

Mental Health Reading Activity for Grades 3-5

One Wave at a Time: A Story About Grief and Healing

This interactive reading activity is designed for students in grades 3-5 and provides educators with opportunities to help students develop social-emotional intelligence and reduce mental health stigma by introducing mental health challenges that children sometimes face.

A link to purchase the book, the book's synopsis, and an activity guide with discussion questions have been provided to help facilitate the activity, create dialogue and teach strategies, tools and skills that help to develop resilience, mindfulness, positive self-talk, self-esteem, confidence-building, acceptance and compassion for oneself and others, as well as teach students how to be a supportive friend and that it's okay to ask for help.

BOOK DETAILS

[One Wave at a Time: A Story About Grief and Healing](#), by Holly Thompson

Colorful ocean waves symbolize the waves of emotions that arise during a family's intense period of grief. The narrator in the story, a boy whose father recently passed away, shares the emotions, body sensations, thoughts, and behaviors he has with each wave that washes over him in turn: Sadness, Anger, Fear, and that flat numbness where feeling stops. The story acknowledges that his mom grieves, too, that the boy sometimes takes his grief out on his little brother, and that happiness continues to exist, in varying amounts, even amidst all the grief. The narrator describes what helps him to cope: his support group; making a Grief First Aid Kit, a memory box, and new rituals like the Memory Chair to honor what they've lost; and talking, singing, or just breathing in silence with his Mom and his brother. The story ends hopefully, with the boy's growing ability to cope represented by learning to surf "one wave at a time" when they come.

Emphasis: Social-Emotional Development

Diversity Notes: Shows ethnically diverse, able-bodied, male and female characters

Relationships: Mom, Dad who passed, brother, peers, support group, grandparents

ACTIVITY + QUESTIONS

Read the Story:

1. Before you begin, introduce this lesson is about coping with and healing from sadness, grief, and loss, and review your classroom's norms to ensure that students feel respected and safe.
2. *There could very well be students in your class who have experienced a significant loss that they may or may not have disclosed at school. Hearing this story may bring up feelings or cause them to act out or shut down. Pay attention to changes in students' body language, level of attention, behavior, and overall demeanor, and be sure to check in with students who look like they might need some help coping with what this story brings up for them. Practice the strategies introduced in the book until additional support and interventions can be arranged.*
3. *Be aware, too, that some students may come from families who do not talk openly about death, loss, or grief, so this topic may be difficult for them to grapple with and or to understand or empathize with the experiences of the characters in the story.*
4. As you read, invite students to notice colors, facial expressions, and body language that reveal the characters' feelings. Call attention to descriptions of body sensations, how the different waves cause the members of the family to act, and which strategies help them to feel better and to remember their loved one whom they lost.

Discussion + Activities:

1. In what ways are feelings like waves in the ocean?
 - How does the boy cope with the Sad waves?
 - Why kinds of things do the Angry waves cause the boy and his family to do?
 - What thoughts and sensations does he have when the Fear waves come?
 - What does the boy mean that some days there are no waves, only flatness?
 - Can there still be Happy waves, even when someone is feeling grief?
 - Are there other types of waves that can come?
2. What strategies and tools help the boy and his family begin to cope with their grief?

3. How can the boy tell that he is beginning to heal?
4. Help students connect with the concepts to be explored by writing/drawing individually, or sharing aloud in pairs, small groups, or whole class, their responses to:
 - What is grief? What are some reasons a person might feel grief?
 - How is grief different than regular sadness?
 - How might grief affect a person's day-to-day life?
5. Consider vocabulary that students might generate or that you might opt to introduce:
 - Feelings: sad, quiet and safe, mad, afraid, flat, slow, happy
 - Strategies: support group, Grief First Aid Kit, memory box, new rituals: Memory Chair, talking, singing, or breathing in silence with loved ones