

Life Changes, Grief & Healing

Last fall, I worked with a young boy and his family who had recently relocated to Edmonton from a small town. He had lived his whole life surrounded by a large, extended family, with grandparents, great grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. The move to Edmonton entailed a significant change in the family structure. This was combined with changes in the immediate family, as his father worked long hours at a new, challenging job, and his mother adjusted to working and living in a new community. Shortly after they moved, one of his grandparents died. At the same time, the boy was diagnosed with a developmental disorder.

The family came in together for several sessions and worked on issues of loss and change. We used art as a way to process some of the changes the family was going through. They made a memory box with items and pictures and stories of the family member who had died; and they made a family map showing the connections between family members and showing the effect of time and distance on their relationships. They also made a diagram showing the community structure of the family's new environment and contrasted it with the community they came from.

Eventually, the family entered treatment with another agency that offered a program specific to the boy's condition. We all agreed that this was an appropriate time to end counselling at the YWCA.

A few days ago, the boy's mother called to tell me that another family member had died, and when the boy went to a grief group to help him deal with the new loss, the group leader told her that he was experiencing "the most normal grief process" that the leader had ever seen. The mother attributes this to the counselling the boy was given at YWCA a year ago, and expressed deep gratitude for the services they received.

- YWCA Counsellor

