
Helping Children Cope With Loss...

The death of a loved one is always difficult. For children, the loss of a sibling, parent, grandparent, or friend can affect their sense of security, identity, and it can de-center them. The family and the community can help children who are grieving. Compassionate support will enable children to adapt and establish some normalcy in their lives at home and at school. Parents, teachers, medical professionals, and community leaders all play an important role.

Quick Tips for Adults

1. Children need comfort and frequent reassurance that they're safe, loved, and secure.
2. Be honest, simple, and direct when talking to them about death.
3. Encourage them to express their feelings through talking, drawing, and playing.
4. Try to maintain a normal routine.
5. Find a well-facilitated children's support groups.

How to Help Children:

- Allow them to participate in funerals and memorial services. Children at all ages should be offered the opportunity to say goodbye.
- Encourage questions. Do not discourage them from talking about their pain or feeling sad.
- Be patient and very gentle with them. Children may appear to be "misbehaving" but are actually manifesting grief symptoms. Try not to yell or isolate them even months after the death.
- Avoid telling them that God took their loved one. Avoid associating death with sleep or something 'lost.' Remember children are very literal.



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*Children are
forgotten grievers...*

Helping Grieving Children



602-279-MISS (6477)
www.missfoundation.org
www.SelahCarefarm.com

Because even in death, they still matter...

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How Children Respond To Death...

Here are some common ways in which children may respond to a death:

- Sadness
- Denial, shock, and confusion
- Anger, irritability, and agitation
- More quick tempered
- Impaired sleep or oversleeping
- Nightmares or fear of sleep
- Loss or increase of appetite
- Fear of being alone
- Somatic/physical complaints such as stomach aches and headaches
- Inability to concentrate or focus
- Guilt or shame over failure to prevent the loss
- Loss of interest in daily activities
- Regressive behavior—acting much younger or reverting to earlier behaviors
- Withdrawal from friends
- Decline in school performance
- Talking frequently and asking repeated questions about the death, or making repeated statements of wanting to join the deceased.
- Intense, seemingly out of control, emotional reactions and expressions

How To Help a Grieving Child:

- Children are often physical in their grief process. Interact with them when playing and support their special 'language' of grief expression. Art, music, dance, and writing may be particularly helpful.

- Young children are concrete thinkers. Avoid expressions such as “passed on,” “at rest,” or “we lost” when talking about the person who died. Be direct and honest. Offer only what they can absorb and keep it simple.
- Children can be fearful about death and feel insecurity about their future. Give them a chance to discuss those fears and validate their feelings. Offer the support of another adult they trust as children may hesitate talking to their parents about their grief feelings.
- Be patient with the child. Children are not able to express overwhelming sadness into words, so try to interpret perceived behavior problems as manifestations of grief. Be more flexible with the child, and we suggest positive reinforcement rather than harsh discipline. Yelling, hitting, or isolating a grieving child can exacerbate the child’s symptoms, adding trauma to trauma.
- Keep your routines when possible. Try not to make any major decisions for 18 months. Children need to be assured that they have security, stability, and love.
- Adults can provide a good grief “model” for the grieving child. Share an ‘open emotion’ policy and allow yourself, and your child, to cry when needed. Your openness will validate their feelings.
- Some children are intermittent grievers. Just because they don’t cry everyday doesn’t mean they aren’t hurting. Some children cry for one minute and jump right back into normal play.
- Expect their grief to revisit during their childhood and through adolescence. Special days often awaken old grief. Make yourself available for many years to come.
- Shower them with affection and attention. If you are feeling too overwhelmed with your own grief, call a friend, a support group, your church, or someone else who can help!

Because a sudden and unexpected death is so hard on families, we recommend surrounding the family with compassionate others, from within culturally appropriate systems (church, school, family, friends). Keep the lines of communication open and if you need an assessment, find a highly skilled counselor who can help you and your child. Our Compassionate Bereavement Care™ providers are trained to help:
www.Certificate.MISSFoundation.org

MISS FOUNDATION

After the death of a child family member, a home becomes a house of pain.

The MISS Foundation is a 501c3 organization that CARES for families and communities before, during and after the death of a child.

We provide family packets, support groups, HOPE Mentors, online support forums, one-on-one counseling, retreats, conferences, research, advocacy, the Selah Carefarm, and opportunities for volunteerism that allow people affected by child death a place to begin to feel, and remember, and to be.

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