

Helping Kids Work Through Grief



Accepting losses and grieving those losses is important for all of us. It's especially important for children. There are many kinds of losses in our lives and the grieving process differs from one person to another. For children, physical activities can be a valuable way of accepting and working through a loss.

Here are five essential ways to help grieving children:

✧ Person-to-person connections. Because children see themselves through the eyes of other people, their mental picture of reality is shattered when someone dies or moves. They need affectionate physical interaction (such as hugs and quiet conversations) with those people who remain to create a new picture of reality.

✧ Soothing repetitive activities. Repetitive motion--rocking, sand and water play, walking—replicates the natural heartbeat and the rhythm of breathing, allowing grief energy to move through the body at a regular pace and reduce tension.

✧ Keepsakes and memorials. Creating something visual expands the child's capacity to think about and remember a loved one. Planning the ceremony—a funeral perhaps, or the anniversary of a birthday—is as valuable as taking part in it.

✧ Large muscle activities. Hitting people and throwing things are examples of how kids demonstrate grief with angry, aggressive behavior. An adult's job is to help kids find appropriate big-muscle activities such as gardening, drumming or throwing balls so that grief energy can be expressed safely.

✧ Small muscle activities. Making something they can see, feel and touch that represents their memories and feelings gives children a sense of control and power. The process—drawing, working with clay, or beading an Indian “time ball”—is more important than the product.