



## Helping kids to cope with grief

A lot of people have very wrong ideas when it comes to helping children to deal with grief. Sometimes these misconceptions can prove to be more damaging than helpful. Listed here are several myths commonly associated with grief. Also offered are some alternatives you may need if you are helping a child or young person who is grieving or if you have lost a loved one.

### **Myth #1: Tears are a sign of weakness.**

Tears are a normal way to release the intense emotions a grieving person feels inside. Encouraging a child to withhold his or her feelings is encouraging potential emotional problems.

### **Myth #2: It is best to avoid talking about the death with or around a child who is grieving.**

People who are grieving the loss of a loved one usually are grateful to those who keep memories alive, and who are not afraid to talk about the death. Depending on the age of a child, he or she may want to know more about the deceased person or details about the death.

### **Myth #3: Once you're over the grief process, you have stopped caring about a loved one.**

Recovering from a significant loss is healthy. The love a youngster has developed for someone close who has died will last long after he or she has recovered from the shock of the death.

### **Myth #4: Children should be sheltered from grief and other strong emotions.**

Kids need to vent their feelings about the loss of a loved one just as adults do. Adults

need to explain the loss and the grieving process to children according to their ages. This will help children to better understand the unaccustomed feelings they are experiencing.

### **Myth #5: The grieving process is the same for everyone, and you can identify each phase in order.**

The grieving process is very complicated and differs from person to person. You will not see a grieving child changing neatly from one defined stage to another. In fact it is common for people to drift back and forth between the stages of anger, denial and acceptance.

The loss of a loved one – whether it is a parent, grandparent, sibling or other relative – can be especially difficult for children. Death is one of life's most stressful events and is a period that needs to be handled with extreme sensitivity.

### **If you need more help ...**

If you know a young person who is grieving or you need some help getting through this tough time yourself, call Crisis Services, at (810) 257-3740 or toll free at (877) 346-3648, where a counselor is always available. TTY users call (810) 232-6310.

Other Genesee County Community Mental Health handouts include: *Helping children recover from loss*, *Families facing loss*, *Kids and divorce*, *Building emotionally healthy families*, *Getting along at home and Stress and your child*. © [www.genhs.org](http://www.genhs.org)