

Session 10 – Violence In The Community

Activity 1 – Hash'im's Sister

Sophia tells the story of what happened to her family when her older brother was killed. The impact of this loss on her and her family was devastating. Writing can be a way to heal after a terrible loss.

Read Sophia's story and discuss the questions listed below as a class.

By Sophia Mostella, 16

Hash'im died on a Monday four years ago. He had just turned 20 a week before and he was taking the bus home from the DMV where he'd been applying for his driver's license. A 16-year-old boy and four of his friends approached Hash'im on the bus and told him to give up his silver chain and pager. My brother refused, and the boy shot him in the face.

I was 11 at the time. I was watching TV at home when the phone rang and my mom picked up. After she hung up, she and my dad got in the car and said they were going somewhere. Two hours later, they came home. My dad was holding my mom. She looked sick. I thought it was something with my mom's health.

My dad called my brother Jason from his room and he made us sit down at the table.

"What's going on?" I kept asking. I started to worry because nobody answered.

"Where's Elon?" I asked. Elon is my second oldest brother. "Where's Hash'im?"

My dad looked sick. His face was red and he was stuttering.

"Just tell them, Louis," my mom said.

"Hash'im was ... uh ... on the bus ... and ... He was shot and he's uh ... dead."

Elon came home from a doctor's appointment at 6 p.m. He didn't know yet. When my mom told him, he yelled at her, "You're lying!" He broke down in a flood of tears and it was the saddest thing to see my mom holding him, crying for the first time since Hash'im died. In my family we usually don't express emotions, especially sadness. It was one of the most tender moments ever shared in my family, and one of the most heartbreaking.

Hash'im's death affected me I guess, but I'm still not sure exactly how. I tried to keep my feelings to myself and not think about it. I didn't cry like people say you should, but I'm not discouraging it either. I just don't think crying helps me personally. It just makes me feel worse. Writing this article has helped me be a little bit more open with my feelings. I also thought this could help all the people who lose someone every day, especially in this city.

He used to take care of me

What was Hash'im like? He was kind of quiet. I wasn't as close to him as I was to Elon. He was my half-brother and a lot older, so he would take care of us all summer when my mom went to work. He'd feed us and watch us when we went out to play. He didn't really get a chance to be a kid himself because he had to take care of us, and he did a great job of it too.

As quiet as he was, you knew that there was always something that disturbed him. He never talked about it, but maybe it had something to do with his father dying in a violent way when he was very young. He never got a chance to really get to know the man who looked so much like him. My mom said they were a lot alike in other ways.

He wasn't perfect, and he didn't always do the right thing. But he was my big brother, my protector and he didn't deserve to die. I most regret not being able to tell him how much he meant to me and how much I always loved him and looked up to him.

When Hash'im was 16, he started to rebel and get into trouble with his friends. He was in and out of juvenile hall, and later jail. He had just gotten out of jail a month before he was killed. He was trying to get his life together, going to job interviews and getting his driver's license. He never made promises before that he would do better, but he started saying it to my mom and really trying. He didn't go out with his old friends, didn't drink, and he stopped smoking. He would stay in the house all day when he wasn't looking for a job.

We're now closer as a family

It was really hectic after Hash'im died. My mom couldn't get out of bed. She was in the house all day and she wouldn't eat. She was up walking all night. I couldn't sleep either for about a month. I could hear her crying some nights. Everybody kept bringing food over. I can't understand why they bring food when somebody dies, because you can't eat. I'd try to make my mom eat some soup.

Every night we'd be in a circle and pray together—me, my dad, my older brothers, my mom and cousin. One night my dad was praying and I saw drops of water falling. I thought, "What was that?" It was my father crying, even though Hash'im wasn't his son. It was the first time I saw him cry.

Hash'im's death brought us closer as a family. We never hugged before, but now we do sometimes. My dad started saying, "I love you" (he says it once a year). Also, every night when my dad goes to work he kisses my mom on the cheek. Ewww, I thought at first but now I kind of understand because you never know if you may not see someone you love again.

Hash'im's death made me a little bit more open and nice to people. My mom's attitude is that if we have something, even it's not a lot, we have to share it with somebody who doesn't. They used to have to make me share, but now I kind of like giving to people.

I'm also a lot more forgiving. I'm forgiving even to the guy who did it. I just can't believe that anyone can just shoot a person and not know what the consequences will be—if you shoot someone in the face, they die! And you go to jail. Even if he didn't care, that shows you have to be crazy. I can't help but assume the guy had some problems. I am in no way justifying what he did or making excuses for him or his actions. I can't imagine wanting to hurt anyone just for a stupid chain and a pager. Was that worth my brother's life?

Discuss the article by addressing these questions:

1. Do you think it's harder for young people to deal with grief and loss than others?
2. Do you think that young people have to deal with more grief and loss today? Has that hardened young people to feeling when they suffer the death of a loved one or other losses?
3. What other kinds of losses can cause you to grieve? Can a divorce, or the end of a friendship, or moving away from a familiar home make you feel a loss as deeply as a death? How, if at all, would you change your coping strategies for these different kinds of losses?
4. What kind of losses can cause not just individuals, but groups and communities to grieve? How can we help communities heal from wounds? How do these strategies differ from those for individuals?

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Activity 2 – The Obituary

When reading the Obituary section of the newspaper, it is startling to come across an age lower than 20. Teenagers don't belong on an obituary page. The truth is that violence in our community is taking more and more young people. When reading a young person's obituary you are struck by how many lives will change because of this loss.

Have you ever thought of what information is put in an obituary? An obituary includes a person's name, age, day and date of death and date of birth. It includes the place of death and who was with the person when they died. It tells of who preceded the person in death. It also can include career information and a person's school history. Then the survivors are listed. Everyone from your immediate family and siblings to your great aunts and uncles are listed.

Script your own obituary below. Use the back of the form if necessary.

What choices and or changes will you have to make in order to accomplish the goals in your obituary?

What other thoughts occurred to you while writing your own obituary?

What could prevent you from accomplishing your goals?

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Activity 3 – How To Deal With Grief

After a violent tragedy life then becomes about the survivors. Life becomes about those who are left behind. These are the lives that are impacted and must cope with the loss in some way, shape or form.

Get in groups of 3 or 4 and discuss the increase in teen death due to violence. Consider the ways to deal with grief listed below. Do you agree with the advice given? Can you add some healthy strategies to this list? Try to add at least 3 more strategies to the list. Be prepared to share your group's strategies with the rest of the class.

How to deal with grief

- Take care of your health: Grieving can take a lot out of you. Your body needs enough rest, exercise and food more than ever.
- Postpone major decisions: Wait a while until you're thinking more clearly before you decide on major decisions.
- Be patient with yourself: Grief can last longer than people realize.
- Be patient with others: They mean well, but not knowing what to say, they may say the wrong thing sometimes.
- Get back into your normal routine: It helps you to take your mind off of grief and keeps you from getting stuck in a deep depression.
- Don't get overly stressed: There are a lot of demands when somebody dies, such as funeral arrangements and taking care of other grieving family members. Try to make time for yourself.
- Don't be afraid to let go of the grief: Letting go means you can enjoy your life again and remember your loved one instead of thinking of their death.

1.

2.

3.