



How Parents Can Help Children/Teens to Cope With Loss and Grief

What Is Grief

Grief is the term used for the many feelings and behaviors we experience when we are faced with loss. The loss may be from the death of a significant other, relocation, or divorce. Grief is a normal reaction to loss and change. Children **do** experience grief as they have feelings and are aware of losses. However, children grieve differently based upon age and personality.

What Are Some of the Feelings Children May Have

Children may have one or more of these feelings: abandonment or the feeling of being left alone, anxiety, confusion, anger, guilt, fear, body distress, rejection, sadness, and panic. It is important to help children identify, label, and talk about these different feelings.

What Is the Effect of Age on Children Who Are Grieving

Children's development and age will have an impact on how they think about death and the loss.

Age	Reaction
Infants and young children (0 - 2 years)	React the way they see their caretakers react. They may resist change and separation from caretakers.
Preschool aged children (3 - 5 years)	Do not accept death as permanent. They will often ask when the deceased person will return. They may react primarily to separation.
Young school-aged children (5 - 9 years)	Accept that death is permanent, but not universal. Questions about why their loved one had to die and not someone else are common.
Older school-aged children (9 -12 years)	See death as permanent and universal. They take death personally and understand they also will die someday. They are interested in concrete details about the death, such as the funeral and burial.
Older children (12 years and older)	Have started to reach an adult understanding of death. They spend a significant amount of time thinking about death and trying to understand what happens after death. They have very intense emotions during this time.

As children go through the different developmental stages, they re-grieve the loss and try to understand their loss in new ways. This can be confusing and difficult for adults.

What Are Some of the Behaviors You May See in Your Child Who Is Grieving

Children will normally act out some of their feelings. In a supportive way, let children know what behavior you see that has changed. Continue to expect that the child will function. It is important to set limits on destructive behavior and to respond to a less mature or regressive behavior. As the child heals, the regressive behavior should disappear.

Temper outbursts, panic attacks, regression or less mature behavior, disinterest in usual activities, increased dependency on adults, stomachaches and headaches, silence, model child behaviors or trying to be "the perfect child," withdrawal, adult role behaviors or taking on adult responsibilities, over-activity.

What Is the Difference Between Grief and Mourning

Grief can be thought of as the internal experience about a loss. Mourning and bereavement are words that people use about the outward signs of grief. The goal of dealing with children who are grieving is to help them to talk about how they feel.

What Is the Difference Between Grief and Depression

The symptoms of depression and grief are similar. If you have any concerns about how your child is adjusting to the loss or whether a child has slipped into depression... TALK TO SOMEONE! People that can help you are nurses, doctors, nurse practitioners, school counselors, and psychologists.

How do Children Grieve Differently than Adults

Adults often feel sad over an extended period of time, whereas children's grief tends to come and go. Children's expression of grief may flare up and then be over relatively quickly as they move on to the next activity. This "volcano"-like mourning, though different from that experienced by adults and possibly uncomfortable for adults, is a normal grief pattern for children.