

Thrive 365

Dragonfly: Impact Education



Did you know?

May 2nd - 6th is 'Dying Matters' week. It's about communities coming together to talk about things to do with death, dying and grief. These can be lonely experiences because they're hard to talk about.

Like anyone, there is no right or wrong way for a child to grieve. It will also depend on how much they understand about the permanency of the loss and how close they were to the person who died. Experts have suggested that during the middle childhood phase, usually around the age of 7, most children understand that death is permanent. They also understand that they too will die and that death is inevitable. So how do we help children with grief?

1 Clear information

The best information we can give children is that which will clarify any confusion or uncertainty. Sometimes that means talking about some sad truths. Don't be afraid to use the word "dead." Euphemisms such as "gone to sleep" or "not with us anymore" only create confusion and misunderstanding in children.

Listening and acknowledging what has happened can be the most helpful thing to do. It's fine to respond simply with – 'That is very sad' or 'I'm sorry to hear that'. This can be said face to face or if the child is not in school in the form of a card or a message.

2 Stages

There has been much scholarly debate about whether children can mourn a death. Worden (1996) proposed that mourning is an active process that goes through four stages:

- Accepting the reality of loss
- Experiencing the pain or emotional aspects
- Adjusting to an environment in which the deceased is missing
- Relocating the missing person within one's life and finding ways to memorialise them

As a result of the developmental changes throughout childhood and adolescence, mourning may need to be addressed time and time again at differing points.

3 Talk together

It's important to foster good communication with home to support a bereaved child. As well as sharing any concerns, remember to report any times where the child is coping well. This will provide a more realistic picture and also some reassurance for parents/carers who may also be struggling with their own grief.

Ideally the child will have opportunities to express the emotions they are feeling. This could be through talking or it could be through play or creative activities. It is not unusual for a child to play dead or draw images of death – this is their way of making sense of what has happened.

Sources:
<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/primary-schools-supporting-bereaved-children>
Children's Encounters with Death, Bereavement, and Coping - David Balk, PhD

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