

Children & Grief

Normal Grief Reactions in Children

- Openly angry or irritable.
- Excessive energy.
- Temporarily impacted self-esteem
- Age regression
- Temporarily affected sleeping and eating patterns. • Decreased abilities to concentrate.
- Increased crying. • Increased clinging.
- Physical complaints, including head-aches, stomach-aches, fatigue, rashes, lowered immune system.
- Increased need for comfort and physical contact from loved ones.

Signs of Complicated Grief

- Total denial of the trauma.
- Persistent panic or fear.
- Prolonged physical complaints.
- Chronic feelings of apathy.
- Dramatic changes in eating and sleeping patterns.
- Prolonged hostility.
- Chronic acting out.

Normal Grief Reactions for Teens

- Limited testing.
- Rebellion. • Impulsiveness.
- Lack of common sense.
- Increased moodiness.
- Increased dependence on peers.

Signs of Complicated Grief

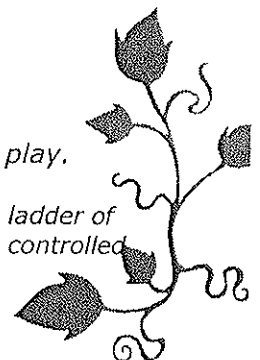
- Suicidal thoughts and/or tendencies.
- Prolonged anger or apathy.
- Isolation from those close to them.
- Drug or alcohol abuse.
- Dramatic personality changes.
- Prolonged eating and sleeping disturbances.
- Chronic depression that prevents the teen from participating in day-to-day activities.

This list is not inclusive or exhaustive. It is to be used only as a guide to help distinguish between normal reactions and signs of distress. Please seek immediate assistance if you are unsure and/or concerned about your child/teen.

What Helps:

- ⓐ Seek out support.
- ⓐ Encourage questions.
- ⓐ Be honest with your answers according to the the child's age and developmental level.
- ⓐ Reassure them that the death was not their fault.
- ⓐ Help them identify their feelings.
- ⓐ Offer clear limits and guidelines.
- ⓐ Encourage children to express their emotions.
- ⓐ Offer alternatives for safe expression. e.g., hitting a pillow, jumping up and down (a particular favorite is to paint eggs the colour of your feeling, go to the woods and throw!
- ⓐ Share your own feelings with them.
- ⓐ Establish routines wherever possible.
- ⓐ Create a daytimer (routine) for children to help them know what is coming next.
- ⓐ Offer plenty of physical comfort.
- ⓐ Recognize and accept temporary regression as part of the healing process.
- ⓐ Talk about the way things were and how they are different now.
- ⓐ Allow children to participate.
- ⓐ Be patient with yourself and it will spill over to your children encourage children to play.

To force ourselves or our children into a linear grieving "process," evaluating where we are on the ladder of grief, is a vain attempt to control and manipulate a "journey of the heart." This journey cannot be controlled it can only be lived through by each of us in our own time and in our own way.



Helpful Resources:

Books for Children

Aarvy Aardvark Finds Hope,

D.Ferguson, 1988, Burnsville, NC, Mt. Rainbow Publications.

- An animal story that presents pain, sadness and hope after death.
(Ages 5 to 8)

Dinosaurs Die,

L. Krasny Brown & M. Brown, 1996, Boston, MA, Little, Brown & Company Limited

- A simple, friendly guide to understanding death, reactions children may have and ways to remember your special person.
(Ages 3 to 10)

Rachel and the Upside Down Heart,

E. Douglas, 1990, Los Angeles, CA, Price Stern Sloan.

- A true story of a 4 year old girl and the effects of her fathers death.
(Ages 5 to 9)

I Heard your Mommy/Daddy Died,

Mark Scrivanu, 1994, Omaha, NE, Centering Corporation.

- A simple and helpful tool for family and caregivers to help normalize the feelings after the death of a parent.
(Ages 2 to 6)

Love You Forever,

Robert Munch, 1986, Willowdale, Canada, A Firefly Book

- A book for children and adults as a little boy goes through the stages of becoming a man.
(All Ages)

I Wish I Could Hold Your Hand,

Dr. Pat Palmer, 1994, San Luis Obispo, CA, Impact Publishers

- A book to help children identify their feelings and learn to express them.
(Ages 3 to 8)

I Miss You

P. Thomas, 2001, Barron's Educational Series Inc., New York

- Explains different aspects of death, suggestions on how a child can participate.
(Ages 2 to 6)

The Tenth Good Thing about Barney,

Judith Viorst, New York, NY, Alladin Books.

- As he tries to overcome his grief, a boy thinks of all the things he loved about his cat.
(Ages 3 to 8)

Books for Adults Who Want to Help Children

The Grieving Child,

Helen Fitzgerald, 1992 New York, N.Y. Simon and Schuster.
A guide for parents to help children work with their grief

150 Facts About Grieving Children,

Erin Linn, 1990, Incline Village, NV. The Publisher's Mark.
150 paragraphs that illustrates important information for parents and caregivers on grieving children.

