

# HumorMatters™



**With Love, Honor, and A Bit of Humor**

**Helping Children Balance Grief and Joy**

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### *In Memoriam*

*I hold it true, whate'er befall;  
I feel it, when I sorrow most;  
'Tis better to have loved and lost  
Than never to have loved at all.*

*Alfred Lord Tennyson*

While there are many ways to honor and remember those that we have loved and lost, one of the often overlooked ways is to honor our loved ones by sharing the joy of their lives and the joy that they brought us. Yes, we will mourn and miss their presence, but we may also honor their spirit by cherishing the loving and often funny memories they shared with us. George Bernard Shaw said, "Life does not cease to be funny when people die any more than it ceases to be serious when people laugh."

Too often feeling joy after a death is viewed as disrespectful when in reality it honors the memory of the lost loved one. How can a child who feels deep sadness having lost a brother or sister, also experience acceptance for the deep joy that they feel for the lost loved one and even for life in general. Often the surviving sibling feels guilty when feeling good, as if feeling good is unacceptable and dishonors the lost brother or sister. Encouraging the surviving sibling to feel good when thinking about his/her lost brother/sister helps the child to embrace the loss in a loving and respectful way.

Pleasurable and even funny memories of the lost loved one honor that person's life and aids in the process of accepting the loss. Pleasure does not remove the pain of the loss, but it reduces the suffering a child may feel with the loss.

Pain results when someone who we love and cherish is lost to us. We feel pain, sadness, and grieve because we deeply care about the person and the relationship we experienced with them.

Suffering occurs when we place extreme negative meaning on the loss. Suffering generally results in depression or anger, and impedes our ability to move forward and create a loving, fulfilling, and happy life.

The language of suffering includes such statements as, "my life is ruined or I cannot be happy, fulfilled, or move on." These self messages are simply not true.

Your life is not ruined. It is certainly changed in sad and perhaps difficult ways, but as humans we are resilient and will adapt to the traumas of life. You can be happy and fulfilled even with the loss. I suggest that not only would your lost loved one want you to live a happy and fulfilling life, but that person would be saddened to see his/her death impede your living a fulfilling life.

If children are encouraged to both grieve for the loss and feel good for the life's memories they shared, they will be better equipped to move forward in life thus preserving their ability to live a fulfilling, satisfying, and happy life.

How can we as parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, or as compassionate individuals in a child's life, encourage the child to both experience the pain and grieve and honor with joy the one who has been lost? Perhaps the best answer to this question is balance. We can offer balance for the child by recognizing and validating the grief and sadness while also honoring the joyous memories of the one who is lost.

### Helping a Child Grieve and Feel Joy

To validate a child's pain, we let the child know we understand. The most effective way to demonstrate understanding is to mirror the child's experience by saying such reflections as, "I know you are sad, hurt, angry, etc." We can also offer acceptance of the child's grief by inviting the child to share thoughts and feelings about his/her lost sibling and respecting the child's thoughts and feelings. We can encourage a child to process his/her grief by saying, "Tell me what you think about when you remember your brother or sister, or tell me a story about your brother, or tell me about what happened to your brother." We do not say, "don't think that or don't feel that" for either statement is likely to discount the child's experience and teach the child that what he/she is thinking or feeling is bad. We do not say, "Everything is fine" when the child does not see the world as fine. We ask the child to express his or her inner thoughts and feelings, and we validate them by accepting them and not judging or asking the child to avoid the "Darkside" or embrace the "Brightside."

Grieving involves the child experiencing being sad, hurt, or even angry. Moving emotionally forward involves not letting those emotions inhibit the joy of life. Sharing the joyous and funny moments of life, even if those are moments about the loss of a loved one, helps a child to move forward in life. After allowing the child to express his/her inner experience, and validating that experience through reflecting, you can then invite the child to honor his/her lost sibling by recounting the joyous and funny memories of their relationship.

### Stimulating a Child's Funnybone

There are many ways to invite children to recall the humorous and joyous experiences they shared with their siblings. You can encourage a child to talk about the times of joy with such statements as, "Tell me a time when you and your brother laughed so hard that you fell down (or depending on the age of the child, 'You peed your pants')." You might also ask, "What is your funniest memory of your brother or sister; What did your brother or sister do that made you laugh; or What is the silliest thing you did to make your brother or sister laugh." You know your child best and certainly can uncover other questions that would encourage him/her to share his/her experiences of delight.

Sharing funny memories of the loved one who is lost honors the relationship and helps all of us to move forward. It also creates a picture album of joyous moments for the child to embrace as he/she grows and matures through life. Pleasant, humorous, and joyous memories create a solid anchor for the child to remember his/her lost sibling.

After her death in the line of duty, Tashi Yar, the security officer on the Starship Enterprise, stated, "Death is that stage of life when one lives on in the memories of others."

Truly our memories of humorous delight are priceless and cherished in preserving our lost ones in our thoughts and in our hearts.

