



Grief and Loss

CoRe Kids Therapy

Prepared by: Daniela Diaz

What is Grief?

An inevitable process (never-ending) that happens due to a permanent or temporary disruption in routine, separation, or a change in a relationship which can sometimes be out of the person's control. (Fiorini & Mullen, 2006)

It's normal that grief causes pain and discomfort and therefore impacts thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

EVERYONE EXPERIENCES LOSS IN A DIFFERENT WAY!

Common types of losses for children

- Death of parents, relative, friend, pet.
- Divorce.
- Moving house, interstate, overseas.
- Changes in school/friendships.
- Birth of a sibling.
- Finding out a relative/friend is sick.

How Children respond to loss?

Children respond to loss in two vital contexts: Internal and External.

Factors influencing the internal context are: age, stage of development, personality and own experiences from the past. Whereas the external contexts consider the nature of the relationship the child had with who/what they lost, how the loss occurred, types of support available, and responsiveness of the family system.

How do children demonstrate their grief?

- Emptiness, sadness
- Guilt and self-blame
- Fear, disorganization and panic
- Acting out behaviour
- Explosive emotions
- Regression
- Physiological changes
- Lack of feelings

When a child is experiencing difficulties due to the loss of a loved one, it's vital to acknowledge that death is part of the cycle of life. If the child asks questions in regard to a loss, honest and age-appropriate answers help them to navigate the grieving process better.



How to support children who have had a loss

According to the National Center for Childhood Grief, when a child is going through grief they need LOVE, UNDERSTANDING and INCLUSION, as their familiar, predictable and safe world has become chaotic and fearful.

- When talking to a child about death, use words like “dead/died” as opposed to euphemisms such “lost/sleep”, as children tend to take things literally and they might feel afraid to go to sleep or being lost.
- Before answering a child’s question in regard to death, tragedy, etc, always ask them what they understand about it so you can build on what they already know. This avoids giving complex explanations that may not be appropriate for their age and stage.
- Modelling is vital for children by having a caregiver around them who is able to model how to grieve. This can be by not being afraid of their feelings and being able to label how they feel, making the child aware of their feelings and reassuring that every feeling is okay.

Resources suggested

National Centre for Childhood Grief
1300654556

Kids Help Lines
1800551800

National Association for Loss and Grief
0294896644

- Children Books:**
- “Lots on the clouds” by Tom Tinn-Disbury
 - “Why do I feel so sad?” by Tracy Lambert
 - “What Happens When A Loved One Dies?” by Jillian Roberts

Little things you can do together to help

- Write a letter to each other to let them know they are loved and cared for.
- Keep routines as normal as possible to help children feel secure.
- Reassure the child that play and having fun after a loss is still okay.
- Show them that drawing, painting, writing and music are ways to express feelings as well.
- Help them to achieve comfort through favorite TV shows, snacks, toys, etc.

How Play Therapy can help?

When children tend to express their grief through actions and activities as opposed to verbalizations, traditional talk therapy may not be developmentally appropriate. Alternatively, play therapy could be a more appropriate way for the child to express what is happening within their world. (Ceballos and Williams, 2013)

In play therapy, play is the language and toys are the words that a child would use to tell the therapist what is needed at that stage in their world. The therapist is led by the child’s needs instead of guiding them through what the therapist thinks would be appropriate for the child.

References:

- Ceballos, P. L., & Williams, J. M. (2013). Using play techniques to address student grief and loss. In J. R. Curry & L. J. Fazio-Griffith (Eds.), *Integrating play techniques in comprehensive school counseling programs* (pp. 19-42).
- Fiorini, J. J., & Mullen, J. A. (2006). *Counseling children and adolescents through grief and loss*. Research Press.
- Fiorini, J. J., & Mullen, J. A. (n.d.). *Understanding grief and loss in children*. Vistas Online. American Counseling Association.
- National Centre For Childhood Grief. (n.d.). *Grieving children, guidelines for adults who care by Dianne Mckissock*.

