



Grief-Related Activities for Your Classroom Kindergarten

- The following are suggestions and are not concrete session plans. All activities can be modified to meet any accessibility requirements.
- All directives given to children are merely suggestions. The child does not have to follow the directive exactly but may find that they are good starting points for conversation or other expressions.
- **Activities are also available for Grades 1-2, Grades 3-4, and Grades 5-6.** (See the end of this document for brief descriptions.)
- For some general facilitation principles for compassionate classrooms see the document ***Guidelines for Facilitation and Creating a Climate of Safety and Mattering in Your Classroom.***
- Our thanks to Sophie Arkell, one of our expressive arts therapists, who has put together these activities and accompanying classroom facilitation guides.

Age/Grade	Brief Description	Page
Kindergarten	<p>Mindful Music Breathing Simple activity in which each individual participant will focus on their own breath. Overall theme of mindfulness: some education for younger kids about how the brain works and how breath is connected to our decisions and emotions. <i>(Grief-informed)</i></p>	2
	<p>Memory Boxes - Sesame Street Create a physical container as a safe space for holding kids’ special memories/meaningful items. This memory box can be created for someone who has died, or even to help kids who are having a tough time with moving homes or schools. <i>(Grief-focused)</i></p>	7

Kindergarten Activity - Mindful Music Breathing

Music Based Activity	
Name	Mindful Music Breathing
Brief description of Activity/Theme	Very simple activity in which each individual participant will focus on their own breath. Overall theme of mindfulness: some education for younger kids about how the brain works and how breath is connected to our decisions and emotions.
Purpose of the activity	<p>This activity is meant to help bring an awareness to how our breathing can change in speed and depth, how we can control our breathing, and how a change in breath can calm our mind and bodies.</p> <p>This is also an opportunity to start to introduce some brain science to kids; a better understanding of what parts of the brain are responsible for what actions. It is important for younger kids to start learning how to calm themselves (self sooth) with simple breathing, and understand that calm minds are very good decision makers.</p>
Target Age/Grade Range	<p>This activity is designed for young kids, ages 3 - 6.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This activity can be slightly modified for an older group by engaging in more/longer mindfulness experiences and exploring the brain science in greater depth.
Target loss/losses	<p>*not directly loss related - beneficial to explore and practice mindful breathing as a emotional self-assessment, and as a calm down tool for kids</p> <p>*having kids practice while they are in calmer states will help reinforce the skill so they are able to tap into that skill while they are in an escalated state. Practicing will help to make sure the kids are not trying to do something completely new when they are already irritated, escalated, or frustrated.</p>
Calendar connection	Not applicable.
Logistics	
Number of Participants	1 - 12 children per facilitator
Setting Requirements	A quiet setting with enough room for each child to spread out and have their own space.
Suggested Materials/Supplies	<p>For each child: a yoga mat/blanket to lie down on, a small object to help track breathing (this could really be anything that has a bit of weight to it and that will rest on a child's belly without rolling off: a domino or little figurine will work well, a fidget spinner, a stuffed animal, a rock, any particular item that the child likes or is drawn to - having the child choose their own object will promote engagement in the activity)</p> <p>For the facilitator(s): speakers with controllable music, a watch</p>
Estimated Time required	20 minutes
Number of sessions	<p>1</p> <p>The initial session of explaining should take about 10 - 15 minutes. However, the breathing portion, with reminders of the education piece, should be practiced a couple times a week so kids can really work on the skill.</p>

