



Children and Grief Fact Sheet

The Facts

Grief is a normal reaction for children who experience a significant loss. Adults and children often grieve differently. It is important to understand how a child perceives death and loss based on their current age and developmental level.²

Some children may experience serious problems with grief and loss. If these warning signs persist, professional help may be needed.

The Warning Signs

- Inability to sleep, loss of appetite, prolonged fear of being alone
- Acting much younger for an extended period
- Losing interest in daily activities and events for an extended period
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Significant drop in school performance or refusal to attend school
- Believing they are talking to or seeing the deceased person for an extended period¹

Support & Treatment

Encourage a child to express all feelings associated with grief. Understand that the child may cry in one moment and be happily playing the next. This is a developmentally appropriate way that children express grief. Children often process emotion through play. Be developmentally appropriate, direct, and honest when speaking with your child about the loss.²

If you notice that your child seems unusually upset and unable to cope with grief and loss, your child may be experiencing adjustment disorder. It is a good idea to speak with your child's doctor if you feel your child is not recovering from a loss in a healthy way.²

¹ American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2018. Retrieved from: https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-And-Grief-008.aspx

² Child Mind Institute, 2020: Retrieved from <https://childmind.org/article/helping-children-deal-grief/>