

when families grieve™

The Project

When Families Grieve leverages the power of Elmo and the *Sesame Street* Muppets to provide resources in support of families with young children coping with the death of a parent. As part of this outreach initiative, Sesame Workshop is creating a primetime television special and two customized, bilingual (English and Spanish) resource kits: one designed to support the specific needs of military families and one designed for the general public.

Project Goals

When Families Grieve materials helps families with young children ages 2 to 8, to help:

- reduce the levels of anxiety, sadness, and confusion that children may experience following the death of a parent;
- provide families with age-appropriate tools to support and comfort children, including ways to talk about death with a young child; and
- reassure children that they are loved and safe, and that together with their families and friends, they can learn ways of being there for one another and move forward.



The Need

In 2007, the Social Security Administration reported that 1.9 million children under age 18 received benefits from a deceased parent.¹ An estimated 1 in 20 children under age 15 experiences the death of one or both parents due to violence, illness, suicide, war, accidents, or other causes.² Special populations—such as military families—are at even greater risk; approximately 1,345 children experienced the death of a parent serving in the military between 2006 and 2007 alone.³

The death of a parent impacts every aspect of a child's life. Grief encompasses a child emotionally, socially, cognitively, and behaviorally. For children, their emotions may be hard to identify and express. They may exhibit behavioral symptoms and regressive behaviors, anxiety, and/or depression.⁴ For young children in particular, death can be overwhelming and difficult to understand. For this reason, adults may find it difficult to tackle the challenging topic of death in ways that are comforting and developmentally appropriate for a child.

Project Components



- A **Primetime Television Special hosted by Katie Couric**, *When Families Grieve*, featuring the personal stories of several families with children coping with the death of a parent, will air on PBS April 14th 2010 at 8 pm (check local listings). This powerful and heartwarming 60-minute show, featuring the *Sesame Street* Muppets, will provide families in the military and in the general public a valuable service by making the courageous struggles of parents and children visible, while sharing strategies that have helped them cope with grief.

¹ U.S. Social Security Administration, *Annual Statistical Supplement to the Social Security Bulletin*.

² Steen, KF. (1998). "A comprehensive approach to bereavement." *The Nurse Practitioner*, 23(3), 54–62.

³ Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC).

⁴ The Barr-Harris Children's Grief Center. (2007). *Helping a Child Cope with Loss: A Teacher's Guide*. Retrieved from http://www.barrharris.org/teachers_guide.html on October 6, 2008.

- Two **Outreach Kits**—one for military families and one for the general public—containing:
 - A **DVD** featuring the *Sesame Street* Muppets and documentary footage of families who have experienced the death of a parent due to a variety of situations including illness, suicide, sudden and natural causes, and accidents. For military families, the DVD will be tailored to address their particular needs.
 - **Print Materials**, including:
 - a guide for parents and caregivers providing tips, strategies, and activities to help comfort and reassure children through difficult times;
 - a children’s storybook designed to comfort children as they cope with the death of a parent; and
 - a facilitator’s guide with strategies for using the project’s components, as well as tips and activities to give to families with children coping with grief.
- A **Website**: sesamestreet.org/grief, providing:
 - streaming video of *When Families Grieve* and the primetime television special, and
 - all downloadable print resources.

Distribution

With help from organizational partnerships, Sesame Workshop will distribute over 800,000 free *When Families Grieve* kits to families and organizations within the military and the general public that provide services and resources to grieving families, including: Military Services casualty offices, childhood grief centers and counselors, and others. In addition, a project assessment will be conducted to evaluate the clarity, utility, and appeal of *When Families Grieve*. Visit sesamestreet.org/grief to download materials and find out more, or email grief@sesameworkshop.org.

Major support provided by



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Additional support from



McCormick Foundation



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When Families Grieve is a continuation of Sesame Workshop’s award-winning *Talk, Listen, Connect* initiative providing resources and emotional support to military families with young children coping with challenging transitions in their lives.