Supplemental Resources	<p>Resources to explain how the brain works to children...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The MindUP curriculum https://mindup.org/ ● https://blissfulkids.com/mindfulness-and-the-brain-how-to-explain-it-to-children/ ● https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=108&v= mZbzDOpyLA &feature=emb_logo
Supplemental Resources for Parent/Caregiver engagement	See above.
Facilitation	
Set-up & Activity Introduction	<p>Kids can help with the set-up of the space: have them each choose a mat/blanket and a spot to lie down. Each child should also have their own small item that will help them with the breathing exercise.</p> <p>To introduce the activity, begin asking the kids if they know what the word <i>focus</i> means. Next, ask them ‘<i>Do you know what happens in our bodies when we breathe?</i>’. Once the group is ready to dive into the activity, the facilitator should instruct each child to head to their own space.</p>
Instructions	<p>Having students set up on their own mat/in their own space and having their special object ready, the facilitator is able to present the first breathing exercise.</p> <p>Noticing Our Breath - Deep Breathing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In this first exercise, the goal is to get kids to notice how to control breath and where their breath is landing in their body. ● The facilitator will instruct kids to lay down on their backs, or to find a comfortable position. Once the kids have shifted and found a comfortable position that works for them, the instructor will verbally lead the breathing exercise. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ First, instruct kids to grab their object and place it on their belly. Prompt the kids that once the item is resting on their bellies, to take 5 more seconds and get all of their body wiggles out before they try to be very still - keywords here are that we want to encourage the language of relaxing muscles and focusing. ○ Letting the kids know that we will be in this position for 5 big belly breaths. The facilitator will lead the group by prompting the kids to inhale for 3 seconds, hold for 1 second, and exhale for 3 seconds (count all of these seconds out loud in a steady voice). ○ The facilitator will repeat the same prompting for the kids; this time with giving the direction to pay attention to the object on their belly. Watch the object rise as you inhale, and fall as you exhale. If kids have a hand over the object, they will feel the exaggeration of their belly breathing. If kids are watching the item, they will have the visual of their belly filling with air, and then falling.

*depending on the group, the kids might need a little break at this point. If that is the case, the facilitator can play a few songs for the kids to dance to before moving into the next block of breathing. If the kids are still settled, have them move into the next block of breathing.

Breathing to Music

- Instructing the kids to return to their mats/spaces with their object; have the kids find a comfortable position again.
- For this round of breathing, the goal is not to follow a certain breathing pattern but is to watch how your breath changes for the 3 different songs.
- The facilitator will then play about 30 seconds of 3 different songs - prompting the students at the beginning of each song clip to stay in their comfortable positions and just breathe with the music. As they breathe to the music, try to focus on what happens to their object.
- It is suggested that the facilitator choose one upbeat song, one more fast pace/aggressive song, and one clip of some nature sounds. Get creative and find some moody songs! Please note: make sure the music you choose is appropriate for the biological and developmental age of the group.
- To debrief this portion of the mindful breathing, have kids sit up but stay on their mats. The facilitator should ask what happened to the kids' objects in the first song, the second song, and then the third. Did they notice any differences between songs? Was the object moving differently to song - was it dancing to the songs or was it even and smooth like it was in the counted breaths? Did they notice it at all or did they start daydreaming or focus on something else?
 - Is it going faster? Slower? Is it coming out in big waves? Short squiggles? Is it smooth? Consistent? Choppy? ...

