



**These notes include ideas for classroom use (or use with groups of adolescents). The ideas we list are intended to spark your own ideas. Expand on them and explore them within your teaching strengths and your group's individual requirements. There are also a few key points to be aware of when dealing with the potentially emotive areas covered.**

*As a teacher/facilitator, it is important to be aware of:*

- a very quiet student
- a very loud student
- a student who may become tearful
- the fact that some in-depth exercises may elicit strong emotions
- the fact that there are less confronting exercises/activities which may be more suitable for i) your students and ii) your teaching style.

*As a teacher/facilitator, you will need to be prepared to:*

- refer (to a school counsellor or a qualified professional)
- talk (openly and honestly)
- seek advice (and consult with other professionals / colleagues)
- spend time (with a student/s individually, outside of the classroom)
- follow up (after certain activities with one or more students)

## ACTIVITY ONE

A good starting point from which to kick off – before even opening **The Grief Book** – is to brainstorm (on a whiteboard or paper) the following questions:

**1. What is grief?**

Our answer: Grief is a reaction to any person or thing that someone believes/ feels they've lost.

**2. What is a grief reaction?**

Our answer: Grief reactions will vary across individuals and according to the grieving person's perception of the relationship they held with the person, pet or thing they have lost. It will also be affected by feelings, thoughts and emotions that may be raised for the individual from past experiences - they may associate a loss with a past event and this may trigger a grief reaction.

Grief

Every student needs – and should be encouraged to have – an array of coping strategies (tricks) to use in their day-to-day lives.

You do not have to be grieving for this book to be of value. Some readers will use it as a tool for building resilience and for coping with general, everyday stressors. Grief is one possible – major - stressor in life.

With the exception of maths and the sciences, the Grief Book can be utilised in most subject areas. It lends itself well to humanities subjects such as English, Art, Drama, Psychology, Human Development, Personal Development and Religious Education.



reactions can be experienced: emotionally, cognitively, behaviourally and/or physically.

### **3. What is coping?**

Our answer: Coping is the means by which you deal with any situation. This does not necessarily have to be a grief situation. People will have an array of coping strategies that they will employ at different times. Many of us will have healthy as well as unhealthy coping strategies. It is often in times of extreme stress (or grief) that we find that we either don't have enough coping strategies or that the ones we do have, don't quite work well enough. Raising this issue can highlight for students the advantages of healthy and positive coping strategies (for example, the 55 tricks in *The Grief Book!*) as opposed to unhelpful and negative coping strategies which include suicide, bullying, drugs and alcohol, isolation. Trick # 3 looks at "bad tricks" in more detail.

### **4. What are the sorts of things you can grieve about?**

Our answer: Anything! A list of possible losses could include: death of a person or pet, family breakdown, relationship ending, stolen personal possessions, bullying, moving house, moving school, failing exams, losing status, loss of control, incarcerations, abortion, loss of job, loss of self-esteem...

It is important to note that grief is relative. It is unique to the individual, and the worst thing you can do is to judge someone's grief reaction. YOU may not grieve over a failed exam but someone else might as the meaning behind, or associated with the failure may be more significant or have a greater impact upon them.

## **ACTIVITY TWO**

### **How do we know if we're grieving?**

Our answer: Trick # 1 "Are You Grieving?" is the basis from which to begin exploring this question. Our recommendation is to move through this trick with students.

## **ACTIVITY THREE**

### **Looking After Yourself – Trick # 2**

Why do we need space and time alone? How can we achieve this without transport, money, access to the bush or the beach, or when we are bound by parental restraints?



Ask the students individually or in small groups, to devise ways of creating their own sanctuaries. (On pages 20 and 21 we suggest sticking up posters and glow in the dark stars, along with other things.) What creative ideas can students come up with that don't require lots of money, and that can really transform a room or small space into their own relaxing and peaceful sanctuary?

You might encourage your students to present their ideas in the style of their choosing – as a performance, a class talk, with a slide or powerpoint presentation or just a good old fashioned piece of writing.

## ACTIVITY FOUR

### Visualise Your Grief – Trick # 5

This trick can be used as a classroom activity in and of itself (discussing it as you read through it together) or as an analogy for other situations that students bring up with regard to visualising grief.

You can alter the scenario from a broken leg to something that may resonate within your group.

Use it as the basis for a more in-depth classroom discussion.

Why are pictures in our heads so important?

## ACTIVITY FIVE

### Rituals – Trick #s 30 and 31

Trick # 30 is a good springboard into this exercise.

Have students identify the rituals that they use in life now eg: the ritual of eating a meal, preparing for bed, going to a funeral.

