

# Why Did You Die?

Activities to Help Children  
Cope with Grief & Loss

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*Questions*

Describe your character or creature.

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If it could talk, what would it say?

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What would you say back to it?

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### *For You to Think About*

Most people do not want to die, but death is often caused by things that can't be controlled, such as illnesses, accidents, or natural events.

Some illnesses are life threatening, like cancer or AIDS. If they are not treated with strong medicines, they can cause death. Sometimes, even strong medicine doesn't help. The illness spreads through the person's body, stopping it from working, and the person dies.

Chronic illnesses, like sickle cell anemia, diabetes, and emphysema, are other causes of death. People with chronic illnesses have something wrong with their bodies that scientists and doctors can't cure. These illnesses may occur before birth or develop later in life. People who have these illnesses need medicine to live, and they may look unhealthy or seem to suffer.

An acute illness is one that happens suddenly. Not all acute illnesses are serious. Some, like pneumonia or infections that spread inside a person's body, can become serious enough to cause death and usually require the person to be hospitalized.

There are also mental illnesses, like severe depression, that can cause people a tremendous amount of suffering. People with these illnesses may feel hopeless and think it would be better to die than to continue living. When the illness is not controlled by prescribed medication, some people suffer so badly that they commit suicide.

People also die of causes other than illness. Accidents, like being hit by a car or falling from a high place, can kill people. People die in wars, and sometimes one person kills another on purpose. Events in nature, like tornadoes or tsunamis, also cause deaths.

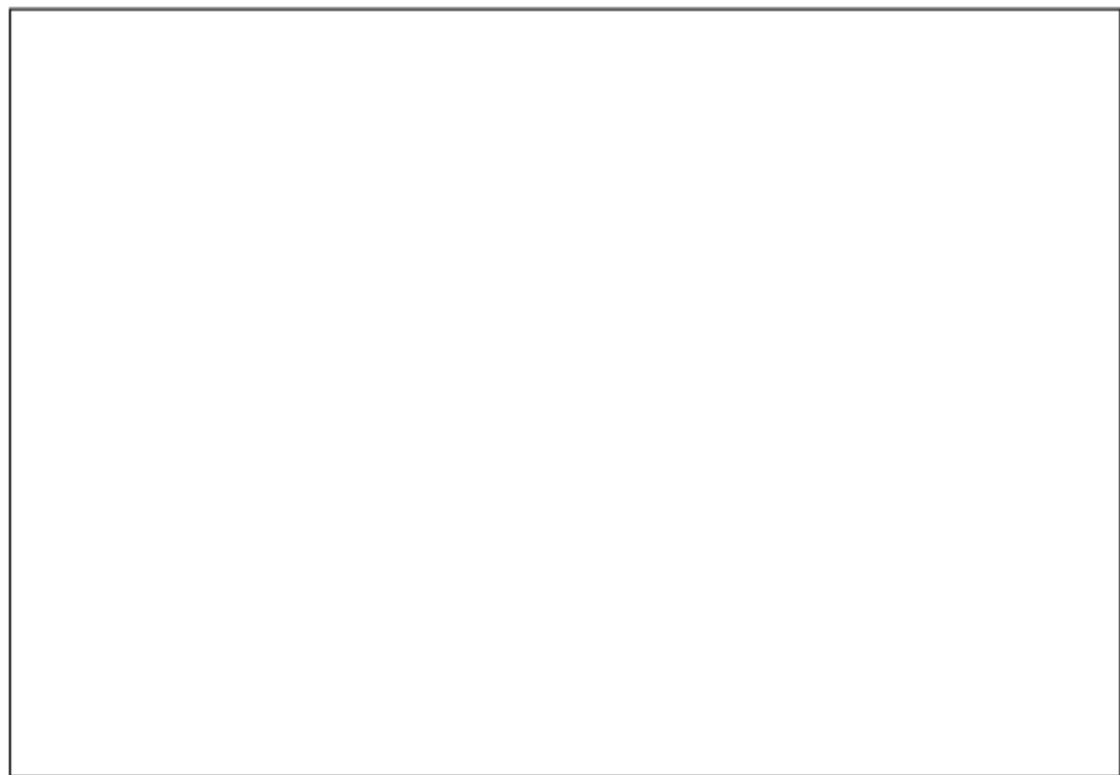
It can help you to remember that, no matter what the cause of death, your loved one would not have chosen to die if he or she had control over it.

