**HELPING CHILDREN WITH GRIEF**

*Children will be faced with many losses in their lives. It is a common instinct for adults to want to protect children from the pain of grief. However, it is important for children to learn how to grieve and to be given the opportunity to grieve.*

Children will learn about grieving from the adults in their life*.*

*“If you are showing your child that it’s OK to talk about and show feelings then they will take your lead”*

Children experience the same feelings as adults but tend to express their grief differently to adults:

* Grief for children is not constant, but comes in bursts. It is not unusual to explain a death to a child and find that they do not seem affected by it, or they want to go out and play. This does not mean they do not feel the pain of the loss.
* Younger children especially may ask the same questions many times. You may have to tell the story over and over again. As children get older they will grieve again. The loss will mean different things to them at different stages.
* Often children express their feelings through behaviour and play.

Children may react to a loss and show their grief in many different ways, as shown below. These are normal ways for children to work through their grief. However, where these behaviours become too repetitive or last a long time, it may be helpful to seek professional advice.

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| **Behaviour*** Playing the same thing over and over
* Crying or giggling without obvious reason
* Playing out the loss with toys
* Anger or aggression to friends, parents or toys
* Temper tantrums
* Copying behaviours of the deceased
* Acting like a younger child
* Acting more like an adult
* Running away, not wanting to go to school
* Problems with school work
 | **Physical*** Pains such as stomach aches or headaches
* Sleeping problems, bad dreams
* Eating problems
* Being clumsy
* Not being able to concentrate for long
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| **Emotional*** Easily upset
* Low self-esteem
* Clingy
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**Grief is hard work. It takes considerable emotional and physical energy.**

**TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT A DEATH:**

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| * Be honest and consistent.
* Ask your child what death means.
* Explain it to them and be sure they understand.
* Use simple language to explain death.
* Avoid explanations such as “he’s gone to sleep”. Children take things very literally. They may start to fear going to sleep.
* Answer questions as they come up. Don’t feel you have to have all the answers, if you don’t know, say so. If you’re unsure what your child means by a question, ask them to be more specific.
* Children often believe that the pain and hurt will last forever. Reassure them the process will take time but that they will feel better.
* Accept their feelings and share your own.
* Remember no two children grieve the same way. Ask your children questions to help you understand how they are feeling.
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**More about grief …**

**Websites**These websites may be of interest for further information.

<http://www.grieflink.asn.au/>

An Australian site with information for people grieving, support people and professionals.

<http://www.grief.org.au/>

An Australian site of a not for profit organisation based in Victoria with information that may be useful for individuals, families and professionals.

**Telephone Services**

Kids Help Line (ages 5 to 25) 1800 55 1800

Lifeline 13 11 14

**Face to Face Counselling**

Anglicare Loss and Grief Centre (08) 8131 3400

Adelaide based professional counselling and resources for children and adults.