



“Mummy, what you crying for . . . you crying for Papa?”

“Yeah baby, Mummy crying for Papa!”

“Where Papa gone Mummy?”

“He’s gone to sleep now.”

“Wake him up then!”

“No baby, he’s gone up into the sky now.”

“Me want my Papa . . .”

What is grief?

Sometimes adults can be so sad with their own suffering that children’s pain can be overlooked. Kids grieve too and from an early age, but not in the same way that adults do. They feel the same loss and are likely to show their grief in different ways. They grieve in bursts, that is, they move in and out of grief. One day they will seem to be okay and another day they will show that they are not okay. They often have more needs at this time, and can become more demanding. They are only trying to get closeness, care and support. They are only trying to understand it all. They often don’t have the words to explain their feelings and will show them in the way they behave.

Times when kids grieve

- when a parent or grandparent dies or goes away
- when a pet dies or gets lost
- if they have a disability or are in hospital

- being injured or abused
- when they move to a strange place
- when they have long periods of separation from a parent
- when they leave behind friends or school
- when the family splits up

Kids might show grief by

- physical pain, such as a headache or stomach ache
- sleeping problems or bad dreams
- eating problems (not eating or eating too much)
- fear of being left alone
- being naughty or mean to others
- being very clingy (wanting to be near certain people)
- easily upset
- temper tantrums
- blame themselves

These things might help

- Give clear and truthful information in a way that is at their level.
- Encourage kids to show their feelings by letting them write a letter, a story, a poem, or drawing.
- Share your grief.
- Kids will feel more normal about their own feelings if they see that you are sad too.
- Allow them time to talk and ask questions and share worries. This helps stop muddled scary feelings.
- Tell them the physical side of death in a way they might understand.
- Keep as many of the family routines and things they're used to as you can. Too many changes will add further stress.
- Allow them to be involved in the funeral and other family rituals.
- If you are too distressed and can't answer their questions, make sure there is someone who can.
- Kids need to know someone is in control, can keep them safe, and be there for them.
- Don't rely on your child for support. You need to support your child.
- Let them know it's OK to be sad and that these feelings will pass.
- Children need to know what is happening, even if they don't ask.

These places might be able to help

Nunkuwarrin Yunti (08) 8223 5217

The Sacred Site Within (08) 8240 4597

Family Well Being (08) 8463 4800

The biggest need for kids at times like this is to be able to be supported and cared for, and to have someone to talk to about it.

Written in Partnership

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Parent Helpline

1300 364 100



Government of South Australia

Children, Youth and Women's
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