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HOW TO HELP CHILDREN COPE WITH GRIEF DURING THE HOLIDAYS

Counseling Partners of Los Angeles



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INTERESTED IN COUNSELING FOR YOUR CHILD?

CPLA's counseling services are **FREE** to all students attending one of our partner schools!

Reach out to the school principal or your child's teacher or request a CPLA referral form from the school.

MISSION OF CPLA

The mission of Counseling Partners of Los Angeles is to support at-risk and under-served students living in Los Angeles by providing a low-cost, school-based program that delivers essential counseling and support services students need in order to grow toward their full potential emotionally, intellectually, morally and socially.

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WHAT IS GRIEF

DEFINING GRIEF AND ITS MANIFESTATION IN CHILDREN

Grief can be described as the pain or heartache that accompanies loss. Loss comes in many different forms for children, including the death of a parent, divorce, the rejection of a friend group, or the loss of a pet.

Coping with grief is difficult no matter the time of the year, however, the holidays present a unique challenge to many families and children.

Grieving loss looks different for each child, as it is influenced by where they are in the stages of development.

However, there are common manifestations of grief in children and teens, as shared below:

- Isolating and withdrawing from family and friends
- Irritation or anger problems
- Decline in academic performance
- Inability to focus/distraction
- Deep sadness and loneliness
- Depression
- Irregular sleep and appetite patterns

"Everyone grieves loss differently, and depending on the age and developmental stage of children, the responses will vary. But one important thing is for adults is to always be aware." - Bonnie Rubenstein, EdD

<https://www.spcc-roch.org/helping-kids-cope-with-grief-and-loss-during-the-holiday-season/>



CHILDREN AND THE STAGES OF GRIEF

GRIEF IMPACTS KIDS IN DIFFERENT WAYS

There are five commonly accepted stages of grief:

1. **Denial** - kids may withdraw or feel numb
2. **Anger** - kids may blame others for the loss and become irritable
3. **Bargaining** - kids may try to bargain with God or the universe to reverse the loss
4. **Depression** - kids may feel deep sadness or show excessive crying
5. **Acceptance** - kids may accept the loss and incorporate its effects into their life

It is important to understand that these 5 stages are not linear, meaning they do not necessarily come consecutively one after the other. Additionally, children experience these stages in different ways than adults, based on their development and age.



Signs it may be beneficial to seek professional help for your child:

- *Prolonged depression*
- *Social withdrawal*
- *Insomnia*
- *Appetite loss*
- *Loss of interest in daily activities*
- *Refusal to return to school*
- *Suicidal ideation*

<https://psychcentral.com/lib/children-and-grief>

HOW TO HELP CHILDREN COPE WITH LOSS DURING THE HOLIDAYS

SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

According to the Society for the Protection and Care of Children, there are various ways that caregivers and teachers can help children cope with grief and loss during the holidays.

1. Listen and Validate – Help kids verbalize their feelings and validate their experiences. Do not attempt to repress or sugarcoat the reality of the situation. Avoid phrases like ‘Everything will be okay’ and ‘Don’t cry, you’ll upset yourself’ or ‘You have to be brave this time of year’ and ‘I know how you are feeling’. It’s important that adults know and validate for children that the holidays will be different this year.

Resources Used: <https://www.spcc-roch.org/helping-kids-cope-with-grief-and-loss-during-the-holiday-season/>
https://childmind.org/guide/helping-children-cope-with-grief/#block_184cfebc-d562-4aa9-bd6e-3534fec2020e

2. Plan for the holiday – Plan for challenges that may arise and commemorate the loss in some way.

3. Create and honor new rituals – Maintain old traditions but create new ones as well. Children like rituals and routine as they provide a sense of safety. For example, maintain your annual cookie making but also consider lighting a candle in honor of the loss.

4. Encourage creativity – Creative projects help children express grief. Some ideas include making a memory box, journaling, and creating a loss timeline, a feeling collage, a worry stone, or a poem.

5. Take care of yourself – Caregivers and teachers cannot take care of children if they are hurting themselves. Prioritize self-care so that you can be there in the best possible way for the children.

If you believe your child could benefit from counseling at school, please reach out to the school principal or your child's teacher or request a CPLA referral form from the school. Counseling services are **FREE** at our partner schools.

6. Provide social and emotional support –

Academics are often impacted by loss, and teachers and caregivers can foster a culture of social and emotional support to help children maintain their academics.

7. Volunteer – Consider volunteering with your kids at a soup kitchen or helping those less fortunate. Volunteering helps kids feel good about themselves and provides a sense of purpose.

"Grieving is a natural process and it takes time. But symptoms that persist beyond six months or are very impairing can indicate that your child may need professional help to overcome her grief." - Child Mind Institute

