

Helping Children with Sad Times

Have you ever had a friend move away? Have you had a pet die? Have you lost someone close to you? Sad times are part of life, just as much as happy times. This is true for both adults and children. Here are some ideas for working with children who are going through some sad times.

- Help children to talk about their feelings. *“You’re feeling sad right now because Daddy moved to another house. It’s okay to feel sad. Would you like to talk about it?”*
- Don’t be afraid to talk about death with children. Children need to hear the truth.
- Many children will want to know why this happened. They may even blame themselves. It’s important to help them understand that they are not to blame for someone dying, divorce, a friend moving away, or other losses. Sad and happy things are part of life.
- Visit the local library to find books to read to the children.

Look for books that talk about children’s feelings when someone close to them dies, when a pet dies, when parents divorce, when a friend moves away, etc.

- Help children to remember and talk about the person or thing they have lost. These could be good or bad memories. A child

might say, *“My dog used to bark a lot and jump on me, but I really liked to play with her.”*

- Many times, a person has other feelings along with sadness. They could also be angry or scared. It can be confusing to a child to have all these feelings going on at once. Understand



**TELL CHILDREN
IT'S OKAY TO FEEL SAