

1

Recognize Brokenness

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



GOAL

After hearing the story of Jesus crying, children find comfort and affirmation that their own expressions of brokenness are welcome in front of God and one another.

- 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, show me where I am broken and help me to heal. Make me courageous in my healing and my expression of love for others. Amen.

THIS SESSION

Grief and sadness due to loss are unavoidable, even for children. They will experience large and small losses in their lives. Understanding feelings associated with loss is important. Recognizing brokenness due to sadness and grief is sometimes hard because it is not always visible. While this unit's focus is on comforting others, sadness in others due to loss can often bring up our own losses and feelings. Don't diminish or talk children out of their feelings of sadness. Thank them for being courageous enough to share and compassionate enough to acknowledge the sadness of others.

THE BIBLE STORY

The Bible story in John 11 follows the death of Lazarus who is a dear friend to Jesus. Within these few verses, a lot of big emotions are explored. Mary and Martha, Lazarus's sisters, are joined by their community as they recognize their loss and share their grief. Jesus also weeps. He weeps for his friend. He weeps for the grief Mary and Martha are bearing and for their broken hearts at the death of their brother. And, perhaps he weeps because they, and those around them, do not recognize him as the one who brings resurrection from death.

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Learning to name and differentiate emotions expands for children between the ages of five and ten. Emotionally healthy children are learning to identify and name those feelings in themselves and others, while seeking appropriate outlets for sharing those feelings.

SESSION PREPARATION

- "Getting It Together" (p. 8): Obtain one or more items that require several pieces to assemble, such as a 25-piece puzzle or simple building-brick set. Hide a few pieces.

Depending on the options you choose:

- "Talking with a Counselor" (p. 10): Invite a counselor or therapist accustomed to working with children to visit your group in person or online and talk about loss, sadness, and grief. Share listed questions (p. 10) with them in advance.
- "Practicing Empathy" (p. 11): Obtain *A Little Spot of Empathy: A Story about Understanding and Kindness* by Diane 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

- One or more items that require several pieces to assemble, such as a 25-piece puzzle or simple building-brick set with several pieces hidden from sight

GETTING IT TOGETHER



Greet the children as they arrive and invite them to work in small groups, no more than four to an item, to complete a puzzle or put together a building-brick set. As these should be fairly easy to assemble, when they notice that pieces are missing, encourage them to look around the room to find them. When children cannot find the missing pieces, but before they get too frustrated, give them the missing pieces so they can complete their projects.

After most groups have completed their puzzles or builds, congratulate the children. Ask them how it felt when they did not have all the parts. Tell them that they are going to explore how it sometimes feels when their lives are missing some pieces and what they do when they recognize something is missing.

JESUS IS WITH ME

Tell the children that, in each session of this unit, they will say some important words that 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



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

- Newsprint
- Marker
- Copies of Resource Page 1

IT'S OK NOT TO BE OK



Ask children to raise their hands and share any times in their lives that make them feel good. If they get stuck, ask them how they feel when they receive birthday presents, get a good grade, perform in a musical or theater event, or win a sports game. Tell them that these are examples of the way God made us to allow us to feel joy and acceptance and other emotions.

Ask the children to think of some times and situations in which they do not feel OK. As they give answers, write their contributions on a sheet of newsprint. Distribute copies of Resource Page 1 and invite the children to find words that describe how they feel in the situations they suggested.

Encourage the children to assist one another with reading. Write these feeling words next to each circumstance that they have mentioned. Wonder if these feelings are also part of the way God made us. Comment that we often think of certain feelings as *good* and other feelings, such as the ones just mentioned, as *bad*. Tell the children that feelings are neither good nor bad but help us understand who we are. Suggest that the situations that cause our feelings may be considered *good* or *bad*, or perhaps sad or difficult, and how we act on our feelings may be helpful or not, especially when our emotions feel big or overwhelming. Wonder together what the children do when they are feeling sad, angry, or frustrated in some of the situations written on the newsprint. Then wonder what they do when someone, a friend or family member, has those feelings.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

ACTING OR DRAWING THE STORY



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.

Tell the children that they have a choice of acting out the Bible story or drawing a picture of a scene or feeling from it. Have the children choose which they prefer to do and form two groups: an acting group and a drawing group.

Give the acting group copies of Resource Page 2 and assign parts, or let the children choose their parts: Mary, Martha, Jesus, Lazarus, and the friends. If there are fewer than five people in this group, the roles of Mary and Martha could be played by one person and the role of Lazarus could be offstage or a toy character with his dialogue cut. Have the acting group gather costumes, if they want them, and practice their skit. Encourage them to practice it so they are comfortable with the dialogue and the stage directions.

Distribute paper and coloring supplies to the drawing group. Tell this group that they will hear the story twice. Explain that, as they listen the first time, they should choose a scene or a feeling expressed that they would like to illustrate. Read aloud the adapted Bible story from John 11:1–3, 17–21, 28–35 on Resource Page 3.

After a designated time, bring the groups together. Have the acting group put on their skit for the rest of the children. Then have the drawing group share their pictures with the others, describing the scene or feeling they illustrated. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions:

- What emotions were Mary and Martha feeling? How do you know?
- Who was with Mary and Martha, and what was their role in this story?
- Why do you think Jesus was crying?
- Are you surprised that Jesus would cry? Why or why not?
- Sometimes, when we have big, difficult feelings, it feels like we are incomplete or missing pieces of ourselves, like the puzzle or toy we put together earlier. When have you felt incomplete or not your whole self because of a loss?

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- Copies of Resource Page 2
 - Biblical costumes
 - Resource Page 3
 - Paper
 - Markers, crayons, colored pencils



FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

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- Invited guest counselor or therapist, in person or online
 - Internet-connected device, if online

TALKING WITH A COUNSELOR



Welcome and introduce your guest, a counselor or therapist who works with children. Explain that a *counselor* or *therapist* has a special job that they have been trained for, to listen to a person and help them when they are struggling, confused, or sad. Tell the children that you will ask your guest some questions, but then they will have time to ask questions as well.

- ✿ Why do we feel sad sometimes?
- ✿ Is it all right if we feel sad?
- ✿ Why do we sometimes cry?
- ✿ What can we do if we feel sad?
- ✿ How do we know that the sadness will not last?
- ✿ What can we say to, or what actions can we take with, a friend if they are feeling sad?

Invite the children to ask additional questions. Encourage them to focus on the topic of loss and grief and how we can offer comfort to others when they are sad.

Thank your guest for their time and their helpful conversation with you.

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- Internet-connected device
 - Play dough

DO YOU WANT TO BUILD A SNOWMAN?



Tell children that they are going to watch the song “Do You Want to Build a Snowman?” from the movie *Frozen* (Disney, 2013). Wonder what the children know about the movie and where this song fits into it. If children are unfamiliar with the plot, tell them that this song comes early in the movie when Elsa and Anna, sisters, are young. Explain that Elsa has a magical gift that creates ice and snow, and, as wonderful as that may seem, she is afraid her magic will hurt her sister as it once did, so Elsa does not want to be with her. Anna just wants a connection with Elsa, trying time and time again to do so as they grow older, and especially after the death of their parents.

Show the YouTube video “Do You Want to Build a Snowman? (from “Frozen”/Sing-Along)” (bit.ly/FMSnowman, 3:21). After the video, provide the children with play dough and invite them to make a snowman, or some other object that represents something comforting as the snowman did for Anna. Sometimes it is easier for children to talk when their hands are busy. Ask the children the following questions:

- ✿ Why is Anna sad?
- ✿ Why is Elsa sad?
- ✿ What do they do when they are sad?
- ✿ What do you do when you are sad?
- ✿ What has helped you when you were sad?
- ✿ When has been a time when a friend or family member needed comforting? What did you do?



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

PRACTICING EMPATHY



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 can ask ourselves the three questions below. Write them on a sheet of newsprint as you mention each one.

- ✦ 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 Diane Alber or show the YouTube video "A Little Spot of Empathy by Diane Alber Read Aloud" (bit.ly/FMEmpathy, 6:24).

After the story, invite the children to form pairs or trios, or work together as one group. Have each group think of a situation in which someone has experienced loss and is sad and grieving. Some ideas might be the death of a pet, parents divorcing, a friend moving far away, a favorite teacher or coach leaving, and so forth. In their groups, have the children discuss the three empathy questions. After some time for conversation in the groups, invite each group to share what their situation was and how they answered the three empathy questions. Encourage the children to remember and practice these empathy questions in the coming week.

- 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
- Newsprint
- Marker

WRITING A POEM



Tell the children that they will be writing a poem together. Explain that the poem will be like a prayer, but instead of talking to God, they will be talking about God. Suggest that this poem, or prayer, can remind everyone of how God is with us even when we feel sad. Distribute copies of Resource Page 4 and read aloud the prompt that is on it in two places.

Tell the children that each line of their poem will have this structure. In the first prompt, they describe something in the first blank that is a happy experience for them. In the second blank, they describe where they see or feel God in that experience. Explain that in the second prompt, they will do the same thing, but with an experience that has been sad for them and where they see or feel God in that sadness. Assist with writing as needed. Two examples may be:

- "When I play basketball, God is in my joy."
- "When I miss my grandma, God is in my tears."

Encourage the children to illustrate their poems with pictures, designs, or colors. When everyone has finished their poems, invite those who would like to share them with the group to do so. Display the poems in your room or in a space where others in the church may see them.

- Copies of Resource Page 4
- Pencils, crayons, colored pencils



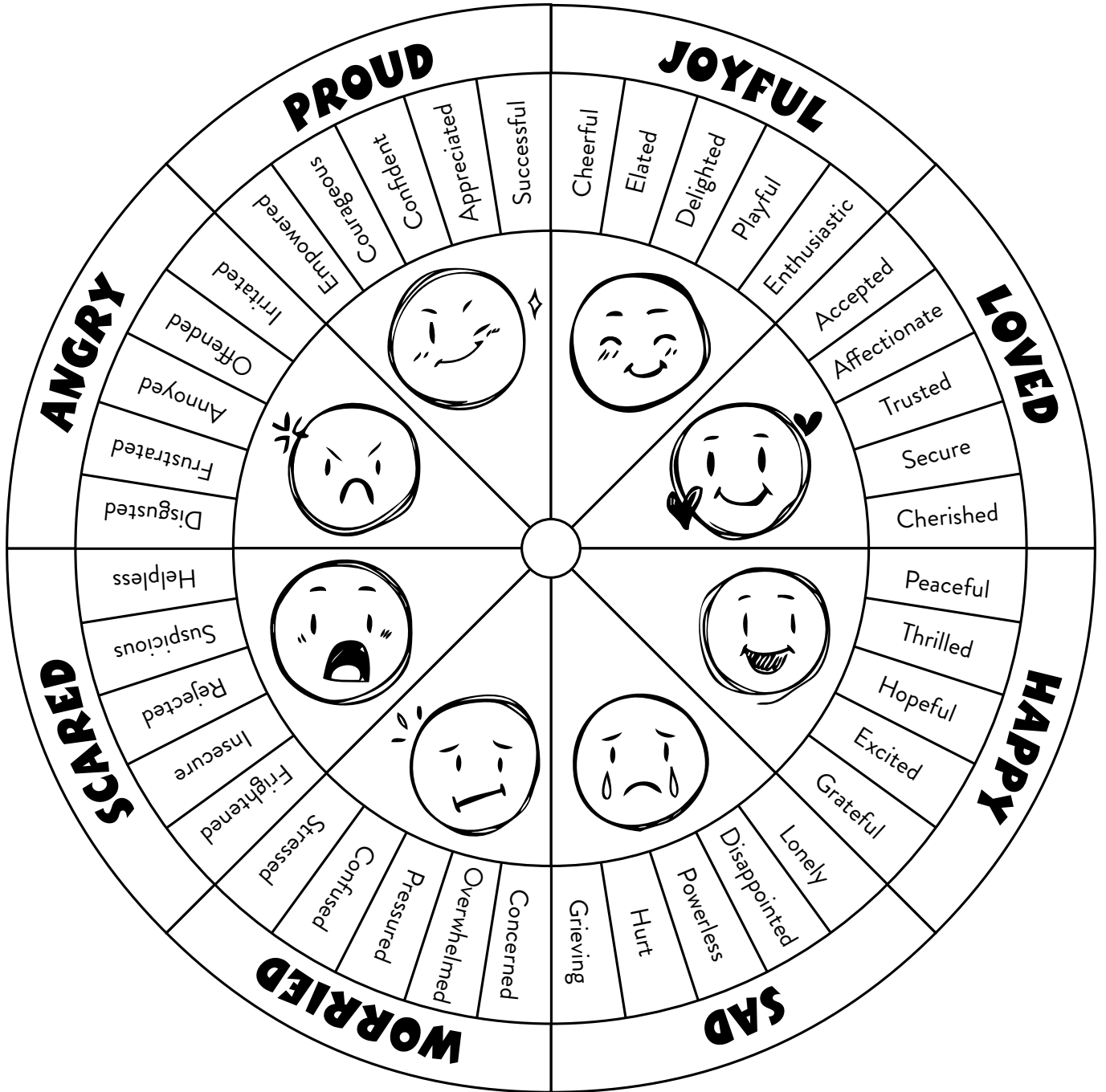
FOLLOWING JESUS

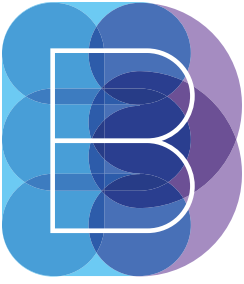
OPEN EYES PRAYER



Thank children for their participation today, acknowledging that talking about loss, sadness, and grief can be difficult, but they have shown compassion and understanding. Close by gathering the children together in a circle. Invite the children to pray quietly with you as you pray the following prayer aloud:

Loving God, sometimes we feel broken or incomplete in our grief or sadness. Sometimes we are confused or angry. However, we know you are with us no matter how we feel. You love us through all of our feelings. Be with us as we (*insert some of the times of sadness that the children shared in the session*). Thank you for holding us in your embrace. Amen.





BIBLE STORY

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

Jesus: I am friends with everyone, but there is one family that I love a lot!
In this family, there is Mary . . .

Mary: Hi, Jesus!

Jesus: and Mary has a sister, Martha . . .