Discuss the elements that can go into making up a ritual, whether symbolic (as in funeral) or everyday (as in cleaning teeth, having a shower).

Discuss the symbolic nature of ritual and the importance of the intent behind our actions.

In pairs or small groups (or alone):

- Create a ritual for a long lost friend



- Create a ritual for finishing school
- Create a ritual for a pet that has died
- Create a ritual for something important to you

In presenting these (if that is your wish), encourage students to think laterally and creatively.

They could:

- Act it out or use freeze frames or tableaux
- Paint it, illustrate it
- Verbalise it in the manner of a radio play or commentary
- Write it using prose, verse, etc

## ACTIVITY SIX

### Trick # 20 – Finding Out

Read through Anna's story (p68) as a group.

The following is a particularly powerful exercise. It gives students a chance to explore the issues contained in Anna's story through third parties, and thus to build on their own understanding in a 'low-risk' fashion.

"The Hot Seat" can be applied to many of the scenarios presented in **The Grief Book**.

After reading through Anna's story (or another, more relevant vignette for your group), have each student write down one question that they would like to ask of one of the characters. Encourage them to think widely and outside the immediately obvious in creating their question. You may like them to ask a question of each of the characters rather than just one.

Place four seats (one for each person in the story – even the absent ones) at the front of the room. These are the hot seats.

Choose willing volunteers! Give them a name tag if you need to, and discourage giggling and other distractions.

Sit your volunteers in their seats.



Have the class ask questions (if you can rotate among the characters it may flow more easily) and the volunteers then answer in character. This may necessitate their creation of fictional answers which is fine – all we ask is that they are in keeping with the character and with the story.

After this exercise, have a discussion as a group and ask students to respond in writing.

## ACTIVITY SEVEN

### Another exercise:

Have students illustrate a time of loss using:

- Poetry
- Art – painting, drawing, collage, sculpture etc
- Performance
- Story

(NB: it can be helpful if you choose one or two of these modes and all participants work within these)

Then, explore (as a group/in small groups/using the written word) what/if any effect that the process of creating had in assisting with the release of, or coping with, feelings.

(If students identify that it did nothing for them, they should keep their creation and memory of the process for another time. Encourage them not to throw the ‘trick’ away but to store it. Keep their blinkers off. Keep their minds open.)

## ACTIVITY EIGHT

### Trick #s 39 and 40 – Anger

Jim’s story is on p 134. Have two students read it from the front of the class (if appropriate).

Place Jim in the hot seat (see previous hot seat exercise). Each student ask Jim questions. See if you can, as a group, expose Jim’s anger issues.

As a group, identify the kinds of issues that arise around anger. Brainstorm.



Have each student write a fictional story containing the following:

- A situation where someone is angry
- How anger was demonstrated (words, actions, silence etc)
- The consequences of their anger (short and long term)

If you're feeling adventurous, have them create two endings – one where the anger is still present and one where the anger is released.

This is an excellent springboard into discussion about:

- healthy/unhealthy expression of anger
- consequences of not releasing anger (it builds, festers and affects other aspects of life and other people)
- reasons for not wanting to release anger (fear, not wanting to hurt/involve others, issues of worth etc)

## ACTIVITY NINE

### Self Reflection

In the notes section of The Grief Book, have students dedicate a page to:

- list 6 of your strengths ie: I'm a good listener, I'm funny, I care about others, I can play tennis, I have a double-jointed little toe...
- list 6 new tricks that you have found. What appeals to you about these?
- list 6 positive, helpful things (see trick #54 Talking to yourself), that would be nurturing to your 'self'.
- list anything else that unfolds as being of significance as you work through the book.

## ACTIVITY TEN

### Trick # 9 – The Perfect Support Person

As a group, actively read through this trick with students. Have them name (on paper) at least one person to whom they could turn for support at a critical time in



their lives. If they are okay with it, they can list this person in the notes section of their books.

## ACTIVITY ELEVEN

### Assignments for The Grief Book.

Set out a grid or table to identify:

- Which tricks involve physical activity
- Which tricks involve intellectual/mental processing
- Which tricks cost money
- Which tricks cost nothing
- Which tricks involve other people
- Which tricks you can use alone
- Which of your five senses are used in each trick (sight, sound, touch, taste, smell).
- What is the most important thing you've learnt from this book?

The point of these is to build up, over time, an awareness that coping strategies can come from one or a combination of our five senses and beyond. One style of coping is not the only style of coping. Eg: To limit oneself to merely physical coping strategies is to limit one's ability to cope beyond the immediate.

These assignments (activity eleven) can be produced over the length of time it takes for your class/group to work through **The Grief Book**.

**Good Grief to you!**



**black dog books**

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# Teacher Notes