

Mental Health Minutes

November, 2021

When a loved one dies



Helping kids deal with death of loved ones

Kids grieve differently: A child may cry one minute and play the next. Changeable moods! Children cope differently than adults. It's also normal to feel depressed, guilty, anxious or angry at the person who has died.

Encourage grieving children to express their feelings: Helpful outlets for children include drawing pictures, scrapbooks, looking at pictures and telling stories. Kids need to express whatever emotions they are feeling.

Be age appropriate: It is hard to know how children will react to death and how they will grasp the concept. Don't volunteer too much information, it could be overwhelming.

Stick to routines: Children find comfort in routines. It is important to grieve the death of a loved one, it is important to keep your child's life as normal as possible.

Possible expressions of grief

Kids ages 4-7: Nightmares, regression to earlier behaviors, changes in sleeping and eating, violent play. They may see death as reversible.

Kids ages 7-13: Regression, school problems, withdrawal from friends, acting out, changes in eating/sleeping, thoughts about their own death. They may have a desire for detail. They may be fearful of sickness and injury because they don't understand how people die.

Kids ages 13-18: Extreme sadness, denial, regression, risk-taking, depression, anger, acting out and even possible suicidal thoughts.

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT HOW WELL A CHILD DOES AFTER A DEATH IS LINKED TO HOW THE ADULTS IN HIS LIFE ARE DOING.

Grief Cycle

Denial: Confusion, Shock, Fear, Avoidance

Anger: Frustration, Irritation, Anxiety

Bargaining: Struggling to find meaning, Reaching out to others, Telling one's story

Depression: Overwhelmed, Helplessness, Hostility, Flight

Acceptance: Exploring options, Moving on, New plan in place

