



Children and Adolescent Grief Information For Parents and Guardians

Grief is a process of feelings and reactions to any significant loss. We grieve because we have loved or care for someone. When we are relationship with others we open ourselves to the pain of losing them. That's what makes us fully human.

Children and Adolescents differ in how they react to grief depending on:

- *Age, psychological and emotional maturity*
- *Coping abilities and previous experience with death*
- *Parental reactions and willingness to discuss death*
- *Cultural background*

Helpful Strategies	Helpful Strategies
<i>Acknowledging their pain by saying "Its ok to feel upset and helpless now"</i>	<i>Encourage the young person to talk about feelings.</i>
<i>Showing Empathy "You must be finding it really hard..."</i>	<i>Be aware of your own anxieties and fears</i>
<i>Make a memory box of photos and pictures of the loved person. Praying for or writing a letter to the person</i>	<i>Give reassurances to the young person so they feel safe but also give factual information that their age development can cope with.</i>
<i>Let the child or adolescent know that whatever they are feeling is normal</i>	<i>Engage the young person in rituals allowing them some involvement in funeral planning etc.</i>
<i>Understand that sometimes younger children act out or misbehave when they have difficulty coping with emotions</i>	<i>Gently talk about this with the child and maintain some structure for discipline.</i>
<i>Encouraging them to speak with a counsellor or favourite teacher if needed</i>	<i>Not forcing a discussion if child or adolescent doesn't want to discuss it</i>

Infant to Primary Age Children - Grief Reactions and Responses

Children will respond differently and any change in behaviour may indicate difficulty in responding to a traumatic event. The following are examples of behaviours that some children display.

- *Acting out or being naughty. Or the child may look sad and become withdrawn*
- *Differences in sleeping patterns or eating patterns*
- *Child may be clingy and not want to be alone.*
- *May have nightmares or regress by acting younger eg thumb sucking, wetting the bed, baby talk*

Further information:

National Association for Loss and Grief NSW

(02) 9489 6644

Websites

www.grief.net Information and resources related to death, dying, and bereavement.