

Grief is a normal reaction to loss. Your child has the right to experience grief and feel the same painful emotions that you are experiencing. Experiencing grief will allow your child to learn to cope with tragedy.

## HOW DO YOU HELP YOUR CHILD DEAL WITH TRAGEDY?

**BE AVAILABLE.** Your child needs to know that they can count on you to be in their lives to love, support and listen to them.

**LISTEN.** Each child is unique and your child will teach you what grief is like for him or her.

**BE HONEST.** Answer all of your child's questions about the death honestly. Tell them in a simple manner what happened because they need information to process the death into their world. They need to know death is permanent and irreversible. Use the words "death" and "died" not "passed on", "sleeping" or "gone away".

**BE A GOOD OBSERVER.** Your child's behavior can tell you a great deal about their emotions.

**RE-ESTABLISH ROUTINES AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.** Your child needs consistency and the routine of normal activities.

**UTILIZE YOUR RESOURCES.** Connect with family, friends, school counselors, hospice support and counselling support for your children and yourself to help you grieve through your loss.

### *Grief is...*

*So high you can't get over it.  
So low you can't get under it.  
So wide you can't get around it.  
You must go through the door of grief to get to the other side.*



Nanaimo  
Community  
Hospice  
Society

"A United Way Agency"

## GRIEF SUPPORT SERVICES FOR CHILDREN

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Grief support services offer safe, non-judgmental, compassionate support.

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# GRIEF SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN



## Because Children Are Often The "Forgotten Mourners"

*There is no "right" way to grieve but you can give your child permission to grieve in the way that is "right" for them.*

## COMMON EXPERIENCES

### *Shock and Denial*

Your child may feel little or no emotion. They may believe the person they love is coming back and behave as if everything is fine.

### *Panic*

Your child may feel scared, overwhelmed and confused. They may complain of stomach aches or headaches or may act out with hyperactive behaviors. In their insecurity, they may become clingy. Provide your child with reassurance and comfort.

### *Rage or Jealousy*

Your child may think their life is out of control and they may outwardly express strong emotions such as blame, fear, rage and jealousy by acting out inappropriately. Look for the **meaning behind the behavior** and encourage the expression of emotion while setting limits on behavior. (“It is okay to be angry but it is not okay to hit your brother. It is okay to punch your pillow.”)



### *Guilt*

Your child may blame themselves for the death. It is not helpful to avoid discussing your child’s guilt feelings. Encourage your child to express their feelings and help your child understand that their thoughts or behaviors did not cause the death.

### *Sadness*

Your child may express sadness by withdrawing or crying months or years after the death. Encourage your child to openly express their feelings of sadness and offer your support.

### *Grief Attacks*

Your child’s feelings will lessen in intensity over time, however, there will be times when their intense grief overwhelms them. Support your child and advise them that their feelings are normal.

### Questions Grieving Children Ask

Why did they die?

Who will die next?

Who will take care of me?

Is it my fault they died?

Am I responsible for taking care of the family now?

## MYTHS ABOUT CHILDREN AND GRIEF

### *Myth: Children do not grieve*

**Fact:** Children of every age grieve. Adults sometimes make the mistake of viewing a child’s ability to play as a sign the child is not grieving, which is not true. Children often grieve intensely and then take breaks from their pain.

### *Myth: Children are quick to get over a loss*

**Fact:** No one really gets over a significant loss. Children may re-visit their loss at different stages in their development and grief may arise as their understanding of loss changes.

### *Myth: Children will be permanently scarred by their loss*

**Fact:** Children are resilient and with support they can deal with their grief appropriately.

### *Myth: Children must talk about their grief feelings to work through their loss*

**Fact:** Children often express their feelings through play, music, dance and art. Talking through their feelings promotes communication, however, the child can adapt to loss in many ways.