



## HELPING EACH OTHER TO COPE WITH LOSS

### THE IDEA

Separation and loss of all kinds, including death, are very emotional and painful for children. In very simple ways, children can be helped to understand about loss and to express their own emotions. By understanding a bit more, they can also learn to be more empathetic and understanding of other children who have experienced loss. Through this they can help each other to cope with loss, and in so doing help themselves to cope with their own emotions.

As this topic may be very emotional for children, it will be important to have a trusted adult available for counselling with individual children if necessary. This can be someone from the community who is good at listening and whom the children trust. It does not have to be a trained counsellor. The depth of discussion about separation and loss should be related to the age and experience of the children, as appropriate. Some of these activities are more suitable for older children. Assess what feels right for your group.

Start the topic with the children by talking about minor experiences of separation and loss, and then gradually the issues of death and grief will arise.



### Involving adults

This generation of children face greater challenges than ever before. Many are losing their parents when they themselves are still young. Adults have a great responsibility to help orphans in their own family and also, where possible, to support other orphans in the community. It is so important to offer a kind word, and to sit and listen to the children who are newly bereaved. Gradually the children will get used to the reality that their parent has died, but it will help them to know that there is a new adult in their lives whom they can trust and turn to. These orphans often face a double blow since they lose their parents and then suffer cruel treatment and isolation from the community, due to stigma. Explain to parents and guardians that children will be learning about helping each other to cope with loss and separation. Adults will need to support and encourage children in this work.

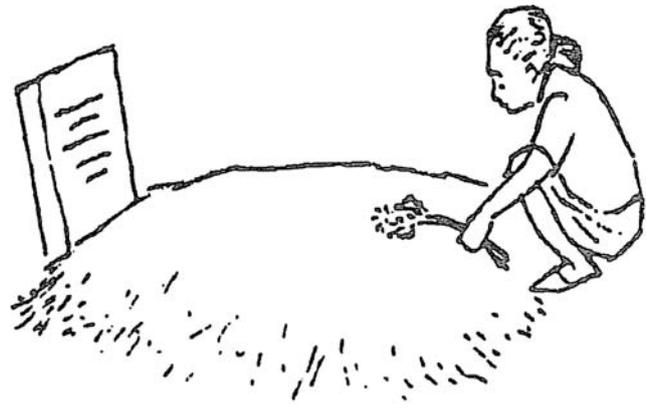
### Understanding about loss and separation

- Read the story on the next page to the children. Ask them to identify different kinds of separation and loss experienced by Juma.
- Juma's life has been similar to many other children's, but he has already had many (up to eight) experiences of loss and separation. How many can the children identify in the story? Make a list of these different kinds of loss and separation in Juma's life. These include:
  - Father going to work in city.
  - Moving house.
  - First day at school.
  - Death of a pet.
  - A friend leaving school.
  - Leaving school himself.
  - Going to boarding school.
  - Death of grandfather.

Juma was born in a small village. He lived with his parents. He loved being with his mother while she was cooking. He liked listening to his father's stories. When he was three, his father went away to the city to work. Juma missed his father very much. From now on, Juma only saw him once a year. He really enjoyed his father's visits. When Juma was four, his family moved house to go to his grandparents' village.

When Juma was five he went to school. He remembers crying that first day when he said goodbye to his mother. Juma had a pet dog that he liked very much. One day the dog was hit by a truck and was killed. Juma was very sad. His grandfather found him a new puppy. When Juma was 10 his best friend left the school. Juma missed him. When Juma was 11 his grandfather died. Juma missed his grandfather. The old man had been very kind to him.

When Juma was 12, he left primary school and went to a boarding secondary school. He only saw his mother once a month. He missed home at first, but gradually he began to enjoy school.



**Important!**

Some children may have experienced the death of a parent or another close loved one. Make sure that they have the chance to talk to an adult if they wish. Also make sure that all the children are feeling okay before they leave at the end of the session.

**Planning and doing**

- The children can think about other children they know at school or at home who have experienced loss. What kind of loss? How do they think those children feel? How do those children show their feelings? What can other children do to comfort them? Make a list of the ways they can help. This could include:
  - Being patient.
  - Listening.
  - Hugging and holding hands.
  - Allowing children to show their sadness.
  - Doing simple things to show they care.
  - Helping with housework or shopping.
  - Writing a letter when someone dies.
- If children know of any child in the community who has suffered bereavement, they can visit that child to show them that they care and are thinking about them. Children could form **circles of friendship** to support these children, in which three or four children agree to befriend and visit another child regularly. When the time is right, they can encourage the child to come and join their activities. They can help the child to look forward

Ask the children to think about how Juma felt on each of these occasions. Make a list of these feelings. Were all the separations or losses bad – or did some have some positive things about them? How do they think Juma managed to cope? What happy memories did Juma have?

- In groups, the children can discuss:
  - If you were Juma's friend, what would you have done to help him in each experience?
  - How would you have felt?
- Some stories in the children's own culture may help them to understand the different feelings about death, such as confusion, fear, anger, guilt and helplessness. Ideas about life and death from the children's religion can be helpful.

and think about the future. The most important thing is that children who are orphaned do not feel alone or rejected by other children.

- Children can find out who are the most supportive adults, who they can visit and talk to about their feelings of grief. It may be a religious leader, a kind teacher, or an older woman or a relation who is very caring and good at listening. Children can take their friends to visit this trusted adult, giving them a chance to talk about their feelings.



## USING THE SHEET

**Teachers, youth group leaders** and other community group leaders can use these ideas for activities.

**Parents and guardians** can also help children to cope with loss and prepare them for future bereavement. The increasing number of children affected by HIV and AIDS is also making new demands on the community. Neighbours and other community members also need to be involved in providing care, love and support to these vulnerable children.

These ideas can also be adapted for use in **situations of war and conflict**, where children have been forced to leave their homes.

## Discussing the results of activities

- Children can ask each other:
  - *Have we supported other children who are bereaved?*
  - *Has this helped them? How have we felt doing this?*
  - *How can we continue to help our friends?*
  - *Is there any more we can do?*
  - *Which adults can we ask to give us more help?*

## Doing it better

This is an ongoing activity. Children will often face some kind of small loss and sometimes a major bereavement. Through understanding and support children can be helped and can help each other to cope with loss. There may be new issues or worries that arise that the adult leaders can help children to address.

This Activity Sheet can be used together with 1.3 **Understanding Children's Feelings**, 8.4 **Helping Children who Experience War, Disaster or Conflict**, and 8.3 **Helping Children whose Friends or Relatives Die**.