their own faith, and leads them toward insight and action.

When it seems appropriate, ask participants to think about what they wish they or their faith community could do. They may not be able to transform the tragedy or trauma they have faced, but they can assemble pieces of a beloved community here and now. Acknowledge that we belong to a congregation and a faith that engages in service with others. This is an empowering base that recognizes the power of love in

action. It calls us toward actively creating community and social justice work, a transformative step toward healing and wholeness.

Our Faith Together: Theological Reflection

10–30 minutes

There are many ways to close the workshop. Three are offered below, including an optional group prayer-writing activity.

- Gather the group together. Take a moment to recount what has happened. For example, you might say, “We came here because we needed to be together, to make sense of what happened, and to think about all that we have and hold dear. We did this in a few ways: We told our story together; we listened to another story about how others have worked through hard feelings; we lit candles of joys and concerns; we thought about what we most want to hold on to and what we have lost or need to let go of; and we created images that we assembled into a group representation of our time together. So now we are ready to close. Let’s go around and each say one thing that you enjoyed doing today or one thing you learned. If you do not wish to add anything, you can simply pass and we will go to the next person.” Allow time for participants to share their thoughts.

Encourage participants to listen, but not respond, to each other.

- Invite participants to look at the group creation they made during the session. Offer words of your choosing, or these from Unitarian Universalist minister Victoria Safford:

We are trying to remember our true and real life. We are trying to touch that, to call it up, trying to know we are alive, hoping to mold that knowing into good work—hopeful,

brave, and helpful later on. We are trying to remember what we love and what to do, and how to be ourselves, good gifts.

Invite participants to reflect on and say aloud the gifts they shared with each other today.

- If you did not light candles of joys and concerns during the opening portions of the program, then you could invite participants to do so as a way of offering closing reflections.

Optional: Large Group Prayer Writing

10–20 minutes

The creation of a collective prayer is a wonderful closing exercise. This activity works best if the group has no more than sixteen members. The process of creating a prayer is based on the insights of Rev. Gary Smith, who credits Professor Walter Cooke. It can be quite simple and powerful.

The process makes use of two posters or flipcharts. On one, write the five parts of a prayer that are listed below. Reserve the other poster for recording the participants' ideas.

Tell participants that they will create a prayer together. Referring to the prepared poster, gather ideas from participants and work with the group to fill in each part. A prayer created this way is usually quite amazing.

The five parts of a prayer are:

- **Salutation:** *to whom is the prayer addressed: God, Goddess, Spirit, Love, and the like*
- **Condition:** *I'm/We're feeling sad, happy, angry, and the like*
- **Please give me:** *hope, patience, someone to love, and the like*
- **Please give us:** *peace, power together, the courage to create [fill in the blank] in the world*
- **Thank you:** *we are grateful for... for these things we give thanks*

Closing Worship

10 minutes

- **Song:** Lead participants in one or two simple songs. You may wish to repeat a song you used in the opening. With children, simple songs that do not require reading work best. You might start with a reflective song followed by a more celebratory song. Possibilities from *Singing the Living Tradition* include:
 - #389, Gathered Here
 - #155, Come, Come Whoever You Are
 - #123, Spirit of Life (reflective)

Possibilities from *Singing the Journey* include:

- #1003, Where Do We Come From? (reflective)
- #1009, Meditation on Breathing (reflective)
- #1024, When the Spirit Says Do (celebratory)
- #1021, Lean on Me (celebratory)

Spoken Words

- Offer some closing words or lead the group in a round robin sharing of “one word to describe how you feel.”

Closing words from *Singing the Living Tradition*:

- #694

May the Love, which overcomes

All differences

Which heals all wounds,

Which puts to flight all fears,

Which reconciles all who are separated,

Be in us and among us

Now and always.

Frederick E. Gillis

- #480, Meditation (composite)

Let us open our minds and hearts to the place of quiet,

To the silent prayer for the healing of pain,

And the soft, gentle coming of love.

- Benediction #701

We receive fragments of holiness,

Glimpses of eternity, brief moments of insight.

*Let us gather them up for the precious gifts that they are and,
renewed by their grace,
move boldly into the unknown.*

Sara Moores Campbell

Shared snack

10–30 minutes

If you did not have a refreshment break during the workshop, close the program with the sharing of food. Eating together affirms the sense of community. It also allows time for participants to talk informally and share as they choose.