Some Brain Knowledge

- This is when the facilitator can bring the lesson full circle - Why do we need to practice deep breathing anyways?! Here is how the facilitator can explain this question to kids...
 - We all have thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Sometimes, we get really big feelings and they make us feel not like ourselves. An example is when you're playing with your friends and your turn with a toy gets skipped - this could make you angry! If you're angry, how might you react? You might want to yell, cry, push, stop playing, etc. (you can ask the kids what they would do in this situation). When we have an emotion that feels really big and like it has taken over us - we need to help our brain calm back down again so it can make a good decision.
 - There is a part of your brain called the prefrontal cortex - it's the prefrontal cortex's job to make decisions and our behaviour.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There is another part of your brain called the amygdala. This part of your brain has the job of understanding emotions, it's especially good at recognizing fear and danger. It's just like a smoke detector - it senses when there could be a fire (something is wrong or doesn't feel right). Smoke isn't always a bad thing - sometimes smelling smoke means that there is a fire and it is dangerous, and sometimes smelling smoke means that someone just blew out all of their birthday candles. When the amygdala smells any kind of smoke, it goes off like a smoke detector with an alarm - this alarm is telling your body that there could be danger. ○ When we use deep breaths, that helps our prefrontal cortex and our amygdala to connect. When we calm ourselves down and give our two brain buddies a few seconds to connect - they work together as a team to figure out the way to respond to the situation. Together, they can figure out if there is a big fire and you should run outside and call for help, or they can figure out that some birthday candles were just blown out and it will soon be time to eat some cake! ○ Allowing our bodies and brains to calm down with big, deep breaths will help the parts of our brain work together. When they work as a team, that is when we make really good decisions <p>Do one more breathing practice before wrapping up the activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The facilitator will instruct kids to lay down on their backs, or to find a comfortable position. Once the kids have shifted and found a comfortable position that works for them, the instructor will verbally lead the breathing exercise. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The facilitator will again give the direction to pay attention to the object on their belly. Watch the object rise as you inhale, and fall as you exhale. If kids have a hand over the object, they will feel the exaggeration of their belly breathing. If kids are watching the item, they will have the visual of their belly filling with air, and then falling. ○ Letting the kids know that we will be in this position for 5 big belly breaths. The facilitator will lead the group by prompting the kids to inhale for 3 seconds, hold for 1 second, and exhale for 3 seconds (count all of these seconds out loud in a steady voice). ● Invite the group to join a sitting circle for a short debrief; this will provide a slow transition back into their daily routine
Debrief/closing	<p>To debrief the entire activity, the facilitator should ask kids how they found the exercise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Was it difficult to focus on your breathing? Could you hear your breathing? Did you see your belly rise or fall? Did the object on your belly move? ● How do you feel now that we've done some deep breathing? Do you think you could practice this breathing again another day?
Notes	Good to Knows:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Some kids may feel more comfortable with eyes open or closed. Encourage the kids to try whatever they feel comfortable with ● If the facilitator is having a hard time engaging some kids, try these two options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Switch to using a stuffed animal as the small object - this is known as “buddy breathing’. Lots of information and examples of this can be found online ○ Split the class into a few smaller groups of kids to try the exercise. Sometimes group dynamics will be a barrier for kids to try this activity - try the first few attempts at mindful breathing in smaller groups where the kids feel comfortable with one another and there are manageable group dynamics. Once every student has gone through the process a few times, they will likely feel more comfortable to participate with the entire class ● Kids like structure - please give kids timing prompts throughout this activity. Let them know how long they will be breathing for, when they have one more round of breathing left, and when they have 1 minute to get ready to come back to the classroom after the activity is done. <p>Adaptations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If lying down is not an accessible option, this activity can be adapted by using a balloon. Same idea as above, but place a balloon between your belly and your hand(s). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Activity can also be done with just resting both hands on your belly (in a sitting/standing/lying down position). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The benefit of adding an object to this activity is that it helps accentuate the movement of your belly/better indicates the breath. ■ The benefit of lying down in this activity is it gives your body the chance to relax more muscles, allowing you to focus more attention on your breath alone. ● If kids find it very hard to concentrate on watching their object while breathing to music, they could also use a piece of paper and a crayon/marker. For this case, instruct the kids to hold their marker in their hand, close their eyes, and as they listen to the music move their arms around to try to match what’s happening for their breath.
Sequencing	<p>Do this activity, and continue to practice, before moving onto any activity with a deeper dive into bigger emotional topics that could potentially upset a child.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Knowing that these kids have the skill to calm themselves by focusing in on breathing adds a layer of safety to the activity

