

Helping Children Cope With Loss

(Adapted from American School Counselor Association website)

- Try to keep routines as normal as possible; children gain security from the predictability of routine
- Limit exposure to television and the news
- Be honest with children sharing with them as much as they are developmentally able to handle
- Listen to children's fears and concerns
- Reassure children that the world is a good place to be
- Parents and adults need to first deal with and assess their own responses to crisis and stress
- Rebuild and reaffirm attachments and relationships

Developmental Guidelines for Dealing with Children and Grief

Infancy (Ages 0-3)

When a member of the family dies, an infant may receive less physical/loving care as a result of the caregiver's grieving. The infant may react to the situation in a physical manner with increases of crying and not being able to be easily soothed, developing slight skin rashes or cling to caregivers. Generally, these behaviors are temporary and will diminish as caregivers are again able to focus normal attention to the infant.

Grieving caregivers can be advised to:

- Spend some time each day in a nurturing, soothing manner with the child
- Keep the child's routine as consistent as possible
- Let other nurturing family members help with caregiving
- Allow others to help with household tasks

Pre-school: (Ages 2 and one half to 5 years)

Pre-schoolers do not understand that death is permanent. They view it as reversible and temporary. Death may be confused with sleeping or the person merely being absent, with the belief the person will return.

Pre-schoolers may exhibit these possible behaviors upon the death of a parent, peer, or other loved one:

- May show little concern at times
- Bedwetting, thumb sucking, baby talk, fear of the dark
- Fear of separating from significant others
- May need to frequently talk about death. These repetitions make it real for the child and he/she may say things such as, "Ben can't use his dump truck anymore because he is dead."

Adults can do the following to help a preschool child cope with death:

- Tell them what to expect regarding the funeral, parents/family grieving

- Explain to them in simple language how things might look and what might happen
- Encourage all adults to use terms “dead/death” and not phrases of “passed away”, “sleeping”, “resting” or “taken from us” as children this age are very literal and may not understand these phrases
- Reassure the child regarding routines, activities, and schedules
- Keep explanations short, simple and truthful, but know that these explanations may need to be frequently repeated

School Age Children

Ages 5-9: Sees death as possible for others, but not for them.

Ages 9-11: Will begin to see death for all, including self. Death is becoming more real, final, and inevitable. Will also show interest in biological aspects of death and will want to know details of the event.

Ages 12-19: Adolescents may have encountered several situations of loss in addition to death. These losses may include separation from friends, separation and/or divorce of parents, etc. Often deaths of friends, relations and acquaintances will trigger feelings of unresolved grief. Adolescents frequently respond very intensely. Developmentally, the adolescent is searching for explanations regarding all aspects of life which includes death. May have many “why” questions that often cannot be answered adequately by adults.

School age children may show these behaviors:

- Crying/sobbing
- Anxiety
- Headaches
- Abdominal/stomach pain
- Hostile reaction toward deceased
- Guilt
- Failure to complete homework
- Poor grades
- Lack of attention/concentration
- Loss of manual skills
- Fear of losing others close to them

Adults can help by:

- Providing information for the questions asked
- Physically and verbally comforting students
- Admitting that adults don’t always know why certain events occur

"Home | American School Counselor Association (ASCA)." *Home | American School Counselor Association (ASCA)*. N.p., n.d. Web. 28 May 2015.