Acknowledgments

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Where My Fears Are Planted

Rebecca Pournoor

This is a story of a girl named Sara, who is about your age. She likes soccer, school, Saturday morning cartoons, and vanilla ice cream with lots of hot fudge. Lately though Sara's life has not been going so great ...she is afraid. She is afraid of monsters under her bed, afraid of what she hears on the news, afraid of how her parents sometimes whisper about war, and afraid that something bad might happen to her family. Sara carries all these fears with her. Everywhere.

Mr. Watson lives next door to Sara. He has a large, beautiful garden filled with flowers, vegetables, and trees all bordered by rocks of all sizes. Some rocks are so large you can even climb up on them, lay back, and bake in the sun.

One day Sara's Mom shooed her out into the backyard to play. Sara didn't feel like playing alone, she didn't feel like playing with friends, she didn't feel like playing period. And so she walked over to Mr. Watson's garden where he was cutting fresh flowers to place on his kitchen table. Mr. Watson could see that Sara was troubled, so he invited her to sit at a low bench and he asked, "How are you doing, Sara?" Sara knew she could tell him anything; she had known Mr. Watson all her life. She knew he wouldn't laugh or share her secrets with anyone, and so she said, "I've been kind of afraid lately. I'm afraid of monsters, of planes, strangers, war, losing my parents, and even of dying." Fears flew out of Sara's mouth and seemed like a list a mile long, and when she was done talking she took a big breath and sat there looking at her feet.

Mr. Watson leaned over and picked out a rock that bordered some tulips. He held the rock in his hands, almost like he was warming it up, and turned to Sara and said, “Imagine that this rock is FEAR, all your fears put together are right here in this rock ...try to imagine that.” Mr. Watson handed Sara the rock. It was warm from his hands and the earth and was as heavy as a brick. Mr. Watson said, “If you want to hold on to your fears, you must carry them around in this stone where ever you go for one week. In a week's time come back to my garden and we'll talk again.”

And Sara did just that. She carried the rock to school in her backpack, she brought it in to the bathroom while she brushed her teeth, the rock rested on her pillow while she slept ... and each day it became heavier and heavier. It seemed to be absorbing all her fear until a week later when she saw Mr. Watson she could barely carry it. As a matter of fact it had become so heavy that she had to roll it on the ground over to Mr. Watson's garden because she couldn't carry it one more step.

“Mr. Watson, I don't want to carry this fear around anymore, it's too heavy. The rock gets in my way, it doesn't let me play with my friends, I can't ride my bike with it, I can't even play soccer anymore! Can I let go of it now?” Sara asked. Mr. Watson picked up the rock and fit it back in the border where he first picked it up from. “Sara,” he said, “this rock used to be my fear of driving. After an accident a couple of years ago, I was afraid to drive again, so I found this rock and held on to it for a while until it got too heavy and I started driving again. See that large rock over there? That rock held all my fear of living alone after Mrs. Watson passed away.” Sara turned to look at Mr. Watson's face and she could tell he was serious. “That green rock over there? That rock was my fear of storms.

Instead of throwing the rocks away I plant them in my garden, surround them with beauty, and pick them up once in a while to remind myself that life goes on.”

Sara leaned back, taking all this in. This beautiful garden was a place where fear is planted, carried around, and finally let go. She reached out and patted her stone. “Thank you, Mr. Watson,” Sara said. “I don't need to carry it around anymore. I think I'm ready to play with my friends again.”

Mr. Watson smiled and said, “We all have fears once in a while. You did the right thing in facing yours and now you can replace the fear that was in you with whatever you like. Replace it with happiness, love, or playing with your friends ... you can choose.”

A smile spread across Sara's face. She looked up at Mr. Watson and, with her arms wide, gave him a huge hug. She then took off back to her own yard, toward the sound of other kids playing.

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The Mustard-Seed Medicine

A Tale from India

Drama by Rev. Leslie Takahashi Morris

Reader One (stepping forward)

Kisa Gotami was a beautiful woman who married a rich man and soon had a baby.

Reader Two

What a happy life you have now, Kisa Gotami! When you were poor and working in a flower stall with no parents to care for you, did you ever believe you would have such a life as this?

