



When Life Changes

A Parent's Guide About Children and Grief



At Hospice of Havasu, we realize parents often have children in the home who are dealing with the loss of a loved one. Many struggle with knowing how to meet their children's needs, thus we have put together simple guidelines that may be helpful when finding yourself in that position. Within this document are a few of the tips and resources you can use to support your grieving children. Hospice of Havasu is here to support our communities in as many ways as we can. May you find guidance and the resources you need within these pages to make tough times a bit easier for you and your children.

You are an important part of your children's lives. Children see you as a role model. With an understanding of childhood grief, you have the tools you need to provide effective support during their times of loss.

Children express grief differently than adults. They move in and out of intense feelings, rather than maintaining one emotion for long periods. When adults see a grieving child laughing and playing, they may mistakenly believe that the child is no longer grieving. This misinterpretation can influence how much grief support a child receives.

Age plays a part in how a child grieves and that knowledge can be very helpful when dealing with a grieving child.

BIRTH – 2 YEARS

Beliefs ♦ No understanding of death ♦ Difficult Emotions

- ♦ Has no words for feelings ♦ Aware of the absence of loved one
- ♦ Notices changes in routine and family emotions

Behaviors ♦ Longing ♦ Misses contact, sounds, smell and sight of loved one ♦ Fears of abandonment ♦ Anxiety ♦ Crying

- ♦ Thrashing ♦ Rocking ♦ Sucking, biting ♦ Sickliness
- ♦ Sleeplessness

Ways to Help ♦ Physical contact, cuddling and reassurance

- ♦ Maintain routines ♦ Meet immediate physical needs
- ♦ Be gentle & patient

3-5 YEARS

Beliefs ♦ No understanding of the permanence of death

♦ To be dead is to be sleeping or on a trip ♦ May wonder what the deceased is doing ♦ Magical thinking and fantasies, can be worse than realities

Emotions ♦ Fear ♦ Sadness ♦ Insecurity ♦ Confusion ♦ Anger

♦ Irritable ♦ Agitated ♦ Worried ♦ Guilty

Behaviors ♦ Regressive behaviors ♦ Repetitive questions

♦ Withdrawn ♦ Interested in dead things ♦ Acts as if death never happened ♦ Physical complaints ♦ Crying ♦ Fighting

Ways to Help ♦ Recognize the child's regression ♦ Encourage children to play & have fun ♦ Allow safe ways to express feelings

♦ Give simple & truthful answers to questions

♦ Maintain structure and routines ♦ Answer repetitive questions

♦ Let the child cry ♦ Talk (reflective listening)

6-9 YEARS

Beliefs ♦ Understands that death is final ♦ Interested in the biology of death ♦ Death associated with bodily harm,

mutilation & decay ♦ His or her thoughts, actions or words caused the death ♦ Death is punishment ♦ Forming spiritual concepts ♦ Who will care for me if my parent, family dies

♦ Thinks about life's milestones without the deceased

Emotions ♦ Sad ♦ Anger ♦ Lonely ♦ Withdrawn ♦ Worried

♦ Anxious ♦ Irritable ♦ Confused ♦ Guilt ♦ Fear

Behaviors ♦ Regressive behaviors ♦ Specific questioning

♦ Looking for details ♦ Acts as if the death never happened

♦ Hides feelings ♦ Withdraws ♦ Sleep disturbances

♦ Concentration difficulties ♦ Declining or greatly improved grades ♦ Aggressive acting out ♦ Is protective of surviving loved ones

Ways to Help ♦ Allow need to regress ♦ Answer questions truthfully ♦ Watch for confusion ♦ Allow expression of feelings through verbal & physical outlets ♦ Encourage drawing, reading, playing, art, music, dance, acting, sports ♦ Encourage peer support ♦ Work with teacher(s) to tailor child's school workload

9-12 YEARS

Beliefs ♦ Understands the finality of death ♦ Denial ♦ His/her words, thoughts or actions caused the death ♦ Thinks about life's milestones without the deceased ♦ High death awareness (death may happen again) ♦ What if my parent/family dies? ♦ Formulating spiritual concepts

Emotions ♦ Emotional turmoil heightened by physical changes ♦ Shock ♦ Sad ♦ Anger ♦ Confused ♦ Lonely ♦ Vulnerable ♦ Fearful ♦ Worried ♦ Guilty ♦ Isolated ♦ Abandoned ♦ Anxious

Behaviors ♦ Regressive behavior ♦ Fluctuating moods ♦ Hides feelings ♦ Acts like death never happened ♦ Aggressive acting out ♦ Withdrawal ♦ Nightmares & sleep disturbances ♦ Concentration difficulties ♦ Changes in grades ♦ Talks about physical aspects of illness or death

Ways to Help ♦ Allow regressive behavior & offer comfort ♦ Expect & accept mood swings ♦ Encourage expression of feelings through writing, art, music, sports, etc. ♦ Find peer support groups ♦ Be available to listen and talk ♦ Answer questions truthfully

12 YEARS AND UP (TEENAGERS)

Beliefs ♦ Understands the finality & universality of death ♦ Denial ♦ His/her words, thoughts or actions caused the death ♦ Thinks about life's milestones without the deceased ♦ High death awareness (death may happen again) ♦ May sense own impending death ♦ Needs to be in control of feelings ♦ If I show my feelings, I will be weak ♦ Internal conflict about dependence & desiring independence ♦ May utilize spiritual concepts to cope ♦ Highly self-conscious about being different due to grief

