



Brentwood Diocesan Education Service

Dealing with loss- A Parent Guide

How children grieve

The age of a child has a direct impact on their level of understanding about what has happened. As a child gets older their ability to understand about death and dying increases. To help you feel more confident about what to explain about death, it is helpful and necessary to appreciate what children know and what they are capable of learning at the various stages of their development



Early primary school

Children are beginning to learn that death is permanent and to realise that when someone dies they are not coming back. They may be very matter of fact in the way they talk about death and want lots of information such as what happens to the body. They may need to hear what has happened many times over. They may not know what it is they are feeling or have the words to say how they feel. They may show their feelings in their behaviour and play.

Later primary school

Children now understand that death is permanent. They can also understand why death happens, e.g. because of illness, accident or old age. They can talk about their feelings better although they might not always do so. They are less likely to blame themselves for what has happened but they might blame others, they have a strong sense of right and wrong and might have strong views about what has happened.

They may be interested in life after death and ask questions about it.

How children show grief

Each child experiences loss differently. It can depend on their age, maturity and connectedness with the person. Young children especially do not have the words to talk about their feelings. They may not really know what they feel.





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Some of the way's children show grief are:

Some of the way's children show grief are: physical pain, e.g. tummy aches, headaches

- sleeping problems, bad dreams,
- angry play or playing the same thing over and over
- being sad and easily upset
- showing fears
- not wanting to be left alone
- acting like a younger child
- not being able to concentration for long
- wanting to be left alone or not wanting to talk



What parents can do

Help children express their feelings

- Let children know you understand they are having difficult feelings. Provide an environment where they feel safe to express their feelings in whatever way they can, for example; through play, writing a letter, a story, a poem, painting, drawing or music.
- Allow children time to talk, ask questions and share their worries. They might be very confused and need to ask many questions. You may have to answer the same questions repeatedly as children try to make sense of things.
- If a child finds it hard to talk, you could open the way by saying something like

'Some things are hard to talk about but talking things through can really help.'

- If you cannot talk about it, find someone you both trust they can talk to, e.g. aunty, uncle, grandparent, teacher or counsellor.

Share your feelings

- Share your feelings and tell children you are sad too - it helps them accept their feelings if they know others feel the same. Be honest

- Tell children what has happened simply and honestly in ways that suit their age and development. This helps them find ways to cope.

- If you do not tell children, you may prevent them from dealing with the loss. It may cause problems when they have other losses later in life.

- Children need to know what has happened even if they do not ask. Provide routine and support.

- Stick to family routines as much as you can - doing the same things as usual helps children feel safe. Keep to the same rules about what children are allowed to do.

- When the time feels right, help your child to move on and try something new.

Faith – a firm foundation

As part of a Catholic community, it is important to pray with your child by reminding them of God's love, care and hope. Children will be hearing this at school and replicating these traditions at home can be a spiritual support particularly when there are questions that are difficult to answer. Prayer can provide consolation and comfort for children.

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