

1

Be Present

JOHN 11:1-3, 17-21, 28-35



GOAL

Children learn the process for comforting mourners, beginning with recognizing hurt and offering the ministry of presence.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- C** Conversation
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Holy God, call my attention to your ministry of presence with me, in the midst of my own brokenness, as I prepare to introduce this practice to young children. Amen.

THIS SESSION

When loss occurs and there is mourning, one of the best things we can do is be present. Often we want to jump into action, fix, solve, or make things feel better for the one grieving, or for us. We want to find the right words to say, but showing up—physically, emotionally, prayerfully—and sitting with another’s loss and grief is the ministry of presence.

THE BIBLE STORY

Jesus’ response to the death of his friend Lazarus offers us a powerful example of recognizing the loss that his friend’s death has caused and what it means to be present to grief. Jesus’ friends Martha and Mary—Lazarus’s sisters—suffered greatly in the loss of their brother. Before Jesus healed Lazarus, he first listened to the hurt his two friends carried with them. Martha’s and Mary’s raw emotion, plus the death of Jesus’ own friend, moved Jesus deeply. The Scripture tells us that he wept with his friends as he acknowledged the brokenness and hurt that impacted his loved ones.

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Children are always learning about empathy in their homes and in their classrooms. Like us, children will often be quick to move to action as a means of comfort. However, children are deeply familiar with the ministry of presence, as they naturally seek out their caregivers in moments of stress or grief.

SESSION PREPARATION

Depending on the options you choose:

- “Listening Is Comforting” (p. 9): Obtain *The Rabbit Listened* by Cori Doerrfeld (Scallywag Press Ltd, 2020) or use the YouTube video “The Rabbit Listened—Virtual Read Aloud—Listening—Shon’s Stories” (bit.ly/FMRabbitListened, 3:37).
- “Learning about Empathy” (p. 10): Obtain *A Little Spot of Empathy: A Story about Understanding and Kindness* by Dian Alber (Inspire to Create a Better You, 2021) or use the YouTube video “A Little Spot of Empathy by Diane Alber Read Aloud” (bit.ly/FMEmpathy, 6:24).



GETTING STARTED

- ☐ Copies of Resource Page 1
- ☐ Crayons, colored pencils

ROSES, BUDS, AND THORNS

A C

Greet the children as they arrive. Provide copies of Resource Page 1 and invite them to draw a picture by the rose of something that made them happy this week, by the thorn (sad face) of something that made them sad, and by the bud of something that they are looking forward to in the coming week. Engage them in conversation about their drawings. Depending on the size of your group, have the children share with the whole group or with a partner or two.

JESUS IS WITH ME

Tell the children that, in each session of this unit, they will say some important words to remind them of God’s promises. Invite the children to repeat after you where indicated (/) and follow your motions.

What is our comfort in life and in death?

Knowing that we belong to God. (*form a link with thumb and middle finger on both hands joining them together*) /

What can separate us from God’s love?

Absolutely nothing can separate us from God’s love. (*move hands palms down at waist height from the center outward*) /

Jesus is with me. (*cross right arm over chest*) /

Jesus is within me. (*cross left arm over chest*) /

Jesus is behind me. (*move hands down and to the back*) /

Jesus is before me. (*move hands palms up in front of you*) /

Jesus is there to comfort and restore me. (*hug yourself*) /

—adaptations from the Heidelberg Catechism, question 1;
Romans 8:35, 38–39; St. Patrick’s Breastplate



This ritual is used as both an opening and a closing throughout this unit.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

FEELING LOSS

C AM

Ask the children who has lost anything recently. Most likely they will talk about objects that they can’t find. Wonder how it makes them feel when they have lost something. Tell the children that loss also can look like different things: when a friend moves away, when parents get divorced, when a grandparent dies, when a caregiver leaves a job, when a friendship is broken, when a pet dies. Wonder together what kind of feelings these experiences have. Suggest that they may have similar feelings of sadness, frustration, and anger, but that these feelings may be bigger and deeper. Tell the children that, when someone experiences deep sadness, or grief, it is called *mourning*.

Invite the children to show you where in their body they feel loss and act out what that loss feels like.

Ask the children what makes them feel better when they have experienced a deep, sad loss. If you need help beginning conversation, wonder together about physical objects that help, people who help and

what they do to help, and any practices the children do to help themselves feel better. Using the children's responses, explain that comforting someone means to help ease someone's grief or sadness. Suggest that, although there are different ways to do that (recalling some of the ways the children responded), sometimes just being present with a person who is hurting because of a deep loss is an important thing to do.

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

REFLECTING AND CONNECTING


C

Resource Page 2

Tell the children that today's Bible story is about a time when a family experienced grief, how they mourned, and how the people around them mourned with them. Set the scene by telling the children that Mary, Martha, and their brother, Lazarus, were good friends of Jesus. He had spent time visiting with them, eating at their home, and talking together, but one day Jesus got news that Lazarus was very sick. Read aloud the adapted Bible story from John 11:1–3, 17–21, 28–35 on Resource Page 2.

