



Happy Homes Doc!

Grief In Children

When your child understands that something or someone is gone and will not return, he or she feels grief.

You can help your child acknowledge, experience, release and heal the powerful feelings associated with that loss.

Recognizing Grief Reactions

- Denial. Your child may seem to deny or refuse to accept the death or loss.
- Guilt. Guilt shows itself when your child feels personally at fault for the loss or death, feels bad because s/he is still healthy or alive and others are not, worries that s/he caused parents to separate/divorce, or believes s/he has caused the negative emotional behaviors of family and friends.
- Anger. Anger results from something happening which your child believes should not have happened. Anger may be directed at the person or thing who is dead or gone, or it can be displaced onto peers, siblings and parents. Your child may be angry with you for not doing what was necessary in order to keep the death or loss from happening.
- Fear. A world which seemed the same day after day and which was safe and secure has been shattered. It is easy to be frightened; even adult reassurance may not dissipate this panic.
- Idealization. To make the loss less painful or final, your child may begin to imitate or idealize the person who has died or left.
- Physical Complaints. Your child may develop symptoms such as headaches, stomach aches, nausea, sleeping too much or too little, overeating, or loss of appetite.

Understanding a Grieving Child

Unless a larger loss has occurred, you may not be aware of or accept your child's grief. The death of a pet, change of school, damage to a favorite toy or non-fulfillment of a promise from an adult, can lead to grief reactions that are equal to grief resulting from major losses. Regardless of the intensity or cause of your child's grief, the reaction needs to be allowed, supported and healed. When you know and understand the process, do not fear feelings and trust your child's innate ability to work through those feelings, you will help your child to encounter and process his/her grief.

- Assure your child that although loss has occurred in one area, other aspects of life are still intact.
- Share your own feelings of grief. Modeling is a powerful method of teaching.
- Be sensitive to your child's feelings and the profound nature of his/her experience.
- Give your child your presence. Your child may feel lonely as a result of the loss. You don't have to talk or "fix" the loss to reassure your child.

Understanding a Grieving Child (continued)

- Be responsive to questions, changes in mood and the good feelings which begin to emerge during the integration phase.
- If you cannot provide this kind of support because of your own grief, make the effort to bring in another adult who can help your child at this vulnerable time and consider seeking professional help to support you through your own grieving.

What Your Grieving Child Needs From You

- Trust that your child is going through exactly what s/he needs to go through.
- Be honest about what has happened and the feelings that come up. Let your child know that mixed feelings (for instance, anger and love) are normal.
- Be patient. Allow the grieving process to take as long as it takes-without judgment. This can include answering questions that may be asked over and over again.

To learn more about the important parenting skill of EMOTION COACHING contact us at

**Ward & Associates Psychological Services, PLLC
1414 W. Franklin Street
Boise, ID 83702**

Phone: (208) 343-0647

Fax: (208) 395-1948

E-mail: DrWard@happyhomesdoc.com