

# A little ray of sunshine

For children with high support  
needs



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## Introduction

*Healing does not mean we forget, it is a process of remembering with less pain and more happy times.*

These suggestions for supporting your child with special needs have been developed to help you in a safe and caring environment. Children who are experiencing grief need familiar routines, support, care and simple, factual explanations around death and grief however they should be spared explicit detail about death or a traumatic event such as the recent bushfires.

Children will respond in an environment where they know you care for them and will respond to their cues, signals and signs. The suggestions below aim to provide you with ideas for working with children to foster their emotional healing, promote their problem solving skills and coping strategies.

Each child is unique in expressing their feelings and emotions connected with their experience of loss. Children's reactions can range from being teary and sad to feeling confusion and angry. The length of time that children take to recover from the effects of grief can range from short to long term, but may take some time to appear and can continue for extended periods. You may notice in some children that their grief is expressed as highs and lows. This means that for some children at times they may feel sad, angry, fearful or withdrawn and while other times they are happy, laughing, playing and engaging with people.

Children often express their grief through actions rather than words so it is important to watch for behaviour changes. It is important that you seek help from your GP or a mental health professional if you are concerned about your child.

## Supporting children through grief and loss

A child's grieving is a healthy response to the death of someone special. Children have a unique way of grieving the death of someone or the loss of something near or dear to them. Some children may miss the sound, sight, smell of a family member or friend.

Some children who are grieving may become anxious or agitated, some may rock, cry or knock their head or thrash around. Some children may experience difficulties with eating or sleeping. Keep a child's routine both at home and at school (eg. feeding, activities, play and sleep).

Parents/carers should give lots of hugs and physical contact. Reassuring attention is helpful from both parents/carers and teachers.

If a child is agitated let them know you are there and tell them that you can sense their sadness. If a child is crying, sit with them, offer words of comfort (eg. I am here with you). Stay with the child until he/she has finished crying. Some children may need help to focus on an activity that will comfort them.

Referral to a mental health professional in consultation with parents/carers and a teacher may be necessary if a child's symptoms (such as ongoing nightmares or chronic sleeplessness) persist for a longer period.



## Healing Quilt

Making a “healing quilt” with the assistance of adults. Each child can be supported to make a square that is unique to them. You may need to advertise in the school newsletter for a school community member to sew the patches together. Once the quilt is complete, teachers may like to display it in the school foyer or in the classroom.



## Feeling Cards

Feeling cards (such as those developed by St Lukes Innovative Resources) can assist children to pick a feeling and work with an adult toward problem solving. For example, if a child selects a ‘sad’ feeling card, talk about what the child has done when they have felt sad before and assist them to access this solution in relation to their sad feelings now.