

Grieving Children and Teens

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Grief is the normal response after the loss of something important or the death of a loved one. When a child or teen grieves, he often feels deep emotional sadness that can last for months and even years. Feelings of grief can suddenly appear when a smell, sound, or event brings back a memory of what has been lost.

Helping Children Adjust

You can help grieving children and teens heal by helping them to go through the stages of grief. As they move from shock to acceptance and then on to emotional healing, they will begin to feel the sadness and pain lifting.

How can you help? Young adults who lost someone they loved when they were between the ages of 6 and 12 gave the following suggestions.

- Explain what is happening. Use words and concepts the children or teens can understand. The unknown often makes what happened feel even worse.
- Describe the emotions children or teens may experience. Remind them that it is okay to cry and let others know how they feel.
- Provide times when children or teens can write or draw what they are experiencing. Encourage them to share their thoughts and emotions.
- Find people to give encouraging advice. Adults who had similar experiences when they were young can share how they dealt with their own grief. This will help children and teens to understand and accept their pain.
- Be patient. When you ask children or teens questions, patiently listen to their answers or sit with them in silence so they know they are not alone in their pain.
- Use Bible stories and age-appropriate books as teaching tools. Talk about how the people in the stories showed they were hurting and how they dealt with their grief.
- Be a good role model. Children and teens can learn to grieve in a healthy manner by watching adults who grieve well.

Although grieving often begins suddenly, it is important to remember that it is an ongoing process that requires adjustment and acceptance. Helping children and teens to overcome their grief requires adults who are committed to having a dependable, long-term presence in their lives.