



Child Grief

← GRIEF SUPPORT

Children & Grief

Children experience the same range of emotions as adults, but because they are still developing cognitively and emotionally, they do not grieve in the same way. Children tend to grieve intermittently, or in small spurts, for a longer period of time. Children need assurance and guidance from parents and caregivers, as well as assistance in identifying their complex feelings. For children, grief issues are likely to resurface throughout their growth, and children are apt to continue to experience their grief at many different ages. Most

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continue to process their grief at many different ages. Mood changes or feelings of grief, even several years out from the

event, are a common part of adapting to life without someone and to the changes that come with that person's death. As children develop mentally and emotionally, they may need further education, support, and patience from parents and caregivers to assist children as they adjust to the changes.

Preschool Age

3-5 Years Old

When young children are experiencing grief, they express it in the moment or in their behaviors. It is important for parents and caregivers to understand how their young child experiences grief, so they can better support them through the process. For young children, their awareness of death is defined by their developmental abilities and stages. Due to their limited vocabulary and cognitive development, it can be difficult for children to express their grief verbally. They may not be able to understand the irreversibility of death. Preschool age children are often focused on themselves and what they want and need. Accordingly, they may be worried about who will take care of them, or be worried that they somehow were responsible for the death. Support of loving parents or caregivers is crucial for young children, and they



need to be reassured that they are safe and cared for.

Tips for Parents of Preschool Age Children

- **Answer children's questions truthfully** about their loved one's death in words that they understand. Even though the child may not fully comprehend that death is permanent, it is still important to provide honest answers to their questions. Avoid using euphemisms, which may confuse the child. Children may have many questions that deal with the tangible aspects of death, such as where the person is. Answer as best you can in accordance with your religious or spiritual belief system. Children may ask the same question many times, and it is important to answer the questions consistently.
- **Be reassuring to the child.** Following a loss, children may want reassurance that they are safe, loved, and have trusted adults to care for them. Special care should be taken to ensure that the child feels that they are protected, and specifically address any unique fears that they have.
- **Understand that preschool age children have very different reactions** than adults due to their developmental stage. Young children may not cry during the funeral because they do not yet understand the finality of death. Children may think that they



caused the death in some way, and need to be reassured that they were not responsible for the death.

Some children may display regressive behavior. Maintaining a normal routine may help limit these negative behaviors.

- **Engage with the child in expressive activities surrounding the loss.** However, keep in mind that children do not always have the words to convey what they are feeling inside. It may be helpful to engage in an activity, such as art or play, to help the child express their emotions and process their feelings in a way that is accessible to them.
- **Maintain routines and other normal activities** for the child as best as possible under the circumstances. Grief often stops activities for adults, but children may still need to be active and play. This is normal developmentally. Also, maintaining family and social rituals, even in an altered way due to the loss, may be reassuring to the child.

Elementary School Age

6–10 Years Old



Children ages six through twelve understand the finality of death and are more capable of working through their grief. They understand that the loss of an important person will have a long-term impact.

Even though elementary school age children are better able to verbalize their feelings, they still may express themselves through behaviors. Children may have a combination of reactions, including thinking about that person, feelings of sadness or anger, and physical reactions such as tiredness or an upset stomach. Children may have anger, not because the person has died, but anger that no one listens or talks to them, or includes them in activities. It is important for parents and caregivers to talk to their children and engage with them, especially if they are exhibiting behaviors.

Tips for Parents of Elementary School Age Children

- **Answer children's questions truthfully** about their loved one's death. Because they understand the permanency of death, elementary school age children may have many detailed questions about the death. Answer as best you can, trying to be as reassuring is possible. If the death occurred in a way that is difficult, you may want to gradually introduce the topic in an age-appropriate way.



