

Supporting Little Sisters Through Grief

We know that grief and loss can be an uncomfortable subject to talk about with your Little Sister. The following is some general information about what grief looks like in children, and how you can support your Little Sister if they are experiencing it.

What is Grief?

Grief is what a person goes through when they experience a loss. A loss can be anything—from death, loss of a home, divorce, loss of a pet, etc.

Variables that influence how children experience grief:

- The level of secure attachments the child has before the loss (i.e. a steady parent, stable home)
- The other changes that may occur after a loss (i.e. does the child have to move? have a new caregiver? switch schools?)
- The degree of safety and support they have in their environment (like you!)
- The role the deceased played in the child's daily life
- The nature of the death (did she have time to prepare or was it unexpected?)
- The amount of age-appropriate information the girl is given



How grief displays itself in children:

- Every child is different and it depends on the girl's age and where she is developmentally
- Physical reactions—including stomach problems, low-energy, and changes in sleeping and eating habits
- Emotional reactions- including sadness, loneliness, anger, guilt, self-blame and fear (children usually grieve in 'spurts' as they can only handle intense emotions for a short period of time, so it may seem like they are upset one minute, and fine the next)
- Physiological reactions—confusion, lack of concentration
- Grief may be revisited at different milestones (i.e. a birthday, holiday, personal achievement)



How to support your Little Sister:

- Provide simple, accurate and honest information about the death or her loss (check with parent/guardian first about what they've told their daughter)
- Let them express their grief and emotions as they need to (as long as they aren't hurting themselves or others)
- Use the word 'dead' instead of euphemisms like 'gone to sleep' or 'gone to a better place' so as not to confuse the child
- Be a stable support in their life
- Understand and respect the family's belief system around death (i.e. religious and spiritual beliefs)
- Maintain appropriate rules and boundaries in your relationship as per before
- Let your Little Sister know you care for her
- Get support for yourself from your Big Sisters caseworker