Reflect on the story with the children. Use the following questions to help spur some conversation about the story. Avoid answering open-ended questions for the children. Instead, encourage them to wonder by wondering with them:

- ✦ What happened to Martha and Mary?
- ✦ Who was with them and what were they doing?
- ✦ How did they feel when Jesus arrived?
- ✦ How did Jesus feel? How do you know?
- ✦ Why do you think Jesus cried?
- ✦ What would you have done if you were there?
- ✦ How do you think Martha and Mary felt when Jesus cried?

 Don't be afraid of some silence after you ask questions. Allow children time and space to respond with words.

FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

LISTENING IS COMFORTING

AM D C T

The Rabbit Listened by Cori Doerrfeld (Sallywag Press Ltd, 2020) or internet-connected device

Tell the children that they will hear a story about a child named Taylor who felt sad. Encourage the children to pay attention to the different ways Taylor's friends tried to help. Pause while reading or pause the video after each animal. Invite the children to act out how that animal wanted to help and wonder how each of their suggestions made Taylor feel. Read aloud *The Rabbit Listened* by Cori Doerrfeld or show the YouTube video "The Rabbit Listened—Virtual Read Aloud—Listening—Shon's Stories" (bit.ly/FMRabbitListened, 3:37).

After the story, wonder with the children why the chicken, bear, elephant, hyena, ostrich, kangaroo, and snake don't make Taylor feel better. Ask the children to recall what the rabbit did for Taylor and how that made Taylor feel. Wonder together about what the rabbit did that was different from the other animals.

Comment that Taylor needed someone to listen to all the different feelings about the amazing block tower falling down. The rabbit listened carefully to everything that Taylor felt and had to say. Ask the children:

- ➔ Who is a person who is like the rabbit in your life? Who sits with you when you need to share your feelings?
- ➔ What might be a situation when you can be like the rabbit for someone else?

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- ☐ *A Little Spot of Empathy: A Story about Understanding and Kindness* by Dian Alber (Inspire to Create a Better You, 2021) or internet-connected device

LEARNING ABOUT EMPATHY

T M

Tell the children that there is a big word called *empathy* that is helpful to learn. Explain that empathy is how we understand other people's feelings. Suggest that, when we have empathy, we ask ourselves three questions:

- ➔ What might the other person be feeling?
- ➔ Have I felt that way before?
- ➔ How would I want to be treated?

Read aloud *A Little Spot of Empathy: A Story about Understanding and Kindness* by Dian Alber or show the YouTube video "A Little Spot of Empathy by Diane Alber Read Aloud" (bit.ly/FMEmpathy, 6:24).



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

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- ☐ Copies of Resource Page 3
 - ☐ Markers, crayons, colored pencils

A MINISTRY OF PRESENCE

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Comment that, sometimes, the most important way the children can comfort someone who is experiencing sadness or grief is just to be there with them. Suggest that this is called *a ministry of presence*. Explain that a ministry of presence means choosing to spend time with someone when they need comfort. If you used the story *The Rabbit Listened* in "Listening Is Comforting" (p. 9), draw connections to the rabbit's behavior with Taylor.

Distribute copies of Resource Page 3 and invite the children to color the pictures. As they color, invite them to imagine what might be going on in each picture. Encourage them to create a story for each picture. Introduce, or recall, the three empathy questions from "Learning about Empathy" (above) and ask them for each of the situations the children have created for the pictures:

- ➔ What might the other person be feeling?
- ➔ Have I felt that way before?
- ➔ How would I want to be treated?

Wonder what the children will remember about comforting someone who is experiencing sadness or grief.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

D

Tell the children that it can be hard sometimes when someone is mourning just to be with them without trying to fix how they feel. If you used the story *The Rabbit Listened* in "Listening Is Comforting" (p. 9), draw connections to the various animals' behaviors with Taylor.

Then read aloud the scenarios below one at a time and invite pairs of children to take turns acting out how they can be present with the person in

their time of sadness and grief. Assign one character the role of the grieving person and the other child the role of the comforter. Encourage them to consider what they might do with their bodies and what they would say in each situation.

- Your best friend moved to a new city, and you don't get to see them anymore.
- Your grandmother is sick, and she has a hard time remembering your name.
- You are getting a new teacher, and you really miss your old teacher.
- Your parents love you very much, but they have decided not to live together anymore.
- Your pet fish died.



FOLLOWING JESUS

JESUS IS WITH ME



Gather the children and acknowledge the work you have done together during this session. Remember together that, when someone has experienced loss, something we can do to comfort them is to just be with them. Invite the children to repeat after you where indicated (/) and follow your motions.

What is our comfort in life and in death?

Knowing that we belong to God. (*form a link with thumb and middle finger on both hands joining them together*) /

What can separate us from God's love?

