

LET'S UNDERSTAND GRIEF



DISCOVER

LEVELS OF UNDERSTANDING |
COMMON RESPONSE & BEHAVIOURS |
MINDFUL COMMUNICATION |
PROVIDING SUPPORT |
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES |

GRIEF THROUGHOUT THE AGES

AGES	LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING	COMMON RESPONSES/BEHAVIOURS
9 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Begins to understand that change and loss is out of one's control.• Develops fear of death and of others dying.• May feel guilt and blame self for loss or change; see it as punishment for bad behavior.• Magical thinking; may see self as cause of loss or adverse change that has occurred.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grief ebbs & flows• Aggression• Possessiveness• Regression• Somatic complaints• School phobia• Exaggerated fears• Clinginess• Sleeping issues (nightmares)• Behavioural reactions – acting out at school, home, etc.• Changes in play
12 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has a realistic view of change and loss, and how it can be out of one's control.• Ask specific questions about loss. Interested in the specific details. When it comes to death – interested in gory details.• Concerned with practical questions. (When will I see my Teacher? How will my family's life style change? Etc.)• Identifies strongly with deceased.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Upset by the disruption in their lives• Blame others for the loss• Separation anxiety, some denial and/or guilt• Difficulty concentrating• Decline in school performance• Want to be "fixers"• Sleeping issues• Difficulty concentrating (decision making)• Behavioural reactions – acting out at school, home, etc.
18 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recognizes that life is fragile; death and change is inevitable and irreversible.• May worry about own death or future life changes.• Often tries not to think or talk about the loss.• Sometimes hides feelings so as not to look different from peers.• Ponders and questions religious and philosophical beliefs.• Often angry at particular individuals involved in loss or change.• Fears the future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aggression• Academic issues• Possessiveness• Somatic complaints• Phobias• Increased risk taking• Increased drug/alcohol use• Defiance• Delinquent acts• Suicidal ideation• Difficulty concentrating• Connection seeking• Withdraw from supports

SUPPORTING THROUGH MINDFUL COMMUNICATION

1. **Listen, Truly Listen** – Talking isn't always helpful; listening is. Silence can invite more sharing. Advice or comments are not always necessary; often the **youth just needs to be heard**. Actively listen by repeating what you hear them say to ensure you are understanding them correctly by using phrases like "I hear you" and "Tell me more". Let me know you heard them, for example, "Wow, it sounds like you had a really tough day at school."

2. **Be Present** – When youth are talking, especially about their concerns, pay attention and be present with your eyes, ears, and your full self. Try to stay tuned into them.

3. **Pose Open-Ended Questions** – Try not to be intrusive or take over the conversation, but **simply stay gently curious** and ask questions such as "What is that like for you?" or "What else happened?"

4. **Follow Their Lead** – **Let youth take the lead in the conversation instead of asking questions you want answered**. Name and **validate feelings and emotions**, and **reflect back on the information they give you**. Such as "Sounds like you felt really lonely." We can't fix or take away their pain, but we can validate their painful feelings. And if they don't want to talk, that's okay.

5. **Be Authentic** – It's okay to show and to respond to youth with real emotion. Model for them by sharing how you are feeling, for example "I feel really sad when ____ happens too, or I also felt frustrated and angry when ____ happened." Genuine responses usually make youth feel more comfortable sharing and talking with you.

6. **Listen and Talk During the "In Between" Times** – Sometimes great conversations happen during those "in- between" of life, like driving, walking, or during an activity.

7. **Honesty Matters** – When we tell youth the truth in simple, developmentally appropriate language, we build trust and model for them that they too can be honest with us. **Being honest also can mean sharing that you do not have all the answers, and that is okay**.

8. **Take Time to Share** – Set a routine within your time with the youth to share whatever it is they are feeling or how their day went. You can initiate this by sharing how you feel or by talking about yourself, rather than just asking questions.

9. **Make Conversations Places of Comfort** – When youth talk with you, **you want them to feel heard, and perhaps relieved, inspired, or recharged**. **Ask what they may want or need from you**, such as advice, help problem solving, or simply listening. Offer your ear as well as words of encouragement.

10. **Be Spontaneous!** – Do the unexpected and mix things up, like doing homework in the park or eating lunch in the grass outside. These unexpected shared opportunities can generate fun, a sense of connection that is the basis for more talking and sharing, and creating new memories.



Remember...

Communication is difficult, and no one is perfect. These 10 tips are just suggestions, not absolute "must dos." Find what works for the youth you are supporting. If a youth chooses not to talk, simply respect that and let know you will talk to them whenever they are ready.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS WHEN PROVIDING SUPPORT

1. Grief is Normal – It is a normal part of the human experience. **There is no right or wrong way to grieve.** Grief for youth is both **emotional and physical.** Youth benefit from physical outlets since they don't always have the words to talk about it. Go for a walk – walking and talking is a great way for youth to process emotions and feelings through communication.

