

# When Children Grieve

Lifelong Mental Health Management: Middle Childhood

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## Children need help to deal with the death of a loved one

**M**ost children have had some type of experience involving death – whether it be a grandparent, friend or even a much-loved pet.

The death of a parent or sibling, however, can have a profound effect on a child. To assist with the process of loss and grieving, the child needs to:

- ◆ be reassured that they are safe and secure;
- ◆ be provided with information about the death (in a form that they can understand);
- ◆ be assisted to return to their normal activities;
- ◆ and be prepared for painful memories.

Though many of the symptoms children may exhibit during this time of crisis are normally associated with psychological disorders, it should be noted that they are normal for a grieving child.

### Children who have lost parents often:

- ◆ need to express their feelings;
- ◆ report hallucinations of their deceased parent;
- ◆ believe that their parent will return;
- ◆ wish to be “dead” so they can join their parent.

### THE IMPACT ON A CHILD

The impact a death has on a child depends upon many factors, including:

- ◆ the closeness of the deceased to the child;
- ◆ the nature of the death;
- ◆ the child’s vulnerabilities and resiliencies at the time of the death;
- ◆ the support available to the child;
- ◆ the disruption in the family caused by the death;
- ◆ the relationship the child has with the other survivors

Source: Saler & Skolnick, 1992

## The stages of childhood grieving

<b>Early-phase</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Children need information about the death in a form they can understand.</li> <li>◆ Children need to feel safe and secure.</li> <li>◆ Children may try to protect themselves through denial.</li> </ul>
<b>Middle-phase</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ The child needs to accept the loss.</li> <li>◆ The child needs to face the emotional reality.</li> <li>◆ The child must bear the psychological pain from the loss.</li> </ul>
<b>Late-phase</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ The child must develop new relationships.</li> <li>◆ The child must be able to remember the deceased and form an ongoing attachment.</li> <li>◆ The child must return to activities that were disrupted by the loss.</li> <li>◆ The child needs to be prepared for the resurfacing of painful memories.</li> </ul>

Source:  
Baker, Sedney and Gross, 1992