- **Be receptive** if children would like to discuss their loved one or their feelings surrounding their grief. Reassure children that it is ok to be sad, and provide a safe space for them to discuss their feelings and emotions. Recognize that children may exhibit feelings through behaviors instead of words, and do not assume that you know the reason why. Try to address any out-of-the ordinary behaviors by asking the child and exploring their underlying feelings with compassion and understanding.
- **Maintain routines and other normal activities** for the child as best as possible under the circumstances. Children may have many concerns about what the loss means for their future. Address how some family rituals may look different because of the death. Maintaining everyday routines of work and school, even in an altered way due to the loss, may be reassuring to the child.
- **Involve the child** in funerary rituals in an appropriate way, if possible. Also, create ways for children to memorialize their loved one, or take part in family remembrance activities.
- **Find community.** Children may be sensitive to the fact that they are now “different” because their loved one has died. They may benefit from support groups or



nas died. They may benefit from support groups or

camp opportunities to be with other children who have been through similar experiences.

Resources

BOOKS FOR KIDS

The Invisible String

By Patrice Karst, 2015
For ages 4-8

The Scar

By Charlotte Moundlic,
2011
For ages 5-9

The Memory Box

By Joanna Rowland, 2017
For ages 4-8

I Miss You

A First Look at Death
By Pat Thomas, 2001
For ages 4-8

The Goodbye Book

A Story for Hippo

Someone I Loved

The Rough Patch

By Todd Parr, 2015
For ages 5-6

A Book About Loss
By Simon Puttock, 2001

Died
Christine Harder Tangvald,
2018

For ages 4-8

By Brian Lies, 2018
For ages 4-8

What's Heaven
By Maria Schriver, 2007
For ages 2-6

*The Fall of Freddie
the Leaf*
by Leo Buscaglia, 1982
For ages 4-8

One Wave at a Time
by Holly Thompson, 2018
For ages 5-7

Children Also Grieve
by Linda Goldman, 2006
For ages 4-7

BOOKS FOR PARENTS

Finding the Words
*How to Talk with Children
and Teens about Death,
Suicide, Homicide,
Cremation, and other End-
of-Life Matters*

By Alan Wolfelt, 2013

Life and Loss
*A Guide to Help Grieving
Children*

By Linda Goldman, 1994

*A Parent's Guide to
Raising Grieving
Children*
*Rebuilding Your Family after
the Death of a Loved One*

By Phyllis R. Silverman, 2009

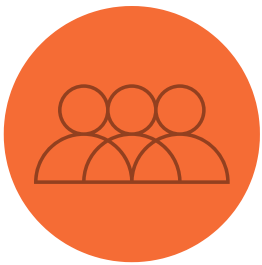
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

National Alliance for

Dougy Center



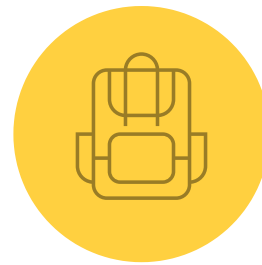
Related Programs



Support Groups



Professional Counseling



Camps



School Programs

Related Events





Camp Erin Family Camp

November 13, 2022



Camp Memory

June 12-15, 2023



Camp Cornerstone

July 10-14, 2023

CLEVELAND

5905 Brecksville Road
Independence, Ohio
44131
(216) 524-4673

COLUMBUS

Our Services

Support Groups
Professional Counseling
Camps
School Programs
Educational Series

Specialized Care

Spouse Loss
Child Loss
Pregnancy & Infant Loss
Military Loss
Suicide Loss

Training

Events

News



COLUMBUS

1550 Old Henderson
Road
Suite E-262

Columbus, Ohio
43220
(614) 824-4285

LIMA

2963 Blue Jacket Court
Lima, Ohio 45806
(419) 581-9138

TELEHEALTH

Please call to schedule
an online appointment.

Educational Series

Community Response

Spiritual Care

Grief Support

Child Grief

Teen Grief

Young Adult Grief

Adult Grief

Senior Grief

Supporting a Griever

Suicide Loss

Overdose Loss

Murder Loss

Complicated Loss

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Columbus Location

Lima Location

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