



#9579

HOW I COPE WHEN MOMMY DIED

FANLIGHT PRODUCTIONS, 2001

Grade Levels: 5-10

20 minutes

DESCRIPTION

Thirteen-year-old Brett Hardy Blake reflects on his mother's death from cancer when he was 10 in this self-made documentary. His openness about guilt, grief, and loss offer hope to others in similar situations.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Subject Area: Life Skills - Self-Regulation

- ★ Standard: Demonstrates perseverance
 - Benchmark: Persists in the face of difficulty (See Instructional Goal #2.)
- ★ Standard: Performs self-appraisal
 - Benchmark: Identifies peak experiences and significant life experiences (See Instructional Goal #2.)

Subject Area: Health

- ★ Standard: Knows how to maintain mental and emotional health
 - Benchmark: Knows strategies to manage stress and feelings caused by disappointment, separation, or loss (e.g., talking over problems with others, understanding that feelings of isolation and depression will pass, examining the situation leading to the feelings) (See Instructional Goal #1.)

INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

1. To present strategies to manage death, loss, and grief.
2. To introduce a teen who has persisted in the face of difficulty and is able to articulate the significant loss of his mother.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Experts working in the field of loss and grief recommend that adults discuss loss through death, divorce, or other personal tragedy with students before they see this film because it can evoke powerful, sometimes frightening emotions. Students may have questions about the possibility of their own parents' death or about who would take care of them if their parents were to die. Education about death and grief as part of life should begin before crisis strikes.

VOCABULARY

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. double-mastectomy | 11. hospice |
| 2. overshadowed | 12. seizure |
| 3. conventional treatment | 13. curse |
| 4. chemotherapy | 14. family dynamic |
| 5. bone marrow transplant | 15. social situation |
| 6. remission | 16. personal therapist |
| 7. lost my concentration | 17. normalizes loss |
| 8. project my anger | 18. nerve-racking |
| 9. by default | 19. coping mechanisms |
| 10. sound shallow | 20. acute grieving |

BEFORE SHOWING

1. List personal losses or losses of someone that you have had to support. Consider death, divorce, or other personal tragedies.
2. Consider the emotions that someone grieving a loss experiences.

AFTER SHOWING

► Discussion Items and Questions

1. Discuss the following statements about grief. Give examples from Brett's life and experience in addition to personal experience.
 - a. Grief is natural.
 - b. Grief is individual.
 - c. Grief has no timetable.
 - d. Grief can include every possible emotion.
 - e. Grieving children and adolescents need to learn to ask for and accept help.
 - f. Grief can have both physical and psychological effects.
2. Explain Brett's quote: "This film is not just about my mother dying. It's about a life, a love, and just going on and being helped."
3. How does this documentary show that with the right support at the time of loss and afterward, individuals can survive and grow through the most tragic of circumstances?
4. List ways that the support group was the right way to help Brett through his grief.



► Applications and Activities

1. Email Brett Hardy with personal questions or comments about his experiences or about the documentary that he created: aleatoire7@mindspring.com.
2. Remember when talking with someone about grief that it's okay to admit that you don't have all the answers; no one does. Consider the following questions.
 - a. Why do people die?
 - b. When do people die?
 - c. When will I die?
 - d. Could you die at any time? Could I die at any time?
 - e. Can someone die because you wished they were dead?
 - f. Why don't I cry when I feel bad?

- g. Will I ever come back to life again?
- h. Who will take care of me if my parent(s) die?
- i. Does cancer always come back?
3. Read Brett's poem. (See Summary.) Create artwork to express your loss. Consider writing, drawing, making a collage, or making a video.

SUMMARY

"The End" by Brett Hardy

My skin is white and so am I
 With fears of death and loss.
 Cancer cells and long black caskets
 Fill my mind with thoughts
 So bleak and cold that I will one day fall to this as prey.
 I suck in my tears just long enough to say
 That I won't be caught in this big mousetrap without a fight
 And I will climb these fortress walls with all my might.
 Although I feel a part of me
 Has been taken rather fast
 I know this memory and all its pain
 Will soon become the past
 Although this dolphin is wounded
 It will soon swim again
 And I will come to realize that
 The end is not the End.



RELATED RESOURCES



- Kids to Kids: When Someone Special Dies #9526



World Wide Web

The following Web sites complement the contents of this guide; they were selected by professionals who have experience in teaching deaf and hard of hearing students. Every effort was made to select accurate, educationally relevant, and "kid safe" sites. However, teachers should preview them before use. The U.S. Department of Education, the National Association of the Deaf, and the Captioned Media Program do not endorse the sites and are not responsible for their content.

• AMANDA THE PANDA

<http://www.amandathepanda.org/>

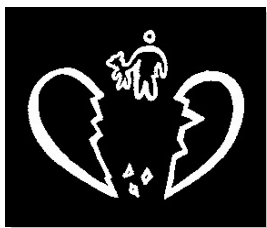
Amanda the Panda provides support to grieving children and their families. The site has information about camps, support groups, home visits, fun days, school presentations, and pen pal programs.



- **ASSOCIATION FOR DEATH EDUCATION AND COUNSELING**

<http://www.adec.org/>

This website includes information about conferences, courses and workshops, its new certification program, local chapters, related publications, counseling contacts by state, an extensive list of web resources, and its newsletter *The Forum*.



- **BARR-HARRIS CHILDREN'S GRIEF CENTER**

<http://www.barrharris.org/>

In addition to information about their specific grief counseling services, this site offers a list of frequently asked questions and an extensive bibliography for children and adolescents.

- **BEREAVEMENT: A MAGAZINE OF HOPE AND HEALING**

<http://www.bereavementmag.com/>

This on-line magazine includes searchable archives, related links, and an extensive bibliography.

