



Helping Children with Loss (HCWL) Information Sheet

How can bereavement affect a child?

On average, most children will encounter 15 significant losses before they reach adulthood. The most common losses for children and teenagers include:

- *Loss of a grandparent*
- *Loss of a pet*
- *Moving*
- *Divorce*
- *Changing schools*
- *Bullying*
- *Having a close friend move away*
- *Being rejected from their university of choice*

As a parent, teacher, or professional who works with children, you have undoubtedly experienced that sinking feeling that occurs when children ask difficult questions about death and loss or are experiencing sad and painful feelings. You may even have memories of how you felt as a child when your feelings were not acknowledged or understood.

Often, we are left struggling for the right words, not least because we ourselves don't know what to do either. We may think we need to teach our children how to "look on the bright side" or we try to distract them with a gift or a treat. Children may allow themselves to be distracted for a time, but the grief does not go away. It often manifests in other areas, causing serious problems in school and at home. **The way we support children in their grief is vital to their further development and overall wellbeing.**

Here are just a few of the behaviors that can be the result of unresolved or unacknowledged grief:

- *Difficulty concentrating*
- *Reduced participation or interest in class*
- *Angry outbursts, violence*
- *Trouble sleeping, nightmares*
- *Frequent absence from school*

How do you help a grieving child?

We know how difficult it can be to find the right words to comfort a child. We don't want to say the wrong thing, but we also want to connect with the child and offer our support. Finding this balance is challenging if you don't have the right tools for the job.

Well-meaning adults often try to comfort children by saying things like:

- *Don't cry, he wouldn't want you to be sad.*
- *Look on the bright side.*
- *We'll just get you a new dog/cat/stuffed animal.*
- *Think of all the friends you'll make at your new school!*
- *Don't worry, I'm sure she'll get better soon.*
- *There are plenty of other fish in the sea.*
- *It could always be worse.*
- *Don't be scared, it will be fine.*
- *Now you'll get to have two birthday parties, one at your Mom's and one at Dad's!*

Unfortunately, these well-intentioned statements often make the problem worse. **The child may stop crying to please you, but in turn receives the message that it's not okay to grieve.** Wouldn't it be nice to know what to say or do when a child comes to you for comfort? **Imagine knowing the right words and actions to take with a child is grieving a loss!**

Learn how to support children and teenagers with loss and bereavement

Our Helping Children with Loss Program provides parents, teachers and anyone who works with children with the specific tools for helping a child of any age and/or ability level with a personal loss of any kind. **After completion of this course, participants will have the confidence and the ability to communicate effectively with children and teenagers on the topics of grief and loss,** as well as specific tools for helping a young person recover from bereavement.

Its techniques have been adapted for children using the evidence-based Grief Recovery Method, which has been successful at helping thousands of griever all over the world heal from the pain of personal loss for over three decades. **The program is ACEs informed and was created with the awareness that adverse childhood events can have a permanent impact on a person's wellbeing.**

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