

## TO HELP A GRIEVING CHILD, PARENTS CAN...



Pathways to  
Permanence 2

Parenting  
Children  
Who Have  
Experienced  
Trauma  
AND LOSS

Session 2

Lifelong  
Issues in  
Permanence

Homework  
Optional  
Reading

1. Create a Feelings Chair in the house. This is a designated place where Feelings/ Emotions are welcomed and explored, even anger! Remember, we teach children the difference between feeling angry and being mean. We assist them in developing ways to express their anger. “I’m angry because...”
2. Help the child draw his feelings. “Let’s draw a sad/angry/scary picture.” Activities are most productive when the parent participates in the process.
3. Create a Feelings deck of cards. Cards should have pairs of Feelings like sad, mad, hurt, scared, angry, happy, excited, nervous, embarrassed, silly, etc. Parent and child play Go-fish or Concentration with cards. When a pair is won, the player talks about a time they felt that feeling. “One time I was sad was when...”
4. Practice good listening skills by trying not to interpret what the child is saying and reflect back what was said, “What I heard you say was that it was really scary for you to have the police take you to Orangewood.” The goal is to assist the child in feeling heard/ understood.
5. Create a Loss Box or Feeling Box in your house. Family members are encouraged to write or draw their feelings and place in the box. A family circle is created once per week where contents can be shared. Note that the child is *encouraged* to share, not forced to share, and some shares may be labeled “private.”
6. Parent practices asking questions of the child. For example, the child says “I’ve lived in four different homes.” Parent says, “Wow, four different homes! What is that like?” Parent is in the habit of asking non-threatening questions as a way to assist the child exploring, discharging, emoting. Take note that “why” questions are not recommended – as children typically are not insightful in regards to their own behaviors. Questions that ask *how* and *what* are most helpful.
7. Parents can model and externalize their own losses/feelings as children learn a great deal from watching and observing us. Let them see you express your sad or mad feelings in a healthy, effective manner. For example, “Boy am I mad, my body is all tense now. I’m going for a run.”
8. Teach them creative ways to express their feelings, which for a younger child might be painting a scary picture, and for an older child it might be writing a story about their birth parents, or a poem about their losses.
9. Be aware of displaced feelings. Children often have delayed responses to losses/trauma. When an intense feeling does surface, it is most important that the child’s feelings are validated. If they are expressing the feeling inappropriately, such as exclaiming, “I hate you,” we assist them first in feeling seen, “I see that you are really angry right now, it’s OK to be really angry, but not really *mean*, so I’m going to help you learn the difference, but we’ll practice later when you’re calm.” It is most important that we send a clear message



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that the child's anger/pain/hurt feelings are a normal response to their life circumstances, and our goal is to help teach them how to emote in an effective way, not repress, deny or avoid those feelings.

10. Be non-reactive, and able to emotionally attune with the child's emotional needs. Here parents work hard to stay non-reactive when the child becomes escalated, overwhelmed or distressed. This is the opportunity to change the child's perception about himself and the world. Does the child live in world that meets his emotional needs, where he feels safe, understood and connected?