



Building the Foundation: Handout **Using Storytelling to Support Students with Grief and Loss**

Storytelling Activities

Storytelling activities can be used with an individual or with a group of students, either in a classroom or a small group. Though stories can be personal, when storytelling activities are used with groups, it can invite peers supporting peers, build empathy, and create an opportunity for a student's experience to be validated and normalized.

Here are eight storytelling activities to use with student:

- **Read a story to a student or group of students.** Choose a story that offers the opportunity to lean into the theme you want to discuss. Ask students questions to help them think about what the characters in the story are experiencing: How do you think the characters are feeling? How is your story similar to or different from the story we read? What would you change about the story? Adults can also invite students to recreate the ending of the story.
- **Use puppets or other play items to act out a situation.** Puppets or play items can be a helpful way to engage younger students in storytelling. Adults can use play items to act out a story, modelling different feelings and reactions or how to talk about a personal experience. Students can be invited to use play items to respond to the dialogue or add to the story.
- **Have students draw and describe a picture.** Drawing pictures is a great activity to invite self expression. Drawing can help students to identify and label emotions. Adults can give students prompts such as "Draw what it feels like when you miss someone" or "Draw a picture of someone you love." When a student has finished their drawing, they can be invited to share and describe their picture.
- **Provide journal entry prompts.** Journaling is a self-care activity that can support students with reflecting and healing. Adults can invite students to write about challenging experiences, special individuals in their lives, or memories that bring joy. This activity would be more appropriate for older students.
- **Teach students to write a gratitude letter.** Have students write a letter of gratitude to someone in their life, past or present, who has helped them or shown them care. Within the letter, students can be asked to write about some way that the person contributed to their life. If needed, adults can help guide the process by providing a fill-in-the-blank or sharing an example. This activity would be more appropriate for older students.
- **Write from a photograph.** Ask students to bring a meaningful picture to school. It could be a picture of a person, a place, an object - anything that is significant to the student. Students can write or talk about their picture in class, sharing whatever they are most comfortable with.
- **Create memory bracelets.** Creating a memory bracelet is another way for a student to tell a story about someone that they love or miss. Students can choose different colors and styles of beads to represent characteristics about the person or how they feel about the person. Beads could also serve as markers of memories the student has with a special person.
- **Offer a community sand tray.** Sand trays can be used with an individual as well as with a classroom or a whole school. This can be a helpful activity if a loss has had an impact on an entire community, such as an act of neighborhood violence or the loss of an important member of the school community. A sand tray can be placed in a central location and students and adults can be invited to choose figures or objects to add to the tray. Individuals can be encouraged to share about the object they add if they feel comfortable doing so. Participation should be voluntary as individuals have different preferences for expressing grief.