



APOSTOLIC CHRISTIAN

Counseling and Family Services

515 Highland Street, Morton, IL 61550 ♦ Tel: (309) 263-5536 Fax: (309) 263-6841 ♦ www.accounseling.org

GRIEF/LOSS, PART 4

Grief/Loss, Part 1 was written for those who are grieving and was printed in the September, 2009, Silver Lining. Parts 2 and 3 focused on how to help grieving people and were printed in the November and December issues. This article is focused on how to help children grieve. Jesus wants us to minister to those who are in need. Matthew 25:40 “...*Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren (my children), ye have done it unto me.*”

Children, like adults, experience grief in many different ways, and each has his or her own pace of recovery. There are things you can do to help a child through the grief process, which are important to do, as children often don't understand their feelings and may need your help, guidance, and support to cope. Psalm 56:8 “... *put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?*”

Studies point out that there are four adjustments that are essential for a grieving child to experience:

1. Reality - accepting the reality of the loss,
2. Pain - experiencing the pain or emotional aspects of the loss,
3. Change - adjusting to an environment in which the deceased is missing,
4. New Normal - relocating the deceased person within one's life with memories and putting energy into new relationships.

It has been discovered that prior to age 3, babies may sense an absence among those in their immediate world and miss a familiar person who is gone, but they are unlikely to understand the difference between a temporary absence and death. A preschool child may talk about death but may still expect the person to come back. Before age 5, most children do not realize that all people, including themselves, will die. By ages 9 or 10, however, most children have developed an understanding of death as final, irreversible, and inescapable. Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 “*To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven. A time to be born, and a time to die...*”

How can parents help? Caring parents can help children through the Reality and Pain adjustments by being open, honest, and loving, and by responding to questions in a way that shows you care. It may help to touch children and look them in the eye as you talk. Take them in your arms and show them the compassion of Jesus. When answering a child's questions about death, adults should keep in mind the following:

1. Tell a child only what he is capable of understanding. There is no need to be evasive, but modify explanations to what the child can comprehend.
2. What is said is important, but the manner in which it is said has even greater significance. Be aware of voice tone. Try to answer the questions patiently in a matter-of-fact way. Remember that what is communicated without words can be just as meaningful to a child as what is actually said.
3. It is not unusual for a child to ask the same question again and again. Repeating questions and getting answers helps the child understand and adjust to the loss of someone loved.

Parents should avoid trying to suppress the child's tears or expressions of grief. It is hurtful to the grieving process to dismiss your child's feelings or disapprove of them. Instead, help them put their feelings into words. One author stated that a child's grief begins when he or she begins to express or demonstrate his/her feelings. Jeremiah 9:1 *"Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night..."*

Like adults, children's first reaction to the loss is usually shock. Feelings of anger, fear and guilt usually follow. Parents may need to redirect children's aggressive angry behavior to acceptable physical behavior—such as running, doing jumping jacks, shaping play dough, sweeping with a broom, or something to keep their bodies moving. In trying to get to the source of anger outbursts, ask open-ended questions such as: "It looks like something is really bothering you. I'm wondering if you are frustrated about something or feeling hurt or perhaps afraid. Could you tell me about it?" It is easier for some children and teens to express feelings in art work and tell you about the pictures. When they talk, really listen. Listen to the point that you feel you can understand what your child is feeling. Psalm 46:1-2 *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear..."*

Common fears which grieving children have include the fear of not being cared for or of not having enough information to understand what is happening, the fear that the child is to blame, or the fear that another special person may die.

The Change adjustment is learning to adapt with the loved one gone. This is the time to keep routine schedules in place as much as possible. Have your children keep on doing their chores and activities even though they do not feel like doing them because they are sad. Talk about the changes in your family. There may be someone different cooking meals or driving the children to school. There may be one less person sitting at the dinner table. Help them realize that a family is still a family even if someone in the family dies. Life will never be the same again without the loved one who died, but life can still feel safe and normal again. Psalm 23:4 *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."*

The New Normal adjustment is having friends and feeling happy again, but also remembering the special things they did with the loved one. Help your child keep these memories by talking openly about them, even though they bring tears. It is also important and necessary to say "goodbye" to the loved one. Some examples are writing a letter, visiting the grave site, or making a memory book. Saying "goodbye" is not forgetting your loved one. He or she will always be a part of your child's life. Finally, your child should be encouraged to play, to enjoy old friends, to make new friends, and to make new memories as "new" becomes normal. Revelation 21:4 *"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."*

Comments taken from: 1996 study by J. W. Worden, pamphlet "Helping Your Child Grieve," [It's okay to cry](#), by H. Norman Wright, [A Kid's Journey of Grief](#), by Beeney and Chung