

Caring for Grieving Children and Youth

Kids Path

Reminders for Adults Who Care For Grieving Children and Youth

- The wide range of feelings children may show are normal expressions of grief and are usually not signs of disturbed behavior.
- Sometimes children react by being mad, when indeed, they are really sad.
- Children may lash out at someone they love because of feelings of insecurity and confusion. For example, some children are angry with a parent because they have let them down by not keeping them safe - for not preventing the death that is causing so much pain.
- Children may grieve in spurts, crying one moment, laughing the next. Children have no way of knowing what is appropriate behavior.
- Grief is a very complex process for everyone. It is the hardest work any of us ever do.
- Acknowledge the grief of children.
- Let children know that talking about death or even acting out the death is okay.
- Assure a child that his or her grief is not forgotten or overlooked. The grief of a child is no less important or significant than that of an adult.
- Do not delay in talking about what happened. Encourage children to talk about the death immediately.
- They may need to go over their feelings or certain events many times. It is the telling and retelling of the stories of loss that causes healing to begin.
- Experts on early childhood development indicate that it takes at least six months for a normal routine to resume after the death of someone significant in a child's life. Frequently the worst time for survivors is about six months after the death and the first year is always the hardest for a family. In addition, the loss as a family is usually the hardest for a year - the anniversary of all the special days for which the loved one is no longer present.
- Show your love and support to children after a loss. They need to be assured that even when adults are sad, they still love and care about their children.
- It may be helpful for the family to grieve openly together. Children will need to understand that tears are okay. Assure them that it is healthy for adults to cry and that a child's expression of sadness does not make an adult's sorrow worse.
- The best way for adults to deal with children is with honesty and by using simple, easily understood answers.

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- Make a special effort to REALLY LISTEN to what children are saying or trying to say. Help them express doubts, thoughts or questions.
- Adults also need to notice what children are not expressing, as silence may also indicate what a child may be thinking or feeling. Look for non-threatening ways to explore feelings.
- It is OK to tell children, “I don’t have an answer; there is no explanation,” or “No, it isn’t fair this happened,” or “I worry about that too.”
- Find helpful books or other informational materials to explain death and/or memorial and funeral services to children. Books may be checked out at the Kids Path library. Also a bibliography of recommended book titles is available on the Kids Path section of the Hospice and Palliative Care of Greensboro’s Website - www.hospicegso.org.
- Allow children to be included in memorial services. It is important to explain beforehand what will occur at a visitation or a funeral.
- Encourage children to talk to each other about the loss, as grieving children can be a great source of help and comfort to each other.
- Allow children to express memories, recollections and stories.
- Families may also seek ways to remember their loved one on special occasions such as making a gift to a charity in honor of the person’s birthday or by lighting a special candle at Thanksgiving.
- Try, as much as possible, to maintain a child’s normal routine. Children need the security of knowing that their world remains intact, even though a significant loss has occurred.
- Remember that adults are role models for grieving children.
- ***The four most important concepts adults should remember when helping children understand about and cope with death are:***

**BE TRUTHFUL - BE LOVING
BE ACCEPTING - BE CONSISTENT**



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