



**CHECK BACK FREQUENTLY** Check in with the child to see if his or her understanding and adjustment has changed since the loss. If there are any gaps in understanding, this will be an opportunity to reiterate and explain the four key concepts listed on the previous page.

**FUNERAL AND MEMORIAL SERVICES** Children should be offered the opportunity to attend a memorial or funeral service. They need to feel that they are not being left out of the process and can say goodbye in a more formal way.

**A LONG-TERM PROCESS** The loss of a loved one is not easily surmounted. Children will continue to experience the loss for years, particularly at important milestones—a father/daughter dance at school, a graduation, the anniversary of the death. Be alert for any potential changes in behavior, and work together with other adults in the child's life to guide the child through difficult times.

#### ONLINE RESOURCES

- **Children and Grief:** [www.scholastic.com/childrenandgrief](http://www.scholastic.com/childrenandgrief). Scholastic features a comprehensive Web site dedicated to the topic of childhood bereavement. Encourage families, children, and other caring adults to visit the site to find a wealth of online resources and links, including videos, book lists, articles from experts, avenues for self-expression, online communities, and information on bereavement camps for children.
- **National Alliance for Grieving Children:** [www.nationalallianceforgrievingchildren.org/](http://www.nationalallianceforgrievingchildren.org/). This site provides helpful bereavement resources, including a map directing you to a list of comprehensive, state-by-state resources that can guide you toward local support services and initiatives.

## Children and Loss: An Overview



The death of a family member or friend is painful, and children and teens feel the loss strongly. Use this at-a-glance overview to learn some key facts about how children grieve and what you can do to help. We hope these materials will assist you in giving children the comfort and support they need at a challenging time in their lives.

For more in-depth guidance, New York Life Foundation publishes an informative booklet, *After a Loved One Dies—How Children Grieve*. This guide is designed to give parents, teachers, and other caring adults the language and resources to help guide bereaved children through their grief in a healthy and meaningful way. If you do not have a copy, you may download a PDF in English or Spanish from [www.nylgriefguide.com](http://www.nylgriefguide.com), or order a hard copy for the cost of shipping and handling.



## How Do Children React to Death?

**EMOTIONS** Children may become upset in discussing the death of a loved one or be reluctant to talk about a recent death. Encourage them to talk, draw, and write about the loss, but avoid forcing this issue—wait patiently for them to accept the invitation to talk. Opening up is part of the grief process and will allow healing to begin.

**TAKING A BREAK** Sometimes children will need time alone or a break from discussion; give them the chance to collect their thoughts and feelings while you make yourself available for support.

**GUILTY FEELINGS** Children often feel guilty about the loss. They may believe that if they had behaved or thought differently, the death could have been prevented. Reassure children they are not responsible for the death, even if there is no reason for them to believe they were.

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Children may feel guilt about the loss, regress, or indulge in risky or selfish behavior.

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**RISK-TAKING** Children, especially teens, may engage in risky behavior. Keep a close eye on them and help steer them away from unhealthy activities. Very risky behaviors warrant a referral for further evaluation.

**SELFISH BEHAVIOR** Children may seem to ignore the death at times, or to behave selfishly and think only of themselves. Children need to feel that their needs are being met before they can process their feelings about the loss.

**REGRESSION** Children may regress and begin to behave as they did at a younger age. Resist judging them, and continue to show caring and concern. Remember that they are still grieving.



## How Can Adults Help Children Cope?



There are some key things an adult can do to help children accept the loss and experience their grief in as positive a way as possible.

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Adults who share in the loss should not be afraid to express their own feelings.

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### ALLOW YOURSELF TO GRIEVE

The caring adults in a child's life need time to grieve as well. Surviving parents, relatives, and friends should not be afraid to let children see that they are also mourning; rather, let this be an opportunity to share the experience of loss.

**SPEAK HONESTLY** When speaking with children about the death of a loved one, use the words "dead" and "died." Couching the truth in euphemisms may confuse younger children. Help children to grasp four key concepts:

1. Death is irreversible.
2. All life functions end completely at the time of death.
3. Everything that is alive eventually dies.
4. There are physical reasons that someone dies.

**RELIGIOUS BELIEFS** Religion is a factor in many people's adjustment to death. Respect those beliefs while still explaining the reality about what happens to the physical body, in simple and clear terms.

**ENCOURAGE SELF-EXPRESSION** Give children of all ages, including teens, the opportunity to express themselves through poetry, song, fiction, and in other creative ways.