***Directions***

List five things that are difficult to control and can cause harm.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

In the space below, draw a picture of one of these things.



### *For You to Think About*

There are things we know that don't cause death. There is nothing someone could say that can cause someone to die. There is no thought that can cause a death. No one's feelings can make someone die. It is important to remember that nothing you said, thought, or felt made your loved one die. If you have questions about why the death happened, share them with an adult who can understand and explain what really happened.

Sammy drew a picture of his family together in the kitchen. In one corner, there was a big, messy trashcan, overflowing with garbage. When his counselor asked about what he had drawn, Sammy said, "I should have taken out the garbage because that's how my sister got cancer." Sammy had heard his parents and the neighbors talking about their community being built on land that had been filled in over a huge mountain of garbage. They had described the garbage as toxic waste, which meant it was poisonous. Sammy had heard part of this conversation, and he thought that if he had emptied the trashcan his sister wouldn't have gotten cancer and died. He was very relieved when he found out he was not responsible for her cancer.

## *Directions*

Did you ever wonder if anything you did caused your loved one's death? Draw a picture that shows what you thought about.



## *Questions*

Can you think of anything else that doesn't cause death?

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Is there anything you would like to know about death?

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## *For You to Think About*

A funeral or service for the loved one is a time that family and friends get together to say good-bye to the body of the person who died. It is also a time to remember and talk about a loved one's life.

When Sophia, Katrina, and Cristina's neighbor Mr. Clark died, their mom asked them if they wanted to go to the funeral service. She said that it was their decision and it would be okay if they chose to stay home. The girls had felt very close to Mr. Clark and were sad about his death. But they had never been to a funeral and they worried about what it would be like. Their mother explained that it was a sad event, and many people there might be crying. Mr. Clark's body would be in a coffin, which might be open. If it were open, people at the service would be able to see the body. It wouldn't move, and it might look gray or pale.

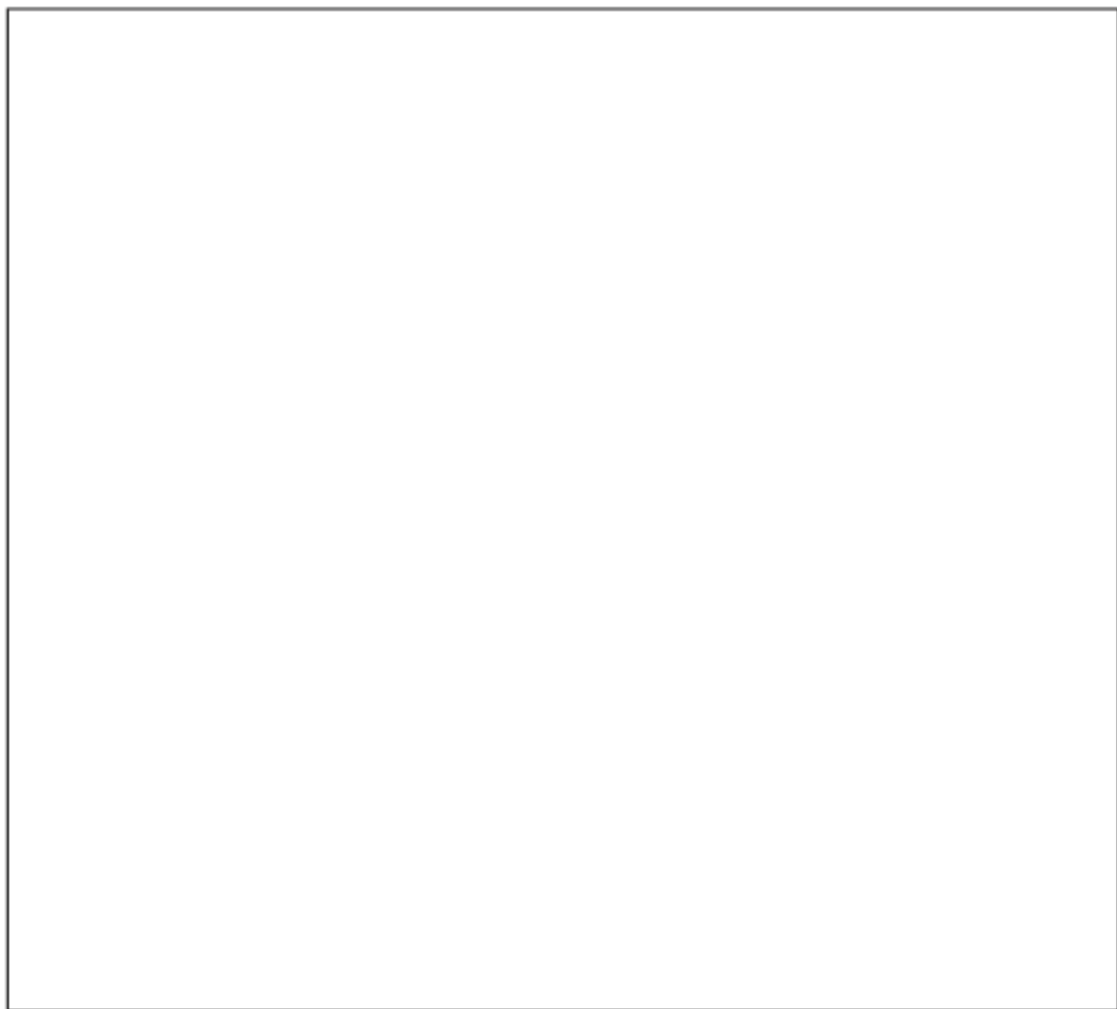
Sophia, Katrina, and Cristina decided that they wanted to go. They wanted to see what would happen and listen to what people said. They wanted to say good-bye to Mr. Clark. Before the funeral, the girls took their favorite photographs of him and pasted them on a poster board. They brought the poster to the funeral, along with colored pencils, markers, and stickers. Before the funeral service, they added words and designs to their poster and invited other people to write about Mr. Clark, too. It made them feel as if they were part of the funeral service, with something special to share.