Absolutely nothing can separate us from God's love. (*move hands palms down at waist height from the center outward*) /

Jesus is with me. (*cross right arm over chest*) /

Jesus is within me. (*cross left arm over chest*) /

Jesus is behind me. (*move hands down and to the back*) /

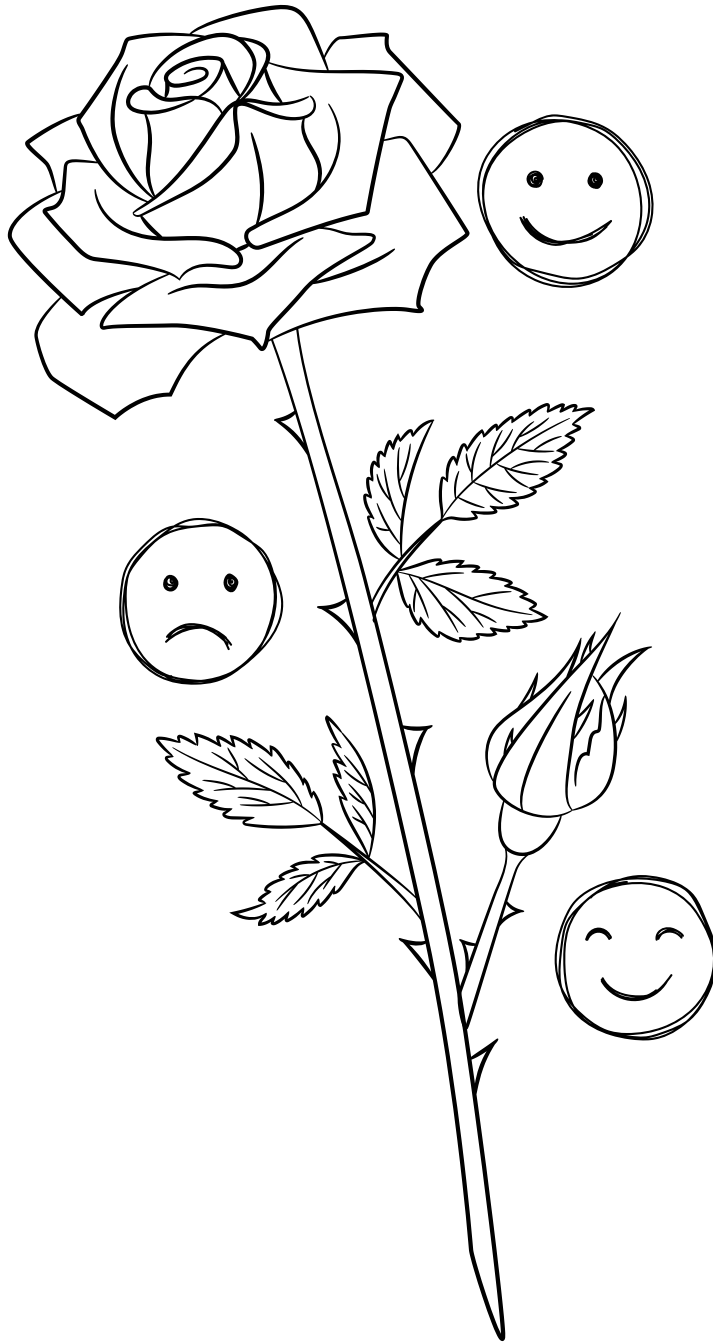
Jesus is before me. (*move hands palms up in front of you*) /

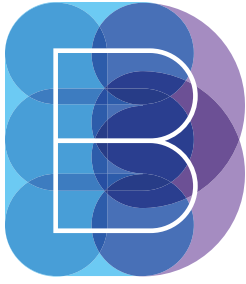
Jesus is there to comfort and restore me. (*hug yourself*) /

—adaptations from the Heidelberg Catechism, question 1;
Romans 8:35, 38–39; St. Patrick's Breastplate

Close with the following prayer:

Holy God, thank you for Jesus who shows us it is OK to love people and be sad when they are sad. Amen.





BIBLE STORY

BASED ON JOHN 11:1-3, 17-21, 28-35

When Jesus was teaching about God's love, two of his friends, Mary and Martha, sent a message to Jesus. The message said that their brother, Lazarus, was very sick. Jesus loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. They were good friends. Jesus decided to visit Lazarus, but it took him a long time to get there.

By the time Jesus got to their house, something terrible had happened. Lazarus had died. Martha and Mary were very sad. Many of their friends and neighbors had come to comfort them. When they heard Jesus was nearby, Martha went out to meet him. She said, "Jesus! If you had gotten here faster, my brother would not have died. You could have helped him!" She was grieving.

Jesus asked her to go get Mary. Mary came out of the house. When she saw Jesus, she was so upset that she fell down at his feet. She said, "Jesus! If you had been here, my brother would not have died." She, too, was grieving. Mary began to cry, and all the mourners cried too. Jesus felt their sadness, and he was sad too. He loved Lazarus. Jesus cried.



