

Grief and loss for Children

Children grieve over the loss of a loved one just as adults do, but perhaps in different ways. It is important to include children in the process of grieving. Children need to be told the truth, using words they can understand, and be honest about your own feelings. Don't exclude them in order to protect them from the pain of their loss – it will only increase their confusion and fear about their own feelings and the feelings they see around them.

Young children may have a hard time expressing their feelings in words, and they may have a limited understanding of what death means.

- Their fear, anger and sense of loss may have a limited understanding of what death means.
- Their fear, anger and sense of loss may be expressed in changes in behavior.
- They may have nightmares, or trouble sleeping or eating.
- They may go back to earlier childhood behaviors, such as bedwetting.
- Some children might become quiet and withdrawn.

It is important that children be able to express these feelings safely. At this time, when you are coping with your own grief, it may be difficult to also deal with the special needs of children. Help is available for children and families, so be sure to ask for it. Contact your doctor, therapists who work with children, clergy or your local Victim Service Unit for help and information.

Some reactions of children:

- An explanation of what has happened should be made to the child at his or her intellectual and spiritual level
- Children need to know as much of the truth as they can handle
- Questions should be answered honestly and openly
- The child should be allowed to participate and to attend services. Ask the child what he/she would prefer to do
- Parents can also identify signs of abnormal reactions and parents should seek professional help if serious problems become evident