

# THE GRIEF BRIEF

## Back to School Issue



### Emma's Place

Staten Island Grief Center for  
Children and Families

#### Support ~ Community ~ Hope



Now is the time of year when we begin to see the signs that summer is evolving into fall, and the new school year is approaching. Many children and parents have mixed emotions about the start of a new school year. Children may feel sad leaving the fun and freedom of summer behind, but they look forward to seeing their friends and playing on sports teams. Parents may feel pride in watching their children grow and achieve special milestones, but they wonder if they are going to have the energy to juggle work and the demands of a new school year. But for grieving children and families, the start of the new school year, is another item on the long list of things that they are going to have to ride through a roller coaster of emotions as they experience each day.

Grieving children may feel fearful, anxious, and sad. They often worry about being separated from their loved ones, and are worried that they'll lose another loved one while they are in school. They also worry about feeling different from their peers who haven't lost a loved one. For a parent grieving the loss of a spouse, starting a new school year as a single parent for the first time can also be extremely stressful. For families who lost a school-aged child, the start of the school year can be extremely difficult and challenging.

Emma's Place is here for you during your transition into the new school year. We'd also like to offer some tips below to help the transition be a bit smoother.

#### Tips for Parents to Help Grieving Children as They Start the School Year:

- **Set up some coping tools with your child before they start school. These can include:**
  - Giving them a small picture of you, or special memento that will help them feel connected to you when you are separated during the day.
  - Putting notes in their school lunch or backpack to let them know they are loved.
  - Explaining to the child that friends may seem a little shy with them at first, but that has more to do with the friends not knowing what to say, rather than anything about the child themselves, and help them formulate some conversation starters.
  - Helping your child realize that it is Ok to not answer questions about the death of their loved one that they don't want to answer.
  - Letting your child know it is OK to have fun.
- **Inform your child's teachers and the school counselor that your child is grieving, so:**
  - Teachers can understand the reason why your child may seem distractible and have had a change in their behavior or attitude.
  - Counselors can check in with your child periodically and set up some times when they can speak with you to update you on how your child is doing and address any issues.
  - Teachers can allow the grieving child to look at photos or keep mementos out on their desk to help with any separation anxiety they may be feeling.

#### Tips for Grieving Parents to Help Themselves:

- Develop a means of support prior to the start of the school year so you can have someone as a back-up to help pick up your child if you're having a bad day.
- Join a bereavement support group or speak to a counselor if things get overwhelming.
- Accept offers when people offer help.
- Remember to take care of yourself and the analogy of oxygen masks on an airplane. You are told to put on your own mask before you can help anyone else.

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#### At Emma's Place you will

- Be supported by those who have journeyed through their own path of grief.
- Find a community of welcoming, caring and committed individuals who will listen.
- Learn healthy grief processing in a private, safe-setting which facilitates healing while offering the hope and tools to move forward to a meaningful life.

*"What we have once enjoyed, we can never lose. All that we love deeply becomes a part of us."*  
– Helen Keller

## Emma's Place Schedule

Emma's Place  
Staten Island Grief & Loss  
Center for Children and  
Families  
P.O. Box 10311  
Staten Island, NY 10301  
[www.emmasplacesi.com](http://www.emmasplacesi.com)

Contact us at:  
Telephone: 347.850.2322  
E-mail:  
[info@emmasplacesi.org](mailto:info@emmasplacesi.org)



Support ~ Community ~ Hope

### We rely on you.

Our Center is supported through donations, grants, memorials and bequests; which will allow us to provide these services at no cost to the children and families it serves.

There are a variety of ways to support Emma's Place and to help reach grieving children and families. We are currently looking for a permanent, cozy home for Emma's Place. Anyone with knowledge of a safe, house or building for rent or as a donation would be greatly appreciated.

Donations can be made out directly to Staten Island Grief Center and mailed to Emma's Place, P.O. Box 10311, Staten Island, NY 10310. Emma's Place staff members are available to make presentations or talk further on the phone – please contact us at 347-850-2322 or [info@emmasplacesi.org](mailto:info@emmasplacesi.org)

We greatly appreciate  
your generosity!

### CHILDREN'S GROUPS

1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays

Ages 5-9	5:30 pm
Ages 10-14	5:30 pm
Ages 15-19	TBA

### PARENTS GROUP

Coinciding with  
Children's Groups at  
5:30 pm

ADULT GROUPS  
TBA

Read more about  
Emma's Place at:  
[Staten Island Live  
Column](#) or see our  
Facebook Page!

Please contact Emma's Place at 347.850.2322 for more information about the groups

### BACK TO SCHOOL QUESTION AND ANSWER

**Dear Emma's Place,** My husband died at the beginning of June, and my 11-year-old daughter has been upset about going back to school. One night when she was especially sad, she told me that she dreads going to school and hearing about plans for the fall Father-Daughter dance. She cried that she can't believe her Dad won't be there to go with her this year as he has been for the past five years. I hugged her and told her that it will be OK, and that I'm sure her Uncle Larry would love to go with her. She pushed me away and ran into her room and slammed her door. Obviously, I said the wrong thing, and that was not what she needed to hear. Is there anything you can suggest that I can say to her regarding the Father-Daughter Dance? **Signed, Two Left Feet**

**Dear Two Left Feet,** First, we are very sorry for the loss of your husband. Please know that we are here to support you. We also have a children's group that may help your daughter. It often helps grieving children to be with other grieving children so they don't feel so different and alone. As far as the Father-Daughter dance we certainly empathize with you regarding how difficult this situation is. Often when we are grieving, we try to do the same things we've always done, but are forced to acknowledge that things are not the same. Therefore, it is sometimes helpful to create a new normal, while still honoring your loved one. Even though it had been a tradition for your daughter and her father to go to the Father Daughter Dance every year, it doesn't mean she has to go this year, with a male figure that could never truly replace her dad. Perhaps you, she, and perhaps Uncle Larry, and any other family members who are close to you, can get together the night of the Father Daughter Dance and create a new tradition to honor your husband. Perhaps you can play his favorite music, share special memories about him, and then dance together in his honor. It seems like your daughter may be looking for meaningful ways to keep her Dad with her, rather than looking for a replacement for her Dad, and creating new traditions to honor him is a way to do this. **Sincerely, Emma's Place**

### OUR FIRST ANNUAL FAMILY PICNIC!



The sun shone on approximately 25 Emma's Place participants, staff and volunteers at our **First Annual Family Picnic** on the beautiful and spacious lawn of Snug Harbor. This was a time of community, fun, and healing, for bereaved children and parents/guardians who have been attending Emma's Place groups and receiving grief support and caring from our committed staff and volunteers.

There were enthusiastic sounds of laughter and comradery, and sportsmanship as the participants played soccer, and went on an interesting scavenger hunt, with prizes! Congratulations to Marc Levy, and his girls, Rachel and Emily for winning the hunt.

#### Special Thanks to Snug Harbor and:

- Counselor, Nicole Pepe for baking delicious cupcakes, and a cake honoring participant, Savannah's, birthday, and to welcome back our amazing parent group counselor, Marybeth Melendez.
- Paulie's on Bay Street for their generous pizza donation.
- Board Member, Michele Yacovello for her fun and imaginative grab bags.