Martha: Hi, Jesus!

Jesus: and Mary and Martha have a brother named Lazarus.

Lazarus: Hi, Jesus!

Jesus: While I was out traveling one day, Lazarus got really sick and died.

(Lazarus dies, being as dramatic as he wants to be. The friends gather around Mary and Martha. Some are crying. Some are making food. Some are giving hugs. Some are sitting nearby.)

Jesus: I came back to their home. Martha and Mary ran to me. They were angry and upset about their brother, Lazarus.

(The friends who were comforting Martha and Mary followed them, staying close by and crying.)

Martha: Where were you, Jesus?

Mary: We needed you here!

Martha: If you were here, you could have healed Lazarus and saved his life!

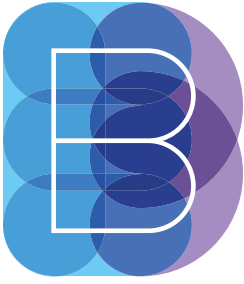
Jesus: I saw Martha and Mary crying, grieving over the death of their brother. I saw their friends crying too.

(Jesus cries.)

Mary: Jesus, are you crying?

Jesus: Yes. I loved Lazarus too.

(Mary, Martha, and Jesus all hug together. Their friends surround them.)



BIBLE STORY

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

Jesus loved Martha and her sister, Mary, and Lazarus. He had spent time with them in their home, and they were good friends. One day Lazarus became sick. The sisters sent Jesus a message: “Lord, your dear friend is sick.”

When Jesus arrived several days later, he found that Lazarus had died and been buried. Many of their friends and neighbors had come to see Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother’s death.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed in the house. Martha said to Jesus, “If you had been here, Lord, my brother would not have died!”

After Martha said this, she went back and told Mary that Jesus was there. Mary got up and hurried out to meet him. The people who were in the house with Mary comforting her followed her when they saw her get up and hurry out. They thought that she was going to the grave to weep there.

As soon as she saw Jesus, she fell at his feet. “Lord,” she said, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died!”

Jesus saw her weeping, and he saw how the people with her were weeping also; his heart was touched, and he was deeply moved. “Where have you buried him?” he asked them. “Come and see, Lord,” they answered.

Jesus wept.



When I _____,

God is in my _____.



When I _____,

God is in my _____.

