

Helping Children Cope With Grief



10 Common Myths About Children and Grief

1. Grief and mourning are the same experience
2. A child's grief and mourning is short in duration
3. There is a predictable and orderly stage-like progression to the experiences of grief and mourning
4. Infants and toddlers are too young to grief and mourn
5. Children are not affected by the grief and mourning of the adults who surround them
6. The trauma of childhood bereavement always leads to a maladjusted life
7. Children are better off if they don't attend funerals
8. Children who express tears are being "weak" and harming themselves in the long run
9. Adults should be able to instantly teach children about religion and death
10. The goal in helping bereaved children is to "get them over" grief and death

Factors Influencing Unique Responses In Children

- The child's relationship with the person who died
- The nature of the death
- The support system available to the child
- Child's chronological/developmental age
- The personality of the child
- Child's prior experiences with death
- Ritual/funeral experience
- Cultural background



The Healing Process Of Grief In Children

EVASION (from the new reality)

ENCOUNTER (with the new reality)

RECONCILIATION (to the new reality)

Six Reconciliation Needs of Childhood Mourning

1. Experience and express outside of oneself the reality of the death
2. Move toward the pain of the loss while being nurtured physically, emotionally, and spiritually
3. Learn to convert the relationship with the person who has died from one of interactive presence to one of appropriate memory
4. Develop a new self-identity based on a life without the person who has died
5. Relate the experience of the death to a context of meaning
6. Experience a continued supportive and stabilizing adult presence in future years.



Informing A Child Of A Death

- Use language appropriate to the level of the child
- Tell the truth, identify the cause of death
- Explain what "dead" means:

"A person's (name) body has stopped working and it won't work any more."

- Don't anticipate that the child will respond in "appropriate" adult ways
- Respond to any questions honestly ("I don't know")
- Demonstrate support

