



GUIDANCE FOR PARENTS & CARERS

UNDERSTANDING A CHILD'S GRIEF AND HOW TO PROVIDE SUPPORT

Grief is a distinct human condition. It encompasses the emotions felt as a result of being deprived. Grief is caused by an external loss event, but it is felt inside. Grieving is a process of working through the loss and it is not a specific emotion, such as sadness, but rather a wide range of often conflicting emotions, beliefs and actions. When someone grieves, it involves the entire self and that is why grief is so exhausting.

A child will grieve in spasms when there is a significant loss. A child is not emotionally mature enough to deal with grief throughout each day, so it will come and go, but this does not diminish how deeply a child feels.

A CHILD OFTEN HAS THREE, OFTEN UNASKED QUESTIONS WHEN TOLD OF A PARENTAL SEPARATION, DIVORCE OR A DEATH OF A SIGNIFICANT PERSON IN THEIR LIFE:

1. **Did I cause this?** Even though you will have initially stated to a child that this event is not their fault, their guilt remains a nagging concern for a long time.
2. **Who will keep me safe?** A child instinctively knows that they cannot take care of themselves. This is a fundamental anxiety for all children, even adolescents. While teenagers seemingly are pulling away from the family, they still want to know that there is a protective haven to return to when life gets too frightening or a problem arises.
3. **Is this going to happen to me too?** A child may worry that history will repeat itself when they grow up and take a partner. Their future may be clouded by the inherent pain of a separation or divorce.

To support a child through a significant loss in the family it is important to explain to a child that:

- The family is still a family, however some members of this family are no longer together daily and the extended family are still family members.
- The child did not cause the separation, divorce or death.
- Parents will continue to love, care and provide for a child.
- When a marriage or partnership took place, separation, divorce or a death was not a part of the future plans. A decision to separate or divorce was not done easily and the emotional pain it is causing is regretted. In the case of a death, even after a lingering illness, is never welcome, but it is the last stage of life for everyone.
- Assure a child that their life will remain as unaffected as possible by this change in their family and find out what the child's needs and wishes are in reshaping the family.

UNDERSTANDING A CHILD'S GRIEVING STAGES

DENIAL

- A child feels numb, shocked and overwhelmed by their feelings.
- A child may fantasise conversations with the person who is no longer present.
- May experience emotional or health problems.

ANGER

- A child will feel anger towards anyone who is close to them.
- A child is angry because the loss has happened to their family.

BARGAINING

- A child will attempt to anything they can to have their life back to the way it used to be.
- A child may promise to do better at school, improve their behaviour or keep their room tidy.

DEPRESSION

- A child will feel that life is out of control.
- A child will consider the question 'Who am I?' since my family has changed.
- A child may sense an early loss of childhood.

FEARS

- Feeling of loneliness.
- Adults will crumble under stress.
- School arrangements may change.
- Rejection and insecurity.

ACCEPTANCE OR ADJUSTMENT

- The period of healing that after all the pain of the loss has been dealt with.
- A child is willing to plan for the future.
- A child adjusts to new routines.
- A child talks about the loss event matter-of-factly.

For further information about Rainbows Bereavement Support, please visit our website:

www.rainbowsgb.org

