

GUIDANCE FOR PARENTS & CARERS

A CHILD'S REACTIONS TO LOSS AND AGE-APPROPRIATE SUPPORT [BIRTH TO 6 YEARS OLD]

Each child's grief is unique. Children tend to have certain basic needs and reactions to loss depending on their age. The information below gives details and suggests 'What You Can Do' to support them. Some children display only a few of these reactions; some carry on as if nothing unusual has happened and others exhibit every response imaginable.

Age	Basic Behaviour and Needs	How They React to Loss	What You Can Do (Parent/carer Response)
Birth to 18 months	- Needs nurturing care and protection - Needs closeness to their primary carer - Consistency in environment and routines	- Disturbed sleep - Changes in eating habits - Clinging to carer - Tiredness	- Maintain consistency in environment and caring - Keep the atmosphere calm - Gradually make changes in lifestyle - Minimal separation from the primary caregiver
Toddlers: 18 months to 2 years	- Fears losing primary carer's love - Craves stability; copes poorly with multiple changes - Home and family are important and begin to realise they are missing someone - Unable to verbalise feelings, may act them out	- Irritable and anxious - Has insatiable need for affections and approval - Regresses; wets bed, sucks thumb, talks like a baby - Physical aggression: hitting, biting, bullying - Understands that family member is absent following separation, divorce or death - Repeatedly asks for absence person - Refuses to sleep alone or in a dark room	- Nurture abundantly with holding, caressing, cuddling - Assure consistently of your love - Limit separation from primary caregiver - Maintain routines - Simple explanations of family changes; affirm that loss is not their fault - Spend meaningful time with each parent - Teach appropriate ways to release hostility and frustration

Age	Basic Behaviour and Needs	How they React to Loss	What You Can Do (Parent/Carer Response)
Young Children: 3 to 6 Years	• Begins establishing self-identity • (separate from parent) • Believes their actions control others' behaviour • Identifies with opposite-sex parent • Fears abandonment • Crying • Yearning for absent parent	• Realises that the family is different following separation, divorce or death of a parent or other crisis that alters a family structure • Acts as if the deceased person is still alive and will reappear • Regresses: wets bed, sucks thumb • Becomes irritable, aggressive, hostile • Becomes clingy; has fears or anxieties not previously expressed • May have headaches or stomach-aches • Nightmares	• Be attentive; assure child is loved • Create time to be with your child • Nurture through cuddling and tenderness • Explain changes that are occurring • Teach appropriate ways to released hostility, aggression

Guidance for other age groups are available, please ask your Rainbows Co-ordinator for copies.

For further information about Rainbows Bereavement Support, please visit our website: www.rainbowsgb.org