2. Grieving Kids can Feel Alone – Grief can be very isolating and many youth can feel alone or misunderstood. Providing connection and doing things to enrich your bond with youth will help them feel less isolated and alone.

3. Don't Assume – Don't assume what they are feeling or think you have all the answers. **Just because a youth looks fine doesn't mean all is well and just because a youth is having a hard time doesn't mean something is wrong or needs to be fixed.**

4. You Don't Have to Fix It – Youth benefit from open, honest, and understanding adults who don't assume and instead validate their experiences. **Listening to a youth and being a consistent presence in their lives matters.**

5. Try to Understand – It is more important that you understand the youth, rather than try to fix their pain.

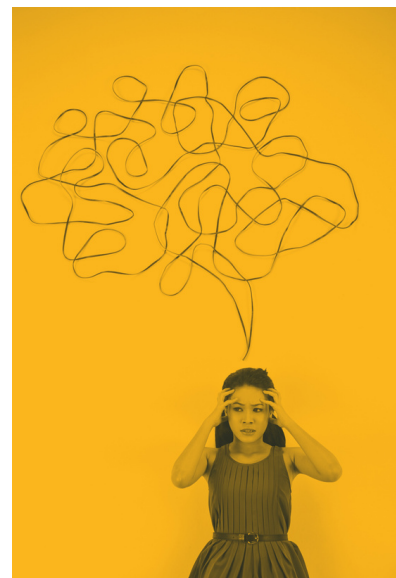
6. Be Willing Not to Know – It's okay that you don't have all the answers to the question's youth may ask, and if you don't know their every thought. **Every grief experience is unique and sometimes there's a lot of uncertainty or confusion.**

7. Youth Need the Truth – Youth understand their feelings, change, loss, and the future through facts and the truth. Lies never help. **Use facts and not euphemisms or clichés to talk about loss and change.** With the truth, youth can learn and develop healthy coping skills.

8. Modify your Expectations – Don't expect a youth or child to think or feel like an adult. **Youth grieve in spurts,** their questions vary as they try to understand the situation and their feelings.

9. Experiences Grief is Unique – No two youth grieve the same. Everyone experiences grief differently depending on where they are developmentally, their support systems, the nature of their relationships, their window of tolerance, and many other factors.

10. Be Prepared – Knowledge is power. Use teachable moments to educate youth about change and loss. Learn how to **talk openly about the subject matter, using honest language and creating a safe space for present and future needs.**



RESOURCES FOR FURTHER KNOWLEDGE

Invisible String by: Patrice Karst -

"Specifically written to address children's fear of being apart from the ones they love, The Invisible String delivers a particularly compelling message in today's uncertain times that though we may be separated from the ones we care for, whether through anger, or distance or even death, love is the unending connection that binds us all, and, by extension, ultimately binds every person on the planet to everyone else."

The Invisible Web by: Patrice Karst -

"All of our strings to one another are interconnected in The Invisible Web. "It breathes as we breathe, pulsating all over our Earth, the single heartbeat of life and love. And do you know what that makes us all? One Very Big Family!" This uplifting inspirational title for all ages puts the concept of "six degrees of separation" into a new context that urges readers to recognize, respect, and celebrate their infinite, unbreakable bonds with the entire human family."

And the People Stayed Home by: Kitty O'Meara -

"O'Meara's thoughtful poem about the pandemic, quarantine, and the future suggests there is meaning to be found in our shared experience of the coronavirus and conveys an optimistic message about the possibility of profound healing for people and the planet. Her words encourage us to look within, listen deeply, and connect with ourselves and the earth in order to heal."

Talking To Children About Death and Dying: National Alliance for Grieving Children.

https://childrengrieve.org/images/website/Resources/NAGC_1_Talking_About_Death_DF_eids.pdf

NAGC Hero Toolkit: In Support of Super Heroic Grieving Children & Teens.

https://childrengrieve.org/images/website/Resources/NAGC_Hero_Toolkit-WEB.pdf

Responding to Change and Loss: In Support of Children, Teens & Families: National Alliance for Grieving Children. <https://www.newyorklife.com/assets/foundation/docs/pdfs/responding-to-change-and-loss-en.pdf>

Canadian Mental Health Association: <https://cmha.ca/brochure/grieving/>

The Window of Tolerance: Supporting the Wellbeing of Children and Young People (Information and ideas for families and schools reconnecting after lockdown) – Government of Jersey. <https://www.gov.je/SiteCollectionDocuments/Education/ID%20The%20Window%20of%20Tolerance%202020%2006%2016.pdf>

25 Fun Mindfulness Activities for Children and Teens: Courtney E. Ackerman – Positive Psychology. <https://positivepsychology.com/mindfulness-for-children-kids-activities/>
