Activity: The Hug Jar

- **Date**: April 30, 2021  
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- **Topic**: Childhood Grief  
- **Type**: Activity

**Objective:** The hug jar allows the youngest children to express their needs even if they don’t know how to articulate them.

**Rationale:** Infants and toddlers need to be reassured by physical touch. One of the biggest developmental needs during their grief is the need for secure attachment and consistent care.

**Materials needed:** A jar and enough small items to fill the jar that symbolize the hugs. They could be made from paper hearts, pom poms, felt hearts, or anything else small and reusable.

**Instructions:**

1. Start the intervention by talking about feelings and emotions. “When you feel sad or scared or hurt, does it make you feel better to get hugs or to be held?”
2. Next, explain death and how it can make people very sad, and sometimes it’s hard to figure out how you feel. But, things like hugs from your loved ones can make you feel better.
3. Explain the plan to make a hug jar to use whenever you feel like you need a hug.
4. The child can color the paper hearts or choose what colors to go into the jar.
5. Fill the jar with the “hugs”
6. Explain how to use the hug jar:
   1. Whenever they have difficult feelings, or just need some extra love, they can take a heart or pom pom from the jar and give it to someone safe. The heart (or hug symbol) will let the care-giver know how to help.

7. The hearts can also help the child identify emotions when they use the hug jar.

(adapted from “The Hug Jar,” 2013)

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