



FORT GARRY WOMEN'S  
RESOURCE CENTRE

## Helping Children Cope with Loss: Fact Sheet

### When Do Children Feel a Sense of Loss?

As with adults, children experience grief in response to the loss of someone or something. The death of a loved one is always difficult for children. Death is one of the most permanent losses children face, but there are other forms of loss that can be distressing as well. The most common are divorce and moving. When adults decide to move or separate from partners, children have no choice but to accept their decision. Children also feel a sense of loss when they have been abused or have witnessed their mother, siblings, or pets being abused.

When a child feels a sense of loss it affects their sense of security. Since children have less time and skills to help them adjust to these situations, they are more vulnerable to loss than adults. While we often discuss how we grieve as adults, rarely do we consider the losses children must face and the unique ways they respond. Like adults, children express and express loss by grieving.

### How Do Children Respond to Grief?

Like adults, children can be deeply affected by loss and grief experiences. While everyone has different ways to grieve, common grief reactions in children include:

- Feelings of anger, denial, shock and confusion
- Sadness
- Emotional numbing
- Fear and anxiety
- Difficulty sleeping
- Excessively asking questions about the deceased or the subject of loss, inventing games about dying
- Physical complaints; stomachaches, headaches
- Changes in appetite (overeating or lack of interest in food)
- Wanting to sleep in bed with an adult
- Lacking concentration and energy at school.
- Acting much younger for an extended period (bed wetting, sucking their thumb)

## **How Can I Help My Child Grieve?**

Long term denial of death or avoidance of grief is unhealthy for children and may resurface later with more serious problems. It is helpful to know that there are some things you can do to help a child overcome loss.

- Answer questions about their loss simply and honestly. Make the discussion age appropriate.
- Share your feelings with children—explain your sadness.
- Say the deceased person's name or talk directly about other losses.
- Give them a chance to talk about their fears and validate their feelings. Listen to them.
- Children are physical in their grief. They may act out feelings so watch their bodies, understand and support their play and actions as their "language" of grief.
- Children grieve cyclically. Expect their grief to revisit in cycles. Make yourself available to talk to them.
- Children grieve as part of a family. They may grieve the changed behavior of family and friends. Keep the regular routines as much as possible.

## **What Activities Can I Do with My Child to Help Them Grieve?**

Within a secure and caring relationship parents can help grieving kids explore activities which help to express their feelings and make sense of the loss that's occurred.

- Read stories about loss: talking about these stories will give your child a chance to talk about their feelings.
- Art Activities: activities with paints, finger paints, clay and collage can provide a great way to express feelings that may be difficult to talk about.
- Music: listening to music combined with talking about feelings can be helpful.
- Write a journal: have your child write in their own special journal their feelings and thoughts about the loss (for young children pictures can get the feelings out and on the page.) Encourage the child to share their journaling/pictures only if they want to.
- Some families find participating in grief support groups for children and families helpful. These provide a chance to be with others dealing with similar feelings and changes. This can help the feelings of isolation and "differentness" that children feel when they grieve.

## How Can I Tell If My Child Needs Help With Their Grief?

Grief doesn't follow a straight path. Just when it seems things are getting better, something may happen to trigger the most intense feelings all over again. Usually it takes several years to begin to feel life is on a normal course again. If your child seems to be taking too long to get over the grief professional help may be needed. Some of the warning signs are:

- If your child is engaging in behaviours that are dangerous to self or others
- If intense feelings of sadness, depression or anger persist after a year
- If these intense feelings are interfering with the child's life, and do not seem to be easing, the child may be stuck in their grieving process and need help to heal.
- If the child through words or behaviours seems to be asking for more than you can give
- If you are feeling overwhelmed by the needs of your child

## Where Can I Go For Help?

### Resources for Parents

Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre 477-1123  
[www.fgwrc.ca](http://www.fgwrc.ca)

Aurora Family Therapy Centre 786-9251  
[www.aurora.uwinnipeg.ca](http://www.aurora.uwinnipeg.ca)

The Family Centre 947-1401  
[www.familycentre.mb.ca](http://www.familycentre.mb.ca)

Hope Centre Health Care Inc. 589-8354  
[hopece@mts.net](mailto:hopece@mts.net)

Klinik/Counselling 784-4067  
[www.klinik.mb.ca](http://www.klinik.mb.ca)

Manitoba Organization of Victim Advocates (MOVA) 831-8950  
[help@mov.ca](mailto:help@mov.ca)

Moffet, Anne. *Grief and Loss Support for Children.*  
[www.directionservice.org/Grief\\_and\\_Loss.pdf](http://www.directionservice.org/Grief_and_Loss.pdf)

Suicide Prevention Education Awareness Knowledge (S.P.E.A.K.) 831-3610  
[www.SPEAK-OUT.ca](http://www.SPEAK-OUT.ca)

## Resources for Children

Aulneau Renewal Centre <a href="http://www.aulneau.com">www.aulneau.com</a>	987-7090
Family Centre <a href="http://www.familycentre.mb.ca">www.familycentre.mb.ca</a>	947-1410
Immigrant Women's /Children's Counselling <a href="http://www.norwesthealth.ca">www.norwesthealth.ca</a>	940-2172
Jewish Child and Family <a href="http://www.jcfswinnipeg.org">www.jcfswinnipeg.org</a>	477-7430
Miriam Centre <a href="http://www.miriamottawa.org">www.miriamottawa.org</a>	878-3736
New Directions <a href="http://www.newdirections.mb.ca">www.newdirections.mb.ca</a>	786-7051

## Resources for Helping Children Cope With Loss

### Book Resources (Available at the Winnipeg Public Library)

Coloroso, Barbara. (2000). Parenting Through Crisis in Time of Loss, Grief and Change.

Emswiler, Mary Ann. (2000). Guiding Your Child Through Grief.

James, John W. (2001). When Children Grieve. For Adults to Help Children Deal with Death, Pet Loss, Moving and Other Losses.

Rothkey, Julia. (2004). What Children Need When They Grieve. The Four Essentials: Routine, Love, Honesty and Security.

Wakenshaw, Martha. (2007). Caring For Your Grieving Child. Engaging Activities for Dealing with Loss and Transition.

## **Other Book Resources**

Ciacco, Janis. (2008). Colors of Grief. Understanding a Child's Journey through Loss from Birth to Adulthood.

Kanyer, Laurie. (2003). 25 Things to Do When Grandpa Passes Away, Mom and Dad Get Divorced or the Dog Dies.

Kroen, William. (1996). Helping Children Cope with the Loss of a Loved One. A Guide for Grown Ups.

Masi, Kimberly. (2008). Mending A Broken Heart. A Teenagers Guide Through the Loss of a Parent.

Mundy, Michaelene. (1998). Sad Isn't Bad. A Good Grief Guide Book for Kids Dealing with Loss.

Myers, Edward. (2006). Teens, Loss and Grief.

Palmer, Pat. (1994). I Wish I Could Hold Your Hand. A Child's Guide to Grief and Loss.

Sorenson, Julia. (2008). Overcoming Loss. Activities and Stories for Children Who Have Experienced Grief and Loss.

Wright, H. Norman. (2004). It's Ok to Cry. A Parent's Guide to Helping Children Through the Losses in Life.

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