



10 NEEDS OF GRIEVING CHILDREN

Adequate Information:

Children need information that is clear and comprehensible. When they don't have sufficient information, they will make up a story to fill in the gaps.

Fears and Anxieties Addressed:

Children need to know they will be cared for. Many children who lose one parent fear the other one will die, too. They fear for their own safety as well. Research also has shown that bereaved children who were given consistent discipline after the parental death were less anxious than those for whom discipline became lax.

Reassurance They are Not to Blame:

Bereaved children may wonder, "Did I cause it to happen?" They need to know they didn't cause the death out of their anger or perceived shortcomings. Younger children especially may experience "magical thinking" and may have difficulty in this area.

Careful Listening:

Children need to have a person who will hear out their fears, fantasies and questions and not minimize their concerns. Some of their questions may be uncomfortable for adults, yet they need to be answered as valid things kids wonder about. Adults may be dealing with their own grief and seem unavailable to assess and meet the child's needs.

Validation of Individual's Feelings:

It is sometimes a temptation to tell a child how he or she should feel, but children's feelings must be acknowledged and respected as valid. Children also need to express their thoughts and feelings in their own way. Adults must remember each child's personality is unique as well as their relationship with the deceased.

Help with Overwhelming Feelings:

Children need help in dealing with emotions that are too intense to express. The most common feelings expressed by bereaved children are sadness, anger, anxiety, and guilt. Sometimes these feelings are acted out and adults can help kids express them in safer ways through play activities/writing.

Involvement and Inclusion:

Children need to feel important and involved before the death as well as afterward. Children need to be included in rituals around anniversaries or other special times when it is appropriate to remember the deceased in a more formal way.

Continued Routine Activities:

Children need to maintain age-appropriate activities and interests. Adults may sometimes need to be reminded that children cope and communicate through play activities.

Modeled Grief Behaviors:

Children learn how to mourn by observing mourning behaviors in adults. Encouraging children to think about, to remember, and to talk about the deceased is a rather simple but effective way that adults can influence the course of bereavement in children. Acknowledging and sharing feelings with the child in this way is very important.

Opportunities to Remember:

Children need to be able to remember and to memorialize their lost loved one not only after death, but continuously as they go through the remaining stages of life. Pictures and objects belonging to the deceased can be useful reminders of who the person was and the things that were important in their relationship. Reminiscence can also be helpful.

