

How is children's grief expressed?



- Children feel grief in the same way as adults but may have a different way of expressing it
- If younger children do not appear distressed it may be because they do not realise that death is permanent
- Separation anxiety is common
- They may ask questions such as 'What is it like to be dead?'
- They may not show feelings in order to protect others from knowing how bad they feel
- They may be too well behaved – this could be an attempt to circumvent further tragedy
- They may be badly behaved or disorganised (inability to concentrate)
- Eating/sleeping too much/too little
- Often children will want to play – they find it hard to feel intensely sad for long periods
- They may complain of minor illnesses such as tummy ache or have similar symptoms to those of the deceased
- Tendency to pick up infections
- They may seem bored/depressed/withdrawn
- Very young children who cannot articulate distress may have disturbed sleeping/eating patterns or cry a lot
- Babies pick up on the distress of their parents
- Reluctance to go to school (check whether they are being bullied)
- Fear of the dark which may be prolonged
- Difficulty in sleeping/ nightmares
- Regression to behaviours from the time before the death – longing for that time/ comfort
- Panic attacks / phobias
- Being on autopilot
- Searching for the dead person
- Acting out death with their toys – this helps them integrate their experience
- Trying to comfort parents in ways that they have previously been comforted
- Angry outbursts – at God / at the person for leaving
- Worries about practical things – Who will take care of me? / Will we have enough money?
- Feeling insecure – their world is falling apart – routine will help them feel safe

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