

INSIGHTS

by Michael Grose – No. 1 parenting educator

parentingideas.com.au

parentingideas.co.uk

parentingideas.co.nz



Helping kids deal with loss

Children frequently experience fear and sadness after loss. They fear the future and the unknown that lies ahead and they feel sad for the loss of a loved one, or situation.

Kids may experience many different kinds of loss, including a friend who moves away, the death of a treasured pet and the death of a loved one. Although death is the most permanent loss we face, there are other forms of loss that can be devastating such as, moving home and family separation.

Helping kids deal emotionally with loss is something that all parents experience from time to time. While nothing really prepares kids for the loss of a loved one, helping them cope with the smaller losses such as the death of a pet, does impact on kids when more significant loss occurs.

When loss is sudden and unexpected, there is much less time for kids to adjust. An anticipated death, separation, or move is easier for kids as they have had time to think, mourn and anticipate how they will react. These gradual changes make loss easier to deal with. When loss is sudden there is more confusion and distress.

Loss, by its very nature involves a grieving process, which is our natural reaction to an event that reshapes our world. For kids grief has two requirements. First, kids need to process the event that lead to loss. "Will Daddy ever come back?" "Can I die too?" Second, they need to mourn the loss of the loved one. "I wish grandma was here to read me a story."

Children frequently experience fear and sadness after loss. They fear the future and the unknown that lies ahead and they feel sad for the loss of a loved one, or situation. Kids grieve in different ways. Adults frequently are grieving the same losses, so assisting kids through difficult circumstances is tremendously challenging.

Here are some general guidelines when children experience significant loss such as the death of someone close to them:

1. Talk about death or loss.

Children do not benefit from putting it out of their minds. Share important facts about the event. Attempt to get a sense of what kids think and feel about the situation. Invite them to talk about their feelings regarding the event, but be guided by their reactions.



2. Share some of your own feelings and thoughts.

Sometimes children act as if they have not heard anything you have said when experiencing loss, but they have. Be prepared to repeat the same information again and again as kids often don't process information when they are distressed.

3. Reassure kids that feelings of sadness and helplessness are normal.

Knowledge of the grieving process can be reassuring to kids, and can provide hope that they will not always feel the way they do.

4. Involve children in the rituals, including the funeral.

There are no hard and fast rules here, but involvement can help them move through the grieving process. Most children, even preschool age children, can handle going to a funeral (although they should never be forced to go).

If it seems too overwhelming for your child, or if he doesn't want to go, then you can create your own ritual or memorial service later. If you do intend to take your child to the funeral, be sure to prepare him in advance for what is going to happen and be ready to answer any questions that he may have during the service.

Dealing with loss is a long process and children usually go through the same stages as adults, but it's not always a continual process. Kids may be sad and grieving one minute and then later they may playing and appear happy and carefree.

Some kids act out, develop behaviour problems or withdraw after the death of a loved one. At times like these, it's best to be empathetic and let him know that you feel sad too and sometimes it makes you get angry or lose your patience.

If behaviours and emotions are still extreme after six months it's probably time to see a professional to help you and your child cope with the loss.

Michael Grose Presentations
PO Box 167 Balnarring Vic 3926
p + 61 3 5983 1798
f (03) 5983 1722
e office@parentingideas.com.au

parentingideas.com.au
 parentingideas.co.uk
 parentingideas.co.nz
 facebook.com/michaelgroseparenting
 twitter.com/michaelgrose



Join Michael's community of parents on Facebook. Go to www.facebook.com/michaelgroseparenting and click on the Like button.