Kindergarten Activity - Memory Boxes

Art Based Activity	
Name	Memory Boxes
Brief description of Activity/Theme	Create a physical container as a safe space for holding kids' special memories/meaningful items. This memory box can be created for someone who has died, or even to help kids who are having a tough time with moving homes or schools.
Purpose of the activity	In creating a physical box to help contain special memories and items, it is also creating a safe space to have and hold those memories and items.
Target Age/Grade Range	Kids ages 4 - 6
Target loss/losses	Death, housing/school move
Calendar connection	Not applicable.
Logistics	
Number of Participants	1 - 12 children per facilitator
Setting Requirements	Setting with enough table space and chairs for each participant. Each child will need a bit of table space to work on their boxes the first day. The space should also be appropriate to show the group of kids some short videos.
Suggested Materials/Supplies	Cardboard box for each child (this could be anything size wise from a large packing box, to a shoebox, to a tissue box), markers, pencils, pastels, scissors, tape, glue, stickers, ribbon, crayons, pencil crayons, scrap paper, feathers, pom poms, tempera paint, paint brushes, set painting spaces for young kids (smocks, table clothes/coverings, appropriate brushes and paint trays)
Estimated Time required	30 minutes
Number of sessions	<p>2</p> <p>The first session can be done with the facilitator. This first session will be introducing the topic of grief, and painting/decorating the outside of their memory boxes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If there is one child in the class who has recently experienced the death of a family member, offer for them to do this activity at home or individually. The rest of the class can also make a memory box with good memories of their family/friends/school as well - you can also prompt them to create a box of memories if they have experienced a loss of any sort <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The idea is to start normalizing that experiencing the death of a loved one is a human experience that every individual will experience at some point in their life. Starting the conversation around grief and feelings after someone dies will help to build compassionate communities for these young kids who have experienced a loss. <p>The second session will be to fill the memory box. This can be done at home with parents, or can be done at school with the facilitator.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The facilitator should offer that kids can always add to this box, especially if filling the memory box at school. Perhaps the child has a very special sweater at home that they want to include in the box; do not have the

	<p>child bring anything to school for their box, simply have them draw a picture of the sweater and offer that they can add the real sweater to the box when they get home.</p>
Supplemental Resources	<p>https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/grief/</p>
Supplemental Resources for Parent/Caregiver engagement	<p>See above - there are also great resources from Sesame Street for parents/caregivers on families grieving.</p>
Facilitation	
Set-up & Activity Introduction	<p>To set up this activity, the facilitator should ask if any of the students know what the word <i>loss</i> means. If there is a child who has recently experienced the death of a loved one, the facilitator can talk about this about it - normalize that one child may be going through this now but we will all experience loved one dying at some point in our lives.</p> <p>Then move into a brief introduction that the kids will watch 2 Sesame Street videos (You Can Talk to Me, and The Memory Box - https://www.sesamestreet.org/toolkits/grief/). The facilitator can then explain to the class that today we are going to make our own Memory Boxes. These memory boxes can be about loss, or about memories that they would like to create a little home for.</p>
Instructions	<p>The facilitator should have the art-making space set up before beginning the videos - younger kids will need more of a set space to ease the amount of cleanup at the end.</p> <p>Each child will have their own box to work on - they can decorate the inside and the outside however they like! They know that it is a memory box, but a few reminders throughout the working time would be helpful for kids this age. Some kids may take a long time to decorate their box, and some kids may fly through it; allot about 15 minutes for decorating, and encourage kids to finish early to decorate every surface of their box. Provide a warning when there are 5 minutes left to work, 1 minute, and 30 seconds.</p> <p>The second half of this activity (if done at school/with the facilitator) is to brainstorm and decide what will go in your memory box. This process can be adapted to meet the needs of the group of kids, however, one suggestion is for kids to draw out various memories that they would like to include in their box.</p>
Debrief/closing	<p>To debrief this activity, gather the kids in a circle - they can choose to bring their memory box and show it off, or choose to keep it private and not bring it to the circle. Please be sure to offer this option as a facilitator.</p> <p>Once in the circle, kids can go around and share what they created with their box. Some prompts for discussion could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Did you have fun making a house for some of your special memories? ● What was your favourite material to decorate with? ● Did you find it hard to make a memory box?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What was your favourite memory? What are you most excited to put in your memory box? ● Do you think you have finished your memory box? Are there any more decorations you would like to add? ● Did you feel any big emotions while you were making this? What do you think that emotion was? How did it feel in your body? <p>After the circle debrief, close the activity off with a short group breathing exercise.</p>
Notes	<p>Good to Knows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Please communicate with parents and the kids that once they make a memory box, please keep it in a safe space! If a child is filling this box with important memories, it is crucial that the box has a special spot that it can stay safe (don't leave it out for other people to find/potentially ruin, and ideally don't leave it somewhere that it can get lost). ● If a child becomes overwhelmed or is experiencing any big emotions with this activity, have some 1-to-1 time with them to help walk them through some deep breathing to help calm down <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ *also see section in Facilitator Note on <i>Calm Down Kits</i> <p>Adaptations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If working on this activity with a child who has limited motor skills, a 1-to-1 helper can help facilitate the creation of the box. By using some hand-over-hand helping, the 1-to-1 can assist the child as they create the box themselves. Another option is to have a 1-to-1 talk through what a child might put in their box, and either assist by drawing pictures or printing off some pictures of those items ● This memory box activity can be adapted for older kids as well. If so, another great resource for some older kids is "The Memory Box: A Book About Grief" by Joanna Rowland
Sequencing	Not applicable.

