

DECEMBER 2009

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI  
 Extension  
Live. And Learn.

# Kindred *Spirits*

Books can open conversations

## Grief is a natural reaction

### Loss tools

These activities can help children deal with their feelings of loss:

- Keep a journal where they can draw or write about their feelings.
- Create a timeline that includes dates of their losses, changes in their lives, positive events.
- Help them make finger puppets and act out plays about their feelings.
- Exercise or do active activities.
- Have them draw pictures of their family. Make a collage.

When someone you love dies or is gone for a long period of time, the natural reaction is grief. "Anyone old enough to love is old enough to grieve," says Kris Jenkins, MU Extension human development specialist. "Even children too young to talk still grieve." When children lose their parents through death, divorce, abandonment or custody, they experience the same grief that adults experience when someone dies. For them, it is a death—the death of their family as they knew it. Whether their life was good or bad, it was what they knew.

The way you respond to your grandchild's grief has a major effect on the way the child reacts to the event. Willingness to talk openly about the absence of the child's parent will help children understand that their grief is natural. Children need you to confirm that it is OK for them to cry and be sad. They need to be assured that the hurt won't last forever.

Good books are available on almost any topic. Children can find security and reassurance when they hear stories about children in situations similar to their own. A good book can be an entry point for you to discuss a difficult topic—one that either you or the child has not been able to

talk with you about. Here is a list of great books that deal with losing someone you love and/or being raised by a grandparent:

- *Aarvy Aardvark Finds Hope* by Donna O'Toole. Aardvark's delayed grief over the loss of his family begins to heal.
- *Belle Prater's Boy* by Ruth White. Woodrow's mother disappears and he moves into his grandparent's home.
- *Dinosaurs Divorce: A Guide to Changing Families* by Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown. Depicts the range of experiences and feelings for children whose parents have divorced.
- *Everett Anderson's Goodbye* by Lucille Clifton. Story about the death of a parent.
- *Good-bye Daddy* by Bridgette Weninger. The Daddy bear has to move and live in a different town.
- *Robert Lives with His Grandparent* by Martha Hickman.
- *Love is a Family* by Roma Downey. A look at all kind of families.
- *Through Grandpa's Eyes* by Patricia Maclachlan.
- *Sad Isn't Bad* by Michaelene Mundy.
- *Do I Have a Daddy?* Jeanne Warren Lindsey.

Published in partnership with the Family Friends Program, Children's Mercy Hospitals and Clinics.

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# A gift requires a thank you

## Make it fun for children to say thanks

“Look Grammy, I got a doll with a pink dress,” exclaims Emily. Gift wrap is crumpled and gifts are scattered across the floor. As Emily plays with the gifts, thank you notes are the furthest thing from her mind.

As an experienced grandparent, you have the camera ready and snap a photo of Emily with each gift. Putting the photo on the front of the card or in the card helps the giver see the excitement of the child with the gift. This is especially meaningful if the gift giver lives far away.

“Every gift requires a thank you note,” according to Lisa Wallace, MU Extension human development specialist. If someone goes to the trouble of giving a gift, you need to acknowledge it. Diane Gottsman, nationally recognized etiquette expert, advises that notes should be sent no matter the age of the child. Written thank you notes are an important part of everyday etiquette; they teach children appreciation and gratitude for the thoughtfulness of others.

grandchild can write, have them write two sentences. Adults like to see handwritten notes even if the handwriting isn’t perfect. If your grandchild doesn’t write yet, have them draw a picture. Also include the photo you took.

**☐ Ideally you’ll send the note within 48 hours.** Telephone calls and email thank you’s do not replace the traditional card sent through the mail.

Thank you note writing should be a family affair. Plan a quick meal, eat dinner and then spend time around the table writing thank you notes.

### Here are some ideas:

**☐ Keep the note short and sweet.** Mention the gift and how the child will use it. If your

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## Get the benefits you need

Every time you and your grandchildren are active together you are both improving health. “The grandparent who shares in physical activity with his grandchildren builds memories that will never be forgotten,” says Susan Mills–Gray, MU Extension nutrition and health education specialist. What better legacy to leave them with than the gift of good health.

Here is a list of fun and healthy activities you can do with your grandchildren:

- Bicycle riding
- Nature walks
- Neighborhood walks
- Backyard badminton
- Fly a kite
- Hide and seek
- Dance to your favorite CD
- Get out the hoola hoop.
- Shoot baskets
- Go bowling
- Play hopscotch
- Ice skate
- Play catch
- Walk the dog
- Swimming
- Jump rope
- Swing a club at the driving range
- Kick a soccer ball around
- Play miniature golf