



Guidelines for Facilitation and Creating a Climate of Safety and Mattering in Your Classroom

Below are a few ideas taken from the context of doing therapeutic work with children that apply in the context of teachers supporting children in the classroom. These are not asking teachers to be therapists, rather they represent principles and ideas that we (adults and children alike) can benefit from in our humanness. They are offered as ways to support your classroom being experienced as a compassionate community, a place where all who enter can experience a sense of safety and of mattering and belonging. These ideas can be employed in conjunction with the ***Grief-Related Activities for Your Classroom*** (activity facilitation guides) targeted for children in Kindergarten through Grade 6 that are also available as part of this Grief in the Classroom project.

- ***Holding Space for Children:***

The concept of ‘holding space’ is essentially asking the facilitator, or supporting adult, to allow children the time and space to work through what is happening for them in that moment - and *not* having an adult come and fix it for them. When holding space for children, the best thing you can do is actively listen to what they have to say; without rushing the child, without judging the child, and without instantly fixing the problem for the child. Holding space for a child prioritizes understanding the child’s current lived experience, emotions, and needs.

The process of holding space for a child:

- a) Proves to the child that they have adults in their life that are safe.
- b) Provides the child with some agency over their own decision making and ability to problem solve.
- c) Reinforces the skill asking for help or a break when you feel overwhelmed.

- ***Calm Down Kits:***

Whenever working with children and asking them to do emotional work, it is a good idea to have a Calm Down Kit on hand. A Calm Down Kit could be any assortment of tools to help

kids regroup, work through big emotions, calm down, feel safe, and/or return to their base level of behaviour. A kit could have playdough (for a calming sensory experience), bubbles (to help with taking long slow breaths), a Hoberman sphere or breath ball (for a visual breathing cue - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QX1LgYMdHw0>), a stuffed animal (for emotional comfort), an eye spy book, back up snacks, or anything else that might help a child to return to their base-line of behaviour and emotional regulation.

- **Creating Safe Spaces in a Classroom:**

Sometimes classrooms can be very overwhelming for kids - especially if a child has recently experienced a loss. If possible, it's great to set up a quiet, safe space in a classroom (or just outside of the classroom) to give a child a moment to calm down. Good examples of this are an extra desk in the back of the classroom/off to the side and away from the commotion of the class (ideally facing away from the rest of the students), or a small tent in the classroom. Creating a space where a child can go to take a break, have a moment with big emotions, and not be seen by other students offers a sense of emotional safety and protects the child from feeling embarrassed.

Other resources related to Grief and Loss in the Classroom can be found on the Camp Kerry website. Highlights of the resources include: a series of videos for teachers for deeper understanding of what a child might grieve and how that grief might show up in the classroom; and a set of grief-informed and grief-focused classroom activities (including facilitation guides) targeted for children in Kindergarten – Grade 6.

Lumara Grief & Bereavement Care Society is a charitable organization that helps children, youth, adults & families cope with serious illness, grief, and bereavement. Through education, support, and counselling services we bring light to grief and sorrow, nurturing healing, and hope within the strength of community. We also provide educational services to organizations and institutions.

<https://lumarasociety.org/> or contact info@lumarasociety.org

Our thanks to Sophie Arkell for her contributions to this document.