



There are four keys to helping children come to terms with loss: information, emotional expression, tenderness and reminiscing.

-Charles Smith, Wonder to Wisdom

Adapted from materials of the
National Catholic
Bereavement Ministry

If you or a loved one is grieving,
please contact the parish office to
see what resources are available to you.



CATHOLIC
DIOCESE *of* RALEIGH

Helping Children Understand Death, Loss and Grief

CATHOLIC GRIEF SUPPORT SERIES



Part 1

Bereavement Ministry Leader Support
ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF RALEIGH

Grief in Children, Part 1

Grief in Children

When children lose a parent, a brother or sister, or a close friend, they need help to understand death and to cope with the grief they feel and see in others. Frequently, parents are so emotionally drained by their own grief that finding words and actions to comfort a child is difficult. Many parents remain silent in an effort to protect children — yet the children sense even unspoken pain. Clear and honest explanations help children accept emotional distress and develop an understanding of death, loss and grief.

There are specific actions that parents and other adults can take that will help children who are grieving.

1. Understand that each child grieves individually, in a personal way at a personal pace. The child's age will affect the degree to which the loss is understood as "real" and permanent. Let the child be your teacher about his or her individual experience.
2. Give accurate, honest information about the death. Explain the cause of death. Do not be afraid to use the words "dead" and "dying". Children are often confused by such terms as "he passed away," "he went to a better place," or "he left us." Explain to young children that death means that the person's body does not work any longer. It will not talk, walk, move, see, or feel anything. The dead person can no longer eat, drink or laugh. Explain that death is permanent and that the person will not come back.
3. Talk to the child about his or her own feelings. Explain that feelings of sadness, loneliness, anger, isolation, confusion and guilt are all natural feelings to have after someone you love dies.



Key points to remember:

- **Let the child teach you about their grief experience.**
- **Be clear in your explanation of the death.**
- **Talk about and normalize feelings of child.**
- **Share your emotions and feelings with the child.**
- **Explain that they are not responsible for the death.**

“But Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me and do not try to stop them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’”

– Matthew 19:14

Try to help the child understand that experiencing all these different emotions is part of grieving. Encourage the child to talk about feelings but never force such a communication.

4. Share your emotions with the child. Talk about your own sadness and why you are sad. The child can learn from you that it is okay to grieve openly and express a wide range of feelings. You can be a strong role model for giving the child permission to grieve.
5. Explain to the child that nothing the child ever said or did contributed to the death. Children often believe that they can cause bad things to happen to others, and they need to be told over and over that they are not responsible.
6. If the child has lost a parent, reassure the child that the surviving parent will continue to love and care for the child.
7. Young children often ask, “Will I die too?” Explain that death is not contagious. Help the child to understand that the fact that one person died does not mean that the child, or others close to the child, will also die right away. Point out that most people die as they get older, not when they are young.
8. Talk to the child about the funeral and the visitation. Explain clearly what will happen. Allow the child to be a part of the planning for these activities, but do not force such participation. Help the child to understand that he or she is a valuable member of the family.

Please see Part 2 for additional information.