

## What is Grief?

Grief is a full range of emotions, thoughts and experiences one may endure when someone they love dies. It is important to recognize that this may entail a wide variety of emotions and experiences. These may be experienced as “negative,” such as sadness, loneliness, anger, guilt or regret. Alternatively, some may be experienced as “positive,” such as recalling a meaningful memory. Some emotions may be more complicated and interrelated such as feeling guilty for experiencing relief or anger. Grief may be experienced physically, cognitively, behaviorally, emotionally or spiritually and children do not always possess the knowledge, self-awareness or internal resources to understand what they are experiencing. It is important for all involved to remember that emotions are not actually “good” or bad,” they just “are.”

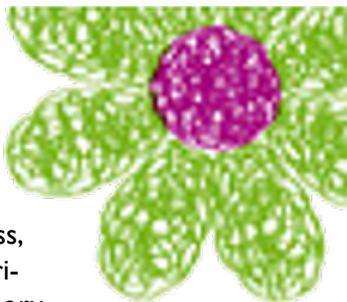
## What is Bereavement?

Bereavement is the state of grief and a time period of mourning after a loss, generally referring to the loss of a loved one. Bereavement work involves the truthful and honest experiencing of the full range of emotions which occur during one’s grieving process.

A child’s grief and his/her related needs will be unique based upon his/her individual stage of physical, emotional and cognitive development, culture and learned family patterns of expression and coping. Consistency and structure, including routines and typical activities, discipline, etc., can help to provide comfort and predictability to a potentially confusing and challenging period of time. Additionally, it is important to remember that various roles fulfilled by the loved one who died and the child’s interpersonal relationship and personal history with that person will also have a significant influence on his/her grief. A teacher, for example, can sometimes fulfill the role of a perceived “father figure” for a youth who may not have another active adult male relationship in his/her life. The lost relationship may also be much more significant to the child than others may assume, such as with the loss of a pet. Therefore, it becomes important to explore such relationships and the various perceived roles from the child’s perspective and to provide support according to his/her perspective and experience.

*What types of things did the lost loved one do with and for the youth and what roles did he/she fulfill?*

*What are some activities or items the youth can use or engage in to maintain an on-going relationship with his/her loved one?*

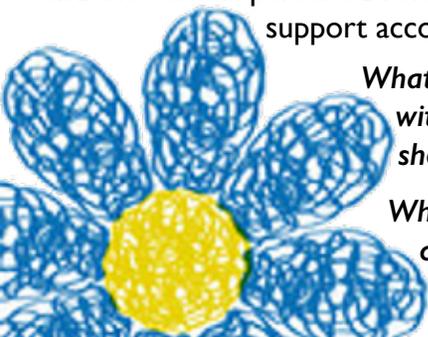


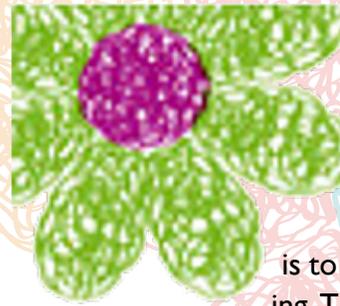
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Regardless of the stage of a youth’s development; structure, consistency and security are fundamental aspects of nurturing individual growth in all dimensions (i.e.- physical, emotional, cognitive, social, etc.) The loss of a loved one, whether it be an extended family member, friend, sibling, parent or teacher, has the potential to interrupt and/or undermine these primary needs and can negatively impact their ability to continue to develop and meet their full potential.

***You are not alone.***





## What is Mourning?

Mourning is the expression of the emotions and thoughts related to grief. Most individuals who suffer the loss of a loved one will grieve, but not all will externalize their grief. To mourn is to release those emotions in order to allow for healing. This release can be through emoting (crying, etc.), talking, writing, physical activities (running, exercise) or any other healthy method of release.

Just as children may not necessarily be able to understand what they are feeling, they also may not have the ability to express these feelings to others in plain language. Children will often express their emotions in indirect ways such as through play or drawings. They may express thematic emotions through indirect questions or interactions. For example, a youth experiencing insecurity and anxiety following a loss may begin to consistently ask her mother if her tongue is going to fall out. Such expressions may be initially interpreted as a child simply being “silly”; however, they may be suggestive of an inexpressible need. Children do not necessarily have the awareness or language for some of the emotions surrounding their grief and loss and are therefore dependent upon the adults in their lives to interpret their needs and to encourage healthy and meaningful release of those emotions.

Has the youth begun exhibiting any observable changes in patterns of behavior, affect or dialog since the loss? (Remember to focus on both direct and indirect expressions.)

Are there specific times of the day, events or other things which seem to regularly trigger these observable patterns of behavior, emotions and experiences?

## What is needed during Bereavement?

Grief and Bereavement can impact each dimension of an individual. Grief and bereavement support, therefore, also entails an equally holistic approach inclusive of all the dimensions of self.

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***Support during bereavement should focus on reinforcing the youth’s experienced security and structure.***

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Efforts can focus on answering any questions surrounding death and dying and exploring concerns regarding the physical safety of himself/herself and other people he/she loves. Primary caregivers and other adults who play an active role in the child’s life can provide him/her with the support, structure, consistency and security he/she needs. Opportunities to put words to what is being experienced and to explore and reflect on these emotions and experiences can be found using arts, crafts and other forms of play such as puppet or role play. The child should be encouraged and helped to inform the people around him/her how to support him/her during grief. Other skills can be worked on including methods for coping with heightened emotions and things he/she can do to let out some of his/her emotional and physical energy.

Grief and other challenges surrounding children’s emotional wellbeing can be expressed and manifested in a variety of other ways, ranging from behavioral and cognitive to physical dimensions. These related patterns of behavior and/or function can continue to significantly impair a child’s ability to perform within his/her social and academic realm. Challenges in succeeding in school and with peers can have a significant and potentially long-term effect on their esteem, emotional wellness and general development which can further negatively affect their ability to grieve and to grow.

*What are some interests or activities the youth enjoys that can be used to explore and express his/her emotions and experiences surrounding his/her loss (pictures, art, music etc.) or writing (journaling, short stories, poetry, etc.)?*

*What are some interests or activities the youth can use to release some of his/her energy or more challenging emotions such as anger (running, sports, hitting a pillow, yelling at a cloud, etc.)?*