

Grief (Actual/Anticipated) in Children: Care Instructions



Overview

Grief is an emotional reaction to a major loss. The words "sorrow" and "heartache" often are used to describe feelings of grief. Your child may feel grief after losing a beloved person, pet, place, or thing. It's also natural to feel grief when a valued way of life is lost, such as a home, a parent's job, or good health.

Your child may begin to grieve before a loss occurs. Your child may grieve for a loved one who is sick and dying. Children often feel the pain of loss before a big move or divorce.

There is no "normal" or "expected" period of time for grieving. Grief can't be predicted. Thoughts and feelings can come and go. Grief is different for each child.

The ways children express grief are often different from the way adults express it. Children aren't always able to use words to say what they feel. Instead, they express their feelings through behavior. Children adjust to loss and death in different ways as they grow and develop.

It's important for adults to listen to a child and answer any questions or concerns. To express their feelings, children need an adult who makes them feel safe and secure. Childcare providers, teachers, and school counselors may also be able to help your child.

Follow-up care is a key part of your child's treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if your child is having problems. It's also a good idea to know your child's test results and keep a list of the medicines your child takes.

How can you care for your child at home?

- Encourage rest, healthy food, and activity. Healthy behaviors may help your child cope.
- Comfort your child. Familiar surroundings and special items, such as photos or a loved one's favorite shirt, may give your child comfort.
- Encourage your child to stay involved in everyday life. Don't let your child withdraw from the activities your child enjoys. Staying in touch with other children at school, church, clubs, or other groups can help your child.
- Think about getting individual counseling or putting your child in a support group. The school counselor at your child's school can also provide counseling and support for your child.

When should you call for help?

call anytime you think your child may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You're worried your child can't stop from hurting themselves or someone else.

Where to get help 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

If your child talks about suicide, self-harm, a mental health crisis, a substance use crisis, or any other kind of emotional distress, get help right away. You can:

- Call the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at **988**.
- Call **1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)**.
- Text **HOME** to **741741** to access the Crisis Text Line.

Consider saving these numbers in your phone.

Go to [988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org) for more information or to chat online.

Watch closely for changes in your child's health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- Your child feels sad a lot or cries all the time.
- Your child has trouble sleeping, or sleeps too much.
- Your child finds it hard to concentrate, make decisions, or remember things.
- Your child changes how they normally eat.
- Your child feels guilty about the death or loss.

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