

Name of Child: _____ Date: _____

When Someone Close to You Dies

When someone close to you dies, you may have many different feelings. These feelings can be very strong or just stay in the background. They come and go. They change. At times, they can be confusing and overwhelming. These feelings are called **grief**.

You may not understand your grief. You may not know what to expect over the next weeks and months. You may not know what to do or how to cope.

Your health care provider wants to help you get through this difficult time. This booklet will describe the feelings of grief. It will tell you how you can take care of yourself. This booklet will also describe how others may act, and how you might help them cope, too.

What to expect

People are different from one another. We each react to death differently. How we react also differs with who dies and what they meant to us. There is no right or wrong way to grieve.

Here are some ways people feel:

- don't believe it
- angry
- sad
- afraid
- want to blame something or someone
- shock
- lonely
- rejected
- abandoned
- depressed
- helpless
- frustrated
- empty
- regret
- guilty

These feelings don't happen in order, one after the other. They come and go. Some feelings may be stronger than others. Some may never appear.

When you first learn someone you love has died, you may feel stunned. It is hard to believe your loved one is gone.

No one knows exactly how you feel. But this booklet may help you understand your feelings when someone close to you dies.

Then you may look for answers. What happened? How did it happen? Why did it happen?

It may be hard to accept how life has changed. Pictures or things that belonged to the loved one may be comforting or upsetting.

You may cry very hard at times, or not cry at all. You may be angry. You may have trouble sleeping or eating. When you do sleep, you may have nightmares. You may feel pains and think you are sick or dying.

You may think you see the person who has died, and then remember that he or she is dead. You may have conversations with the person who had died.

Weeks or months later, you may realize that you will never see your loved one again, and may feel very, very sad. You may become very quiet and stay away from people. You may forget how to do things you used to do all the time. You may forget things you used to know.

Things you used to enjoy may not be fun anymore. You may feel that others who are having fun are not being sensitive to your feelings. You may see nothing good in the future. You may wonder why you are alive. You may wish you were dead instead of the loved one. You may feel like you are going crazy.

Grief is an energy, and you must let yourself feel it before it will soften. How long these feelings last is different for each of us. What was your relationship with the loved one? What are your experiences with death? How is your own health? If you have people to talk to and be there for you, you may feel better sooner.

Slowly, the grief may change. In months, you may slowly begin to eat and sleep again. You may start to go out. Then, a holiday or birthday may remind you of your loved one, and the grief may be harder. Then the grief will fade away again. As feelings of grief soften, you may feel guilty for having fun. You don't get over grief. You learn to live with it. Most people need six months to two years to grieve. Some people may need more time. There is no right or wrong amount of time for grieving.



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How to Deal with Your Grief

Go to the funeral or memorial service. Services are for the people still living, as well as the person who died. They are safe places to cry, to talk about the person who died and to pay respects. You will see that you are not alone with your sadness.

Tell someone how you feel. Find someone who will listen to you. If you cannot find someone to listen, write down your feelings every day. This is called keeping a journal. It will help you express your feelings. Later, you can read the journal and see how your feelings changed over time.

Do your everyday things. Eat at your normal eating times. Go to bed to sleep at your normal sleeping times. Exercise. Go to work or school, as usual. Do these things even when you don't feel like it.

Let others grieve at their own pace. Grief comes and goes, and everyone does it differently and at different times. When people who live together grieve differently, it can be hard. One person may be angry when the other is sad. Accept how other people grieve. Keep talking to one another, even if you feel differently.

How to Help Others Who Are Grieving

After a death, many people ask, “What can I do to help?”

Be there for them. Spend time with people who are grieving. Let them express their feelings. Listen. They may need to say the same thing over many, many times. They may say little. They may cry a lot, or not at all. Do not judge them. There is no right or wrong way to grieve.

Be yourself. Share your feelings of shock, loss and sadness with the people who are grieving. You may feel uncomfortable, but it may help them. They may need to hear that others cared for their loved one. It may help them feel it’s all right for them to grieve, too. Do not say you know how they feel. Share *your* feelings.

Be helpful. Everyday tasks may be very hard for a person who is grieving. Shopping for food or washing clothes may become a big job. Look at how the family is doing, and ask what they might need. Do they need a good, cooked meal? Do they need someone to make a phone call, or go to the bank, or babysit? What would help them now?

Remember them. Grief takes time. Sometimes it is harder than others. It often returns on birthdays, anniversaries and holidays. Make notes in your calendar. At these times call the person who is grieving, send a note or plan a meal together. You don’t have to talk about the loss. Just being here can help. The person who is grieving may start to talk about the loss.