Emotions ♦ Shock ♦ Sadness ♦ Anger ♦ Confused ♦ Lonely
♦ Vulnerable ♦ Fear ♦ Worried ♦ Guilty ♦ Isolated ♦ Abandoned
♦ Anxious ♦ Occasional regressive behavior ♦ Mood swings
♦ Hides feelings

Behaviors ♦ Acts like death never happened ♦ Withdrawal
♦ Aggressive acting out ♦ Nightmares & sleep disturbances
♦ Concentration difficulties ♦ Changes in grades
♦ Impulsive & high risk behavior ♦ Changes in peer groups
♦ Fighting, screaming, arguing ♦ Changes in eating patterns

Ways to Help ♦ Allow regressive behavior & offer comfort
♦ Expect & accept mood swings ♦ Allow hidden feelings unless
there is risk of harm ♦ Encourage expression of feelings through
writing, art, music, sports, etc. ♦ Support relationships with
understanding adults ♦ Be available to listen and talk ♦ Answer
questions truthfully ♦ Share your grief ♦ Watch for high risk
behavior ♦ Find peer support groups ♦ Allow choices about
involvement in death & mourning

The Different Types of Losses

LOSS OF A PARENT: The death of a parent is one of the most painful losses a child can experience. For most children, parents are the most significant people in their lives so when one has died, life as the child knew it is forever changed.

LOSS OF A SIBLING: Guilt can be very strong for surviving siblings. They need reassurance that nothing they did or said caused the death. The child who has died may be idealized by family and friends. This can be difficult for surviving siblings' sense of self. They may conclude they should have died instead.

LOSS OF EXTENDED FAMILY: Reactions to a death in the extended family (aunt, uncle, cousin or grandparent) will vary greatly depending on the relationship children had with the person who died. Regardless of distance or frequency of visits, if the adults in the family are bereaved, this will affect the children. If children want to attend the funeral, they should be permitted the chance to do so.

The Different Types of Losses (continued)

LOSS OF CLASSMATES AND TEACHERS: It can be surprising to discover the ripple effect and impact on a child when a classmate or teacher dies. Children may wonder “Who will be next?” Children may appear more anxious, as their world feels less safe or predictable. Depending on their age, some children may be starting to grasp the finality or inevitability of death. This realization may be overwhelming.

LOSS OF PETS: Many times the loss of a pet will be the first experience children will have with death. This is very upsetting to children who care about their pet. However, pet loss provides an opportunity to teach children about loss, change and death—what it is and how it can occur—as well as ways to say goodbye and remember the pet.

SUDDEN DEATH: Sudden death leaves children and families and communities in tremendous shock. People need support as well as time to adjust to the reality of an unexpected death. Children and adults will display a wide array of reactions depending on their previous experience with death, their relationship with the person(s) who died and the support that is available to them. Children need the reassurance they are safe. Adult reactions around children will have a significant influence on the children’s adjustment and ability to cope. The intensity and duration of their reaction will decrease quicker if they feel heard, understood and reassured.

SUICIDE: When a suicide occurs, many people experience strong feelings of guilt as well as anger. The social stigma and questions of what could have been done to prevent the suicide are common challenges for suicide survivors. How much detail to share depends upon the child’s age and personality. The younger the age, the more basic the explanation needs to be. It is critical to explain the facts simply. Suicide is difficult for anyone to grasp or understand.

TERRORISM AND OTHER ACTS OF VIOLENCE

It is an unfortunate reality that children have been impacted by the threat of terrorism and other acts of violence.



The following suggestions will help decrease children's apprehension about the possibility of sudden, unexpected acts of violence:

- Provide reassuring examples of children's safety without making unrealistic promises.
- Describe specific measures that your child's school has in place to identify and monitor visitors to the building.
- Remind them of the many ways our government works hard to keep them safe.
- Encourage children to identify what helps them feel safe both at school and at home. Explore ways to make that happen.
- Be aware of your own emotions when you are talking to anxious or fearful children. When you convey a calm presence, your children will feel stronger and more secure.

References

Lyles, Mary PhD, LCSW (2004)

Retrieved from: "How to Help Chart" Children's Grief Education Association www.childgrief.org

Lyles, Mary PhD, LCSW and Lyles, Don M.Div., BCC

Children's Grief Education Association web site (2011) www.childgrief.org

National Association of School Psychologists (2013)

Retrieved from: "Helping Children Cope with Loss, Death, and Grief Tips for Teachers and Parents"
www.nasponline.org

On a personal note:

If you are concerned about your child's grieving, please consider calling the Hospice of Havasu Counseling Department.

We can explore more specific ways you can help your child. Hospice of Havasu offers programs and resources to help your family.



928.453.2111

HospiceHavasu.org

Lake Havasu City | Bullhead City | Resale Store | Polidori House

Hospice of Havasu complies with applicable Federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex.

Hospice of Havasu cumple con las leyes federales de derechos civiles aplicables y no discrimina por motivos de raza, color, nacionalidad, edad, discapacidad o sexo.

Hospice of Havasu bik'ehgo h0ji['9n7g77 bidadeeti'7g77 Wl lshindoon t' l l l t'4 bil l'ashdla'ii bee bl l dhaaazt'i'7g77 bibee haz'32nii d00 doo ak'7j8' nits l h l kees da d77 ninahj8' a['33 dadine'4, dine'4 bik l g7 l t'eh7g77, bin l l hai'7g77, nazhniit['ago da, 47 doodaii' asdz l n7 d00 din4 l t'eh7g77.