

*Helping Children  
Cope With the  
Death of a  
Loved One*

HIGHMARK.  
**CARING PLACE**  
A Center for Grieving Children,  
Adolescents and Their Families

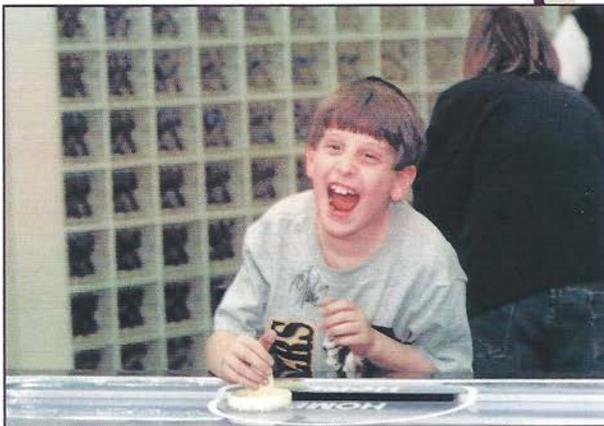


At the Caring Place friendships are made, and even in the difficult time of grief, laughter is shared.



The Caring Place also has a Family Activities Room where children and parents play air hockey and dome hockey. One of the goals of the Caring Place is for the kids and the adults to have a good time together—to know that even in grief, families can still find fun and enjoyment together.

The Caring Place groups are offered at no cost to the children and their families. The Caring Place is funded by community contributions, along with matching funds from Highmark Blue Shield.



### **Impact of Death on Children**

- One child in 20 will have a parent die before he or she graduates from high school.
- One out of every 750 youth of high school age dies each year.

### **Results from Harvard's Child Bereavement Study:**

- Many children are more at risk for emotional and behavioral difficulties two years after the death of a parent than they were one year after the death.
- Many children feel a lower sense of self-worth two years after the death.
- Many children feel more fearful one year after the death than right away.

### **Time does not necessarily heal all wounds by itself.**

- Both children and parents do best in coping with grief with the support of family and peers.

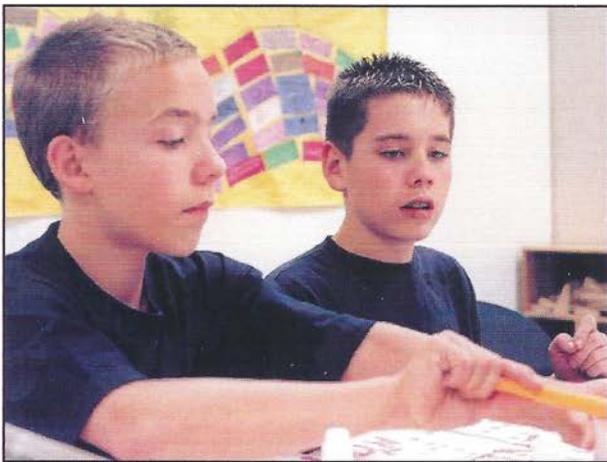
**The only way through grief is to grieve.**

## Peer Support Groups

**"I could finally talk about my grief, and express emotions that I could never let out before. But the Caring Place also brought me hope that I could get through this. And most important, I found out that I'm not alone."**

— Thirteen-year-old

The children and their parents who attend Caring Place sessions receive support and encouragement from other members of their groups—other children and adults who have experienced the same types of losses. Through the meetings they discover what is lost, what is left and what is possible.



Children, adolescents and their parents or guardians participate in support groups on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Evenings begin with a meal together. The children then break into age-specific groups where they engage in creative activities and group discussions. Preschool groups are also available.

**"...over the weeks you're there,  
you bond together.  
You work on the difficult parts,  
and you also have a lot of fun.  
You grow together and work together  
—it's a great experience."**

— Seventeen-year-old



The children and adolescents use art, music, drama, making quilt squares as a remembrance, storytelling and play as ways to express their feelings and to share with peers who can understand and empathize with those feelings. During group discussions, they share their experiences of living without a parent, brother or sister.

During the children's sessions, the parents or guardians meet in separate groups to discuss the impact of the loved one's death upon the family and learn how to help their children cope with their grief. Through this process, family bonds strengthen and mutual understanding deepens.



**"The Caring Place gave all of us a chance to talk. They had time with other kids their age. And I had time with other adults to talk about how to help them, and myself, deal with our grief. It really is what they say it is: The Caring Place."**

— Parent of enrolled child



**“The best thing for me  
was knowing that I wasn’t  
the only one who had  
someone die.”**

**The Highmark Caring Place is  
a program of:**

**HIGHMARK.  
CARING FOUNDATION**

*An Independent Licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association*

**“Daddy, my heart is broken.  
It’s cracked in half.”**

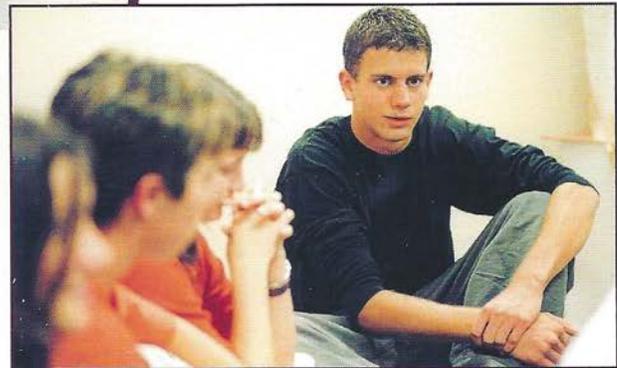
— Six-year-old

The pain of losing a loved one is heart-breaking. And every day, death breaks the hearts of more of our children and adolescents.

**“Nothing’s the same since he died.  
Our whole life has changed.”**

— Mother of five

The death of a loved one radically impacts children, adolescents and families. Security, identity and meaning are all questioned and re-examined. Death is a part of life. And grief is a natural and normal response to the death of a loved one. Grief is both universal and unique.



### ***The Highmark Caring Place***

The Highmark Caring Place is dedicated to children, adolescents and their families who have lost a loved one. It is a safe place with safe people where children and their families can:

- know they are not alone in their grief
- share their feelings, memories and experiences, in an atmosphere of non-judgmental acceptance
- see that what they are going through is normal
- know that hope and healing are possible

*“It is only natural that we and our children find many things hard to talk about.*

*But anything human is mentionable and anything mentionable can be manageable.*

*The mentioning can be difficult, and the managing too, but both can be done if we’re surrounded by love and trust.”*

— *Fred Rogers, creator and host of Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood and Honorary Chairman of the Caring Place from its inception until his death in 2003.*



### **For More Information**

To learn more about the Highmark Caring Place, or to find out how your family can become part of a support group, call 1-866-613-HOPE (4673).

