



children grieve
too...

Bereaved Children's Awareness

www.childhoodbereavement.ie

A large number of children experience bereavement in childhood; for example, two in every one hundred 9 year olds in Ireland have lost a parent. However, the loss of a parent is only one example of children's loss that encompasses the death of any important person in their lives, be that a sibling, friend, grandparent, uncle or aunt or another person who is significant to them.

CHILDREN'S GRIEF

- Unlike adults children dip in and out of grief. It can be intermittent and intense but also can pass quickly, distracted by friends and activities.
- Children tend to protect parents from their pain and upset. This often leaves their grief unrecognised.
- Grief in childhood and teens makes the young person feel different from their peers.
- Children try to control their grief holding it in and pretending nothing has happened. This can be isolating.
- Each child in a family grieves differently due to their personality, age, gender and the relationship they had with the person who has died.
- Death can be frightening for children especially without the information to help understand what is happening.
- Children's grief is not a once off occurrence but affects them at milestone times in life e.g. going into a new school, graduating, getting married etc.

WHAT HELPS?

- Acknowledge their loss -otherwise a child can feel excluded.
- Age appropriate information to help them understand – an adolescent's experience is very different from a five year olds.
- Taking part in the funerals/goodbye rituals and even making something (e.g., a picture) or having a part to play gives a sense of control – but only if they wish to do so.
- Children need time to express feelings - even anger, which can be an expression of the deep hurt and unfairness they are feeling.
- They need time to remember the person who has died and share the stories of their relationship with them.
- They need to know that they are not to blame for a death and that their thoughts or things they say do not cause death to occur.
- Meeting other bereaved children can help them understand that they are not alone in what has happened.

WHEN TO BE CONCERNED

- When a child shows persistent anxiety about the loss and life in general.
- When a child is persistently aggressive.
- When a child socially withdraws from friends and activities.
- When a child carries self- blame and guilt about the death.
- Self- destructive behaviour and risk taking.
- Self- harming.
- Suicidal behaviour.

The above behaviours indicate more complicated grieving and require more specialised intervention.