

Parent Information

Children's reactions to traumatic incidents

This information sheet covers some common reactions to traumatic incidents for children in primary school. Individual children will react differently to the same experience.

In general children of most ages will show a variety of normal grief reactions:

Body talk	Hollowness in stomach Tightness in chest Tightness in throat Breathlessness, feeling short of breath Lack of energy Dry mouth
Thoughts	Disbelief Confusion Preoccupation
Feelings	Fear Sadness Anger Guilt Relief Loneliness
Behaviours	Sleep disturbances Appetite disturbances Social withdrawal Regressive behaviour (behaviours typical of younger children) Dreams of the deceased Avoiding reminders of the deceased Crying Visiting places and carrying objects that remind of or belong to the deceased

(Adapted from J.W. Worden, *Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy*, 2nd ed., Springer, New York, 1991.)

What Parents Can Do To Help... .

➤ Communicate:

- ◆ Listen –answer all questions honestly, clearly, sensitively. Be aware and accepting of repeated questions.
- ◆ Acknowledge – accept their feelings without telling them how they should be feeling.
- ◆ Explain – help them understand the grief reactions they may observe in their family, that they are normal reactions and will not go on forever. Help them understand that do not need to fill the gap/role left by the dead person.
- ◆ Reassure – Reassure that they are still loved and will be cared for. If necessary, reassure that you cannot “catch” death, that no one else is likely to die yet.
- ◆ Gradual acceptance – help them come to terms with the loss and its meaning by talking about the relationship, sharing good and bad memories.
- ◆ Assist understanding – be aware of the child’s level of understanding – talk through confusion or misunderstanding.

➤ Accept normal grieving behaviour (initially)

➤ Re-establish routines – ensure as much consistency and continuity as possible.

➤ Network

- ◆ Use family and friends
- ◆ Use schools and teachers
- ◆ Use counsellors

Adapted from © Lesley Tunnecliffe, 1996 *Parents as Helpers*