

# WELL-BEING SNAPSHOTS K-7

## DEALING WITH CHANGES IN FAMILY STRUCTURES

Change of any kind can be hard. For children, who have yet to fully develop the parts of their brains that can organize their thoughts and manage big feelings and who have little control over their environment, change can be that much more complicated. Children grieve loss the same way adults do, but express it primarily through changes in behaviour, waves of emotions, and regression.

To support your children through big shifts in family structures and dynamics, we need to recognize the depth of its impact, given how most of a child's sense of security still depends on the stability of their family relationships. Even when changes to the structure might be considered positive, like having a new baby join the crew, it creates a forced need to adjust. Your child might experience all sorts of perceived losses connected to the change and it is important to validate those feelings and support them through it. Your child might be trying to hide how they feel. They may have secret worries that can't be addressed if you don't know what they are. Children may also be aware that the loss has impacted you, and may want to protect you from further distress by withholding their own feelings from you. Creating regular openings for sharing with calm reassurance that you are truly okay with however they may be feeling, is important. What we

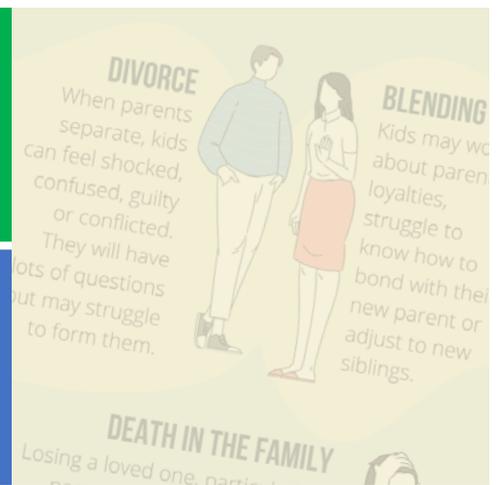
know from the research is that big feelings will find their way out somehow, if not allowed out from the beginning, they will bubble and spill over later.

Unique types of changes come with each family structure shift. When a new child arrives, biologically or through adoption, for instance, the parent's attention will be distributed differently. If separating, your child might be concerned they have done something to cause the conflict. If there has been a death of a parent, a child may feel responsible for taking over their role. The way your child adapts to any of those changes will depend on their stage of development, how they perceive the associated losses, and the support they receive along the way. If you find yourself concerned about how your child is managing or if you yourself are feeling overwhelmed by the changes or how to talk about them with your child, it can be helpful to find a professional with training and experience in grief and loss or family adjustments.

Consider significant changes or losses your child has experienced and notice how they have done their best to manage those challenges. Who is there for them to listen and validate their experience? If more support is needed, who will help your child find that extra help? When well supported, most kids' resilience shines through and leads them out the other end of the tunnel. ●

### RESOURCE LINKS:

[Caring for Kids](#) resource  
[Canada Public Health](#) resource  
[TED Talk: The best thing you can do to support...](#)  
[Parenting in the Trenches](#) podcast  
{S6: Grief & Loss}



## WHEN CHANGE HAPPENS in my family



### A NEW BABY OR ADOPTION

A new addition to the family means significant adjustments in availability and family dynamics. Kids may feel displaced or jealous and may act out or regress.



### DEATH IN THE FAMILY

Losing a loved one, particularly a parent, can be confusing and overwhelming for a child. They may feel guilt, deep sadness, worry, anger or respond by shutting down, or regressing.



### SIGNIFICANT LOSS

When big life losses happen (move, loss of job, friend moves away, unavailable or parent, illness/injury, etc), kids sense the stress and may become more anxious, angry or easily upset.



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