Other resources related to Grief and Loss in the Classroom can be found on the Camp Kerry website. Highlights of the resources include a series of videos for teachers for deeper understanding of what a child might grieve and how that grief might show up in the classroom as well as a set of grief-informed and grief-focused classroom activities (including facilitation guides) targeted for children in Kindergarten through Grade 6.

Age/Grade	Brief Description
Kindergarten	<p>Mindful Music Breathing Simple activity in which each individual participant will focus on their own breath. Overall theme of mindfulness: some education for younger kids about how the brain works and how breath is connected to our decisions and emotions. <i>(Grief-informed)</i></p>
	<p>Memory Boxes - Sesame Street Create a physical container as a safe space for holding kids’ special memories/meaningful items. This memory box can be created for someone who has died, or even to help kids who are having a tough time with moving homes or schools. <i>(Grief-focused)</i></p>
Grades 1 - 2	<p>Foods with Moods The theme for this activity is to speak about emotions and how we process them and hold onto them. “Foods with Moods” is a picture book that identifies common emotions and speaks to how people fluctuate between moods or feelings. <i>(Grief-informed or Grief-focused)</i></p>
	<p>Growing Garden Each child will create their own garden: a garden is a beautiful metaphor of life cycles, change, and growth. In explaining the activity, the facilitator can offer optional directions of how each child would like to work in this metaphor. <i>(Grief-informed or Grief-focused)</i></p>
Grades 3 - 4	<p>Grief Waves Reading the book <i>One Wave at a Time</i>, will be the starting point to open some class discussion about what grief can feel like. This activity will lead into another that will further explore ‘grief waves’. <i>(Grief-focused)</i></p>
	<p>Wave Catchers This activity is designed to follow the <i>Grief Waves</i> activity. This art-based activity is an opportunity for kids to further explore what waves of grief might mean to them, and to create a container and calming tool to help them through any bouts of grief waves. <i>(Grief-focused)</i></p>

Age/Grade	Brief Description
Grades 5 - 6	<p>Name-A-Tune This is a ‘game show’ like activity where kids will work in teams to try and name as many songs that include a specific word in the lyrics of the song. The facilitator will have a list of keywords that relate to grief and loss; each word will be considered a ‘round’ of the game. There is an opportunity to have a discussion about grief, and the related emotion/word of the round, at the end of each round. <i>(Grief-informed or Grief-focused)</i></p>
	<p>Inside/Outside Books Create booklets/cards/boxes/ any content in which there is an “inside” and an “outside” (this could even be simplified to a piece of paper, inside on one side and outside on the other). Basic theme working here is self-reflection and what is presented/seen to the outside world, and what is kept private/not seen by others. <i>(Grief-informed or Grief-focused)</i></p>

The Camp Kerry Society is invested in changing lives for the better by providing an abundance of year-round services to bereaved families. With our help, children are able to enjoy their childhood’s, widows regain hope and happiness, and families move forward in their processes of grief by creating positive memories together. Not only do we assist families, but we also provide educational services to organizations, institutions and more. We can help those that help others to achieve their full potential and discover new ideas.