

Like adults, children experience grief when they lose someone or something they feel close to. A death in the family is particularly hard for children, but this is not the only time grief occurs. Other kinds of losses can also lead to grief reactions. These may include:

- the death of a friend or pet;
- separation of parents and family break-up;
- change of schools or moving house;
- loss of a friendship;
- relocating to a new country;
- having a disability or medical condition; or
- having a family member in hospital for a long time.

Children need lots of support from caring adults to help them come to terms with a major loss. While grief is a normal reaction to loss, feelings of anxiety or sadness may be intense and long-lasting.

Children's grief reactions commonly include crying, being anxious, having bad dreams and clinging to parents. Children may also show their distress by being angry, irritable, unsettled or losing motivation for school and other activities. Sometimes children show their distress by behaving in ways you would expect from a younger child e.g. bed wetting, thumb sucking or baby talk.

How Can Parents And Carers Help?

Knowing what to say and how to talk to children to help with loss and grief is not easy, especially when you are also experiencing a loss and associated feelings. Firstly it is important to acknowledge that you understand the child is feeling sad. Offer support and reassurance. Let them talk about their feelings and ask you questions. Make sure your responses are in plain language that they will understand as knowing what has happened can help children find ways to cope.

As much as possible, stick to normal routines as this will help children feel more secure. It is also important to talk to your children about how you're feeling (keeping in mind their age and maturity level) as this will help them make sense of their own feelings. Lastly, let the child's teacher know what has happened so they can support and monitor your child's wellbeing at school. If you are concerned that your child is not coping with a loss you should seek additional help from a health professional such as your local doctor, psychologist or school counsellor.

