



TEN LESSONS FROM THE CHILDREN

By Larry Dawalt, M. Div., Director of Spiritual & Grief Care Services

During Chameleon's Journey, our annual grief camp for children, we work hard to teach campers important lessons about the grieving process. Over the years, though, we have found that the children have taught us some lessons as well; lessons not only about *their* grief, but about grief at any age.

Lesson #1- Some things will make you cry, even when you don't want to cry. You might not have planned on crying, but the memory was too strong not to cry. It's okay to cry, especially when you've got people around you crying.

Lesson #2- Sometimes you need to take a break from grieving. Learning the lessons of grief is an important task, but so is resting and having fun.

Lesson #3- Just because someone is laughing and having fun doesn't mean they're still not hurting. Taking breaks from our grief doesn't mean the grief isn't still there. Calm water on the surface doesn't mean complete calm underneath.

Lesson #4- It's nice to know people are willing to listen to you, but it's even nicer to have them be willing to wait until you're ready to talk. Some people have trouble sharing their feelings. They need time to develop trust. They don't care to let you know, until you have let them know that you care.

Lesson #5- People who have been through like experiences of loss can communicate on a deep level, with or without words. You don't necessarily have to hear someone talk about their pain to know it's real, especially if you've experienced something similar.

Lesson #6- Not everyone wants to participate in 'group' activities. Just as people are unique and enjoy different things, they also grieve differently and receive help and support in different ways. A favorite book or story may not mean as much to someone else as it does to you. Others may find help and support in alternate ways.

Lesson #7- Helping children deal with their stuff will bring up your stuff. Time distances, but it doesn't always heal. Experiencing a loss is not necessarily dealing with a loss. The adult in you may say it's okay now, but the little child inside of you may still be hurting and may need someone to understand.

Lesson #8- The most meaningful, healing moments may not be on the agenda. A lot of good work at the camp is done during lesson time, but some of the best work is done sitting by the lake, getting the courage to leap off the tower onto the zip-line, or taking that one last step that helps you reach the top of the wall, knowing that if you climbed *that* wall, there are other walls in your life that you can climb as well.

Lesson #9- Kids are still kids. You might think they don't want to stay up late and talk after 'lights out' because they are grieving children, and grieving children are different. Not so. Grief is a part of you, but there are other parts, and that's okay.

Lesson #10- Even though it hurts to remember, you don't ever want to stop remembering. As they launch into the sky on Sunday morning, the balloons go in search of someone we believe will always be out there whether we can see them or not, and knowing that those balloons may find a part of them helps us recover a part of us. Seeing through tears is still seeing. Hearing in silence is still hearing. Feeling with a broken heart is still feeling. It wasn't in our power to keep you from dying, but our memories of you will live forever.

For more information or to pre-register for Chameleon's Journey, email Gerri Cummings at cummings@hpccr.org or call her at 704.335.4334.