



Helping Children Cope with Grief and Loss

By Shannon Theriault, Counsellor at Regina Community Clinic

It is important to let children express their feelings about grief and loss. Children will benefit from ideas on how they can help themselves feel a bit better when they feel sad and upset. Remember, sometimes it's too difficult to remember a special loved one who has passed away. That's OK too. In time most children will want to talk or express their emotion. Also children may have questions about burial, cremation or what happens in the hospital or ambulance. It is helpful to have someone who can answer those questions for them. As with adults, there are no rules about how to grieve. People young and old grieve differently and at different paces. It's OK to allow and acknowledge these differences.

Feelings are normal and all children, boys and girls alike, need a safe place to express their feelings. In our culture, it is often more acceptable for girls and women to express sadness and grief but boys and men are sometimes taught to hold it all inside. It is important to acknowledge that it's OK for boys to express sadness as well. Some feelings that may come up: worried, relieved, angry, lost, tired, cheated, ignored, weird, confused, quiet, sick and maybe even guilty feelings will arise. Ask a child who has experienced a loss or death to tell you about their feelings. They could write or colour their feelings. What colour is sad?

What can a child do when they have strong feelings after a loss?

- be active, run, swim, walk, ride a bike
- play with a friend
- draw a picture
- listen to music
- cuddle with a dog or cat
- talk to your parents
- don't forget to eat and drink even if you don't feel like it ... just a little bit will help
- if you are tired, rest ... acknowledge that you may feel more tired than usual ... it's OK
- be kind to yourself – you're going through a difficult time

It often is important for a child to be able to remember the loved one they have lost. They can have a framed photo or have an adult help them do a photo book. A tree or special flower planted in a garden can be a special remembrance. A picnic or family dinner in honour of the loved one on an anniversary day like their birthday can be a nice activity. Memories are there to be shared. Don't be scared to talk about the person who has passed away. Honour their memory. Smile at a fond or funny memory – it's OK. ♦

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