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Is It Grief or Is There a Problem?

There is no right or wrong way to grieve. But sometimes people have trouble grieving, or the loss of someone close sets off a problem. A problem will not get better on its own and may get worse. The problem needs to be taken care of. Help is needed if the person becomes a threat to himself, herself or to others. What are the signs of a problem?

Many bad dreams that get worse. Often, if you talk to someone about bad dreams, they may go away. If they continue or get worse, help is needed.

Unable to care for self. Sometimes people may become so sad or upset that they stop eating, dressing, bathing or grooming. If this goes on long enough where they become unsafe or unhealthy, help is needed. Sometimes they need help grieving. Then they can take care of themselves again.

Sick or afraid they are sick. Sometimes, after the stress of a loss, people can get sick. Sometimes, people who are grieving notice their symptoms more, and think they are sick. When someone close dies, people may gain weight, lose weight, get many colds, headaches, migraines, upset stomachs or pounding hearts. If they get sick so much that they miss a lot of work or school, help is needed.

Taking risks. Some people who have trouble grieving may express their upset or sad feelings by doing things that hurt themselves or risk the well-being of others. They may work too hard. They may abuse drugs or alcohol. They may drive too fast. They may act like daredevils. When people do not act safely, they need help.



When people do not act safely, they need help.

What kind of help is needed and where to get it?

A good place to start is a **doctor or nurse practitioner**. Make sure a physical illness is not causing the problem. If it is not a physical problem, the health care provider may suggest counseling.

People who have too much stress at once may need some extra help. Sometimes the person needs help grieving or needs to learn how to grieve. In a **bereavement group** many people facing a loss meet to talk about their feelings. A **bereavement counselor** is a specialist in helping people grieve. **Ministers, priests, rabbis and shamen** help people cope with losses, too.

Sometimes the best way to get help is through a **counselor or therapist**. These specialists are trained to help people deal with their feelings and practice healthy behaviors. They may have degrees in **psychology, psychiatry, psychiatric nursing, social work or counseling**.

Another place to get help is the **Employee Assistance Program** at work. Their programs may not cost anything.

There are also many places to get help in the community. Here is a list of some places that help with grieving:

New Song Center for Bereaved Children
6947 East McDonald Drive
Phoenix, AZ
(480) 951-8985

Phoenix InterFaith Counseling
555 West Glendale Avenue
Phoenix, AZ
(602) 248-9247

Catholic Support Services

1825 West Northern

Phoenix, AZ

(602) 997-6105

Compassionate Friends

Call Doreen Sexton at (602) 752-1832 or

P.O. Box 3696

Oak Brook, IL 60522-3696

(708) 990-0010

fax: (708) 990-0246

Grief Recovery Helpline

(800) 445-4808

Hospice Education Institute Hospice Link

(800) 331-1620

Center for Loss in Multiple Birth

P.O. Box 1064

Palmer, AK 99645-1064

(907) 746-6123

National Sudden Infant Death Syndrome Resource Center

8201 Greensboro Drive, Suite 600

McLean, VA 22102

(703) 821-8955 ext. 249

fax: (703) 821-2098

RTS Berevment Services

24 hour hotline for miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy and newborn death.

(602) 239-2121

There are also many books and videos you can borrow from The Emily Center, or from your public library. Here are a few:

Borg, S. and Lasker, J. (1988). When Pregnancy Fails: Families Coping with Miscarriage, Ectopic Pregnancy, Stillbirth and Infant Death. New York, NY: Bantam Books.

Cole, E. (1992). Rainbow's Remedy. Scottsdale, AZ: Eloise Cole's Creative Resources for Death Education. Video.

Fitzgerald, H. (1992). The Grieving Child: A Parent's Guide. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Grollman, E. A. (1987). Living When a Loved One Has Died. (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Beacon Press

Krementz, J. (1981). How it Feels When a Parent Dies. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

Kubler-Ross, E. (1969). On Death and Dying. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Kubler-Ross, E. (1983). On Children and Death. New York, NY:

Kushner, H. S. (1981). When Bad Things Happen to Good People. New York, NY: Avon Books.



If you have any questions or concerns,
 call your child's doctor or call _____

If you want to know more about child health and illness,
visit our library at The Emily Center at Phoenix Children's Hospital
1919 East Thomas Road
Phoenix, AZ 85016
602-546-1400
www.phoenixchildrenshospital.com

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#111 • Written by Pam Edwards, RNC, MA, CCRN • Illustrated by Dennis Swain
This handout is also available in Spanish as #258/111s.