



Families facing loss

Imagine that your family has just experienced a loss of some kind. Will you know how to handle the intense emotions that accompany a crisis?

Different family members may have different reactions to a loss. These responses may range from anger and denial to shock and depression. It's natural to have many reactions to a loss.

Losing someone or something close is a different experience for a youngster, compared to an adult. A young person may consider an event a crisis, when a parent or older sibling may consider that same event trivial.

For example, moving to a new neighborhood, changing schools, losing close friends, losing a pet or a favorite teacher or losing a meaningful object may be traumatic events in a young person's eyes. Because they view crises differently, children may react in ways that adults may not understand.

How can you tell if your child is in crisis?

In response to a crisis, your 3 to 10-year old child may:

- become more active and restless or easily upset
- become quiet or withdrawn, not wanting to talk about the experience
- be afraid of loud noises, rain, thunderstorms, etc.
- be angry and act out by hitting, screaming and throwing
- feel guilt that he may have caused the loss because of a previous wish or past behavior
- worry about what will happen to him or herself
- be afraid to be left alone or to sleep alone
- revert to infant behaviors – thumb-sucking, bedwetting, wanting a bottle, wanting to be held
- Experience symptoms of illness – nausea, headache or fever

Heightened emotions follow loss or change

Children can experience the same heightened emotions as you do following a significant loss or change. If the loss occurred suddenly, emotions tend to be intensified because the child was not prepared for it. This is a time for increased sensitivity to your child's feelings. You may want to leave a night light on for your child, rock him or her to sleep and be a little lenient with some household rules.

Most reactions to a crisis or loss are normal and need to be handled with sensitivity and tolerance. No matter what the crisis or loss, it's hard for children to understand what has happened. Some youngsters, depending on their age, will need your continued guidance and understanding to help them through the experience. How you help your child may have a lasting effect.

If your child has experienced a loss at home, be sure to share that information with your child's school teacher. Other understanding adults can help ease your child's way through this difficult time.

If you need more help...

No matter what the situation is, it's always helpful to talk about problems with someone. You may need to seek professional assistance. If you need more advice, call Crisis Services, at (810) 257-3740 or toll free at (877) 346-3648, where a counselor is always available.

Other Genesee Health System Prevention Pieces include: *Helping children recover from loss*, *Helping kids cope with grief*, *Kids and divorce* and *Stress and your child*. ©

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