



***Making an impact  
when lives are turned  
upside down ...  
supporting children  
and youth.***

When children and youth witness the ill-health of a loved one leading to the death of someone special, the often confusing emotions that accompany their loss can be overwhelming. Children frequently have a difficult time expressing their feelings about loss and grief.

*After his Dad died, 7-year-old Michael said he had “lots of feelings all mixed up inside”. Some days he felt angry and wanted to throw his Legos all over his room. Other times, he felt lonely and quiet and could sit by the window watching the rain fall for an hour. There were days he felt guilty and wished he could have done something to help his dad. At times, he forgot his Dad for a little bit and felt happy about something, like winning at Nintendo or getting his allowance.*



When there's a death in the family you often see a balancing act. Feelings of intense grief can disorient and immobilize a person. Because of this, it is not emotionally safe for everyone in the family to feel intense grief at the same time. Kids will often hold back on their grief, trying to keep the family functioning. Sometimes the child is afraid to grieve. On the one hand they can feel out of control when they are grieving, and that can be scary. On the other hand grieving brings about a sense of finality to a death.

*“I am so mixed up. I cry so much. I don’t know what I will do without my dad. Who’s going to help me with school? Who’s going to fix my bike? I don’t feel well. My friends won’t play with me. My teacher is getting upset with me.”*

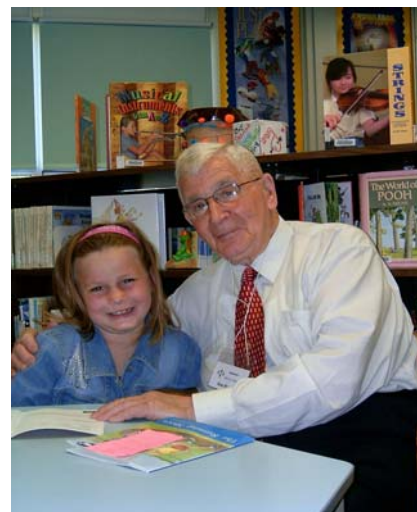


Children frequently have a difficult time expressing their feelings about loss and grief. There are many emotions that come when someone dies. These are different for every person, there is no right or wrong way to feel.

However, when they are among other children and youth who have also experienced loss, these young people tend to talk more openly about their thoughts and feelings.

Many adults avoid speaking directly to children about death and dying because they think it will make them sad or anxious. While understandable, these concerns are usually misplaced. Talking openly about death helps children to cope with the concept and makes them less worried about it.

*Parents, consumed with their own feelings, can find it difficult to communicate with their children during this time, but it is important for children to be able to talk about their feelings and worries.*



Everyone grieves differently, some choosing to talk about death, some choosing to cry. One might share their experiences in a journal or chat room, others choosing to share their grief in artistic ways. Some may choose physical activities like sports. There is no right way to grieve.

However, research has indicated that, to grieve well, a young person needs an environment that invites the safe expression of the many feelings tied to death of their loved one.

Research also tells us that routines, structure and reasonable expectations provide stability at a time of constant change and adjustment.

And, participation in peer support groups is so important to allow multiple ways of expressing grief.

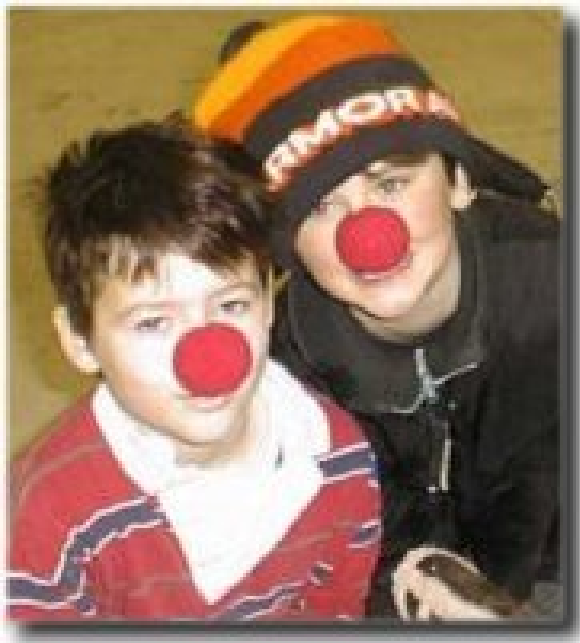


Hospice Northumberland Lakeshore wants to provide that safe place, where young people can rest, feel normal, find support, and learn how to heal. Hospice wants to provide an environment where young people can share their feelings without judgement, with their peers, through a variety of expressions.

*Whether it be through art, music, games or other activities, children and youth will be encouraged to share their feelings with others, and to eventually re-establish feelings of control. Within the Hospice environment, they will be able to participate in a number of activities that will provide comfort and healing.*



**Hospice Northumberland Lakeshore is preparing to launch a Children's and Youth Bereavement Support Program. With a move to a new location, Hospice has the opportunity to introduce activities that will be designed specifically for the unique needs of children and youth who are both preparing to say good-bye to a loved one, and for those who have lost someone close to them.**



### **Proposed Children's and Youth Programming:**

In our efforts to provide Hospice programming across Northumberland County, and to all residents in our communities, we will be introducing unique programming activities that can take several formats.

Within the new office environment, Hospice has the physical space to include a play area for children. This space will allow children to spend some individual and/or one-on-one time with a volunteer, to work through the grieving process, and/or to spend time while a parent is involved in a group session.

Within a designated quiet room, children and youth will have the ability to read (from library material) and/or watch videos related to the grieving process.

Art and music have long been associated with helping people of all ages to express their emotions. In both individual and small group formats, children and youth will have a supply of art supplies and musical instruments to help them release and understand their emotions related to loss.

And, peer support groups will be organized, recognized the value in sharing and learning from others.

Volunteers remain key to the successful delivery of Hospice programs. With proper training and resources, our volunteers will be able to deliver these unique child and teen-focused activities.



**Northumberland United Way  
Member Agency**