



HELPING CHILDREN THROUGH GRIEF

Unexpected events like death can be difficult and, like adults, children express emotions by grieving. Yet, children may not demonstrate grief in the same manner. The following information is provided for parents and others who may find themselves in a position of guiding a child through the grieving process. In addition, if the children in your family need extra assistance, counseling supports are available at the school to provide services. Please read the information below and let Canyons District's Responsive Services Department know if we can provide additional support to help you and your families.

Signs of Grieving in Children and Adolescents

- Sadness, anxiety, chronic fatigue, anger, denial, shock, confusion, extended depression. Watch for changes in their normal behavioral functioning.
- Inability to sleep, nightmares, loss of appetite, prolonged fear of being alone
- Frequent physical complaints such as stomachaches and headaches

Helping Children and Adolescents Grieve

Long-term denial or avoidance of grief is unhealthy for children and may resurface later with more severe problems. Here is a list of things you can do to help a child overcome grief:

- Answer their questions simply and honestly. Only offer details that they can absorb. Don't overload them with information.
- Give them a chance to talk about their fears and validate their feelings. Offer a simple expression of sorrow and take time to listen.
- People are repetitive in their grief. Respond patiently to their uncertainty and concerns. It can take a long time to recover from a loss.
- Children can be physical in their grief. Watch their bodies and look for any changes.
- Some children need to talk about a traumatic experience all the time and others don't want to talk at all. This is normal. While it is important not to force children to talk about their experiences, it is also critical for parents to let them know they are willing and available to listen.

- Giving children choices helps them feel some control when their environment has felt out of control. Choosing food, clothes, what games to play—any appropriate choices—can be helpful.
- Children still need discipline. It helps them feel safe to know their parents won't let them get away with too much and that normal rules still apply.
- Parents will want to establish daily routines as soon as they can. Meals, bedtimes and other regular parts of their day can help children feel comforted and know what to expect.
- Sometimes children react to trauma and stress with anger. They may feel it gives them a sense of control. Adults should be understanding but hold children responsible for their behavior. It is not OK to hurt others and break other home and school rules, even if students are stressed.
- Parents should remember to take good care of themselves, too. This will help them have the energy necessary to take care of their children. Their ability to cope with traumatic events will help their children cope, as well.

The following websites give more information and tips for parents:

- http://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/recovering/part_pg3.html
- <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/conditions/helping-children-cope-loss>

Canyons District counselors are available for your child if they need a little help processing grief. Students also have access to free services at the Canyons Family Center housed at Mount Jordan Middle, 9351 S. Mountaineer Lane. The phone number to the Canyons Family Center is 801-826-8190.

In addition, if emergency help is needed guiding students through the grieving process, students and their families have all-day-and-all-night access to licensed counselors at the University of Utah's Neuropsychiatric Institute via the mobile app, SafeUT.