



Grief is a normal and healthy response to death and loss.

Within every child and adult there is a natural ability to respond to great loss.

Each person chooses their individual path for expressing grief.

Help begins with understanding.

Children and Loss

- Death touches the lives of children regularly.
- What may seem normal or abnormal for adults may be quite the opposite for children.
- Children's expressions of grief are both similar and different from adults.

Numerous Factors Affect the Grief Process

- Each person is affected by grief in a different way, each person's experience is unique.
- The age of the child and the age of the person who died can affect the grief process.
- The nature of the death affects the grief process.
- The available support system affects the grief process and the ability to cope.

Children's Understanding of Death

- Varies with age.
- Young children often do not initially respond to hearing someone has died.
- Young children do not comprehend the concept of death but do react to loss.
- Older children are more aware of death's finality and the impact upon them and others.
- Teens may act indifferent to the death as a protection against feelings.
- Children are repetitive and physical in their grief, often their feelings are expressed through behavior or questions that search for a meaning.
- Children grieve as part of a family.
- Children need choices.

Coping with Fear & Guilt

- The most basic feeling of loss for a child is that of fear.
- Children express uncertainty, they question...
"What happened?" "Who will die next?" "Will my parent die?" "Will my parents be ok?" "Who will take care of me?" "Where will I go if I die?" "Why did it happen to me? ...and especially ask "Will I die?"
- Children often experience an unrealistic sense of responsibility. They wonder if they may have caused the death or may regret actions that were taken (or not taken) that may have prevented the death.
- Grief can result in anger, especially if there are unresolved issues between the child and the person who died.

How can you help our youth? By understanding grief, you can help to positively affect one person that in turn affects the whole family, and by extension the community as a whole is healthier and more able to effectively handle the grief and loss that are a part of living. By helping youth learn about grief, loss and how to develop coping strategies at an early age you can help them learn how to deal with stress, shape their response to future loss, and help them avoid the problems that can emerge later that could affect their emotional and physical health.

For more information and support, call Hospice of Hilo at 969-1733.