# WFLL-BEING SNAPSHOTS K-7

# CHILDREN GRIEVING LOSSES

t might appear that children are too young to experience grief after loss because they process it differently than adults. Children actively walk through a grief process but because of their stage of brain development, won't have the capacity to hold sadness and loss in the background for long periods of time the way adults can. Instead, they weave in and out of emotions, meaning they may appear "fine" one day, and then not the next.

Children don't yet have the language to express the feelings associated with experiencing a significant or unexpected loss. Instead of using words, they are more likely to reveal their grieving process through signs, symptoms, and behaviours. Paying attention to changes in behaviour or play, mood swings, or acting out can help you detect if your child is grieving. They may struggle with concentration, their sleeping and eating patterns may shift and leaving your side may become uncomfortable or even scary for them.

Modeling healthy ways of naming uncomfortable feelings is a first step in showing your child they are not alone or broken. Sharing our feelings can help normalize the impacts of loss in our lives and allow for support and connection. Sadness, confusion, worry, and irritability or anger are natural parts of the grieving process. Help validate your child's experience and provide comfort and reassurance.

Grief can pop up at different times in our lives depending on our stage of development, so expect feelings of loss to re-emerge down the road when they are ready to process those in new ways. We used to understand grief in a linear way, walking through 5 stages of grief in order. We now understand that while there are common features to the grieving experience, rarely do they happen in a predictable way. Grief is unique and can feel messy. Having someone witness our pain, validate where we are at, and comfort us is powerfully healing.

Difficulty concentrating

Sleeping Problems



# **Difficulty concentrating**

ieving takes a toll on our minds and in particular our abil locus, problem solve and organize thoughts. They may ap tracted, 'lost' in thought or unmotivated. They may have king decisions or managing more than one tax. Some ch performance in school is impacted.

## **Sleeping Problems**

t is common for sleep routines and patters to be thrown off aft sss. Children may have difficulty falling or staying asleep, they have increased nightmares or have trouble turning their though off about their worries and fears.

### **Clinginess or anxiety**

After a loss, your child may show signs of wariness about separating from you. They may worry more, cry more or feel more inrtable. It is common for children to want to be hild requerity to stay nearby and perhaps axoidant of going places or being with other people. Particularly for early school aged children, a fear that anyone could de at any time may develop.

### **Developmental regression**

Children may regress in their development after experiencing a gnificant loss. They may have toileting issues or wet the bed. They ay revert to old comforts or attachments such as holding a stuffed imal or blanket, sucking a thumb, or wanting to sleep next to you.

### Changes in behaviour or play

Kids process all sorts of experiences through play. You may find you child acting out stories of loss with their stuffies or toys. Behaviours often change as well, as they attempt to express their grief without having the words to do so. You may notice concerning behaviours on acting out that in ways that weren't there before.

### **Feelings of guilt**

of how children make sense of their world, it is c m to feel at fault or to blame when so net example to use the event of the event

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**RESOURCE LINKS:** 

Parenting in the Trenches Podcast episodes S6.E1&4 When to Seek Help for your grieving child The Rabbit Listened, by Cori Doerrfeld