

WELL-BEING SNAPSHOTS K-7

CHILDREN GRIEVING LOSSES

It 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. ●

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