Why Did You Die?

***Directions***

In the space below, create a collage that will help you remember your loved one's funeral. You can include cards, obituaries, items from the funeral home, pictures from magazines, or your own drawings.



### *Questions*

What memories came to your mind while creating the collage?

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Did you leave out anything you would like to include? You can go back and add to your collage.

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What are some feelings you had at the funeral?

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What feelings do you think other people had?

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Did you say anything during the service? If you did, what did you say? If you didn't, is there anything you would like to have said?

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### *For You to Think About*

When someone dies, many people take or send gifts to the family. Often, these gifts are flowers or food. People often send cards, too. These cards are called sympathy cards. These gifts and cards are a way to tell the family that others are sorry the person died and that they understand it is a time of sadness.

Bobby wanted to show his friend Evan how sorry he was that Evan's brother had died. His parents had sent a fruit basket to Evan's family, but Bobby wanted to do something just for his friend. Bobby made a card to give Evan. First, he drew a picture with markers, but then he didn't know what to write inside. He couldn't think of a way to show his feelings. None of the words he thought of seemed right, and yet he wanted Evan to know that he cared. After some time, he decided to just write this:

Dear Evan,

I wish your brother didn't die.  
I'm sorry that you are sad.

From,

Bobby

The next day, Bobby gave Evan the card. Evan still felt sad, but he knew that he had a really good friend.



*Questions*

Where would you like to keep what you have created?

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What would you write to go along with your gift or card?

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Do you remember any cards or gifts that were special to you?

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### *For You to Think About*

After the funeral, the body is taken to a special place. It may be a cemetery, a mausoleum, or another specific place decided upon by the family. People can go to this place to help them remember their loved one.

Nora, Eddie, and Tyrone all went to a support group for children who had had someone they love die. Their group leader asked each of them where the body of their loved one was. Nora said, "In the ground in the cemetery, and my mom goes there every day." Tyrone said, "In the mausoleum, in a wall." Eddie said, "My grandma's ashes were put in a special garden."

They were each surprised at the others' answers. Their group leader reminded them that they didn't need to worry, no matter what special place the family had chosen. The person's body no longer felt pain. It didn't sense heat or cold, and it didn't need food or air. What was important was that friends and family could go to this place to remember their loved one.

***Directions***

Draw a picture or take a photograph of this place, and put it in the frame below.

