

Helping Children Cope Loss, Death, and Grief Tips for Parents



Expressions of Grief

- *Emotional shock*
- *Regressive (immature) behaviors*
- *Explosive emotions and acting out behavior*
- *Asking the same questions over and over*

Helping Children Cope

- *Allow children to be the teachers about their grief experiences:*
Give children the opportunity to tell their story and be a good listener.
- *Don't assume that every child in a certain age group understands death in the same way or with the same feelings:* All children are different and their view of the world is unique and shaped by different experiences.

- ***Grieving is a process, not an event:*** Allow adequate time for each child to grieve in the manner that works for that child.
- ***Don't lie or tell half-truths to children about the tragic event***
- ***Help all children, regardless of age, to understand loss and death***
- ***Encourage children to ask questions about loss and death***
- ***Don't assume that children always grieve in an orderly or predictable way***
- ***Let children know that you really want to understand what they are feeling or what they need.***
- ***Children will need long-lasting support.***
- ***Keep in mind that grief work is complicated.***
- ***Be aware of your own need to grieve.***

Development Phases in Understanding Death

- ***Infants and Toddlers:*** The youngest children may perceive that adults are sad, but have no real understanding of the meaning or significance of death.
- ***Preschoolers:*** Young children may deny death as a formal event and may see death as reversible. They may interpret death as a separation, not a permanent condition.
- ***Early Elementary School:*** Children at this age (approximately 5-9) start to comprehend the finality of death. They begin to understand that certain circumstances may result in death. At the age, death is perceived as something that happens to others, not to oneself or one's family.

- ***Middle School:*** Children at this level have the cognitive understanding to comprehend death as a final event that results in the cessation of all bodily functions. They may experience a variety of feelings and emotions.
- ***High School:*** They may seek out friends and family for comfort or they may withdraw to deal with their grief. Teens (as well as younger children) with a history of depression, suicidal behavior and chemical dependency are at particular risk for prolonged and serious grief reactions and may need more careful attention from home and school during these difficult times.

Resources to help you identify symptoms for severe stress and grief reactions are available at the National Association of School Psychologist's website – www.nasponline.org

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