Reader Three (shaking head)

I am so completely happy! To watch my little son grow and learn, what could be better? Why, I can't believe he can already run about and talk! I love him more than anyone else in the world, even when he is stubborn. And even when he cries!

Reader Two (stepping forward)

One day the little boy got sick and, though his parents did everything they could for him, a few days later he died.

Reader Three (shaking head)

No! Please. This cannot be true. There must be some medicine that will wake him up. I will wrap him in this sheet. I will take him to my neighbors. Someone must be able to help us. Someone!

Reader One

Kisa Gotami!

Reader Three

Please, my friend. Give me some medicine that will cure my child.

Reader One (very sadly)

No, that I cannot do. No medicine can cure your boy now.

Reader Three

I will find someone. You—

Reader Two

Me?

Reader Three

Please give me some medicine to cure my boy.

Reader Two

Kisa Gotami. You go from house to house asking us all the same question. Poor Kisa, have you lost your senses?

Reader Three

I must find the medicine.

Reader One

Good woman, I cannot give you any medicine, but I can tell you of one who can help you.

Reader Three

Who! Oh, please tell me who and where this one can be found.

Reader One

Go to the Buddha. He can always help people.

Reader Three

Good Buddha! I am told you are always able to help people in trouble. Please give me the medicine that will cure my child.

Reader Four

My good woman, you must help me find the medicine. Go and bring me a handful of mustard seed.

Reader Three (eager, joyful)

Why, everyone uses mustard seed for cooking. Surely I can find a handful of mustard seed!

Reader Four

Do as I tell you, but remember this: The mustard seed must come from a house where no one has ever died, or it will be of no use.

Reader Three

I can find it! I will find it! Thank you! Thank you!

Reader One

Kisa Gotami—why do you knock on my door?

Reader Three

To ask only if you have a handful of mustard seed. The Buddha says it will cure my child.

Reader One

Certainly I have mustard seed. I will gladly give you a handful and more.

Reader Three

Thank you kind neighbor. Oh, but wait—before I take the seed, I must ask you whether anyone ever died in your house—a father or mother or grandmother or grandfather or anyone else?

Reader One

O Kisa, have you forgotten? Our dear grandfather died here scarcely more than a year ago.

Reader Three (sadly)

Oh, then your mustard seed cannot cure my child. The Buddha says that I must find the seed in a home where no one has ever died.

Reader Two (stepping forward)

Kisa went from house to house, and door to door, to every house in the village, asking for a handful of mustard seed.

Reader Three

Has anyone ever died in this house?

Reader Two (stepping forward)

Yes, our oldest son.

Reader One (stepping forward)

Yes, both our grandparents died in this house. Why do you remind us of our sorrow, good woman? How do you expect to find a house where no one has died?

Reader Three

Oh, this is the saddest day. Now I know that even the Buddha has no medicine for my child. I feel as if this is the darkest of nights, even in this noon hour. I feel as if my heart will break. (Bows head) It seems that everyone, all of us, must die. Perhaps that is what Buddha was trying to tell me. I must go and talk with him and try to understand.

Reader Four

Gentle Kisa, have you brought the mustard seed?

Reader Three

No, my lord. There is no house in all the village where someone has not at some time died.

Reader Four

Ah. Yes. Let us talk together a while. You see, Kisa, our lives in this world are all short, whether we live for one year or for one hundred. Everyone who is born must sometime die—yes, everyone. There are no exceptions. We all have our times of happiness and our times of pain and sorrow.

Reader Three

But it hurts!

Reader Four

Do not struggle, good woman. Be at peace. Accept your life as a gift. Take the days as they come one by one. Fill them as full of kindness as you can.

Reader Three

What you say—I can begin to see. Can I come and talk with you again? The thoughts you give me are the best medicine for me. They make me less lonely.

Reader Four

Come again. You are always welcome.

Reader One

And Kisa Gotami went often to see him. And she found comfort for herself and also learned how to comfort others.

Reader Two

Though she was wealthy, she could often be found in the homes of the poor. She brought food. She played with the children there.

Reader One

In these ways, she slowly found peace. And she too became a teacher who helped others learn that loving-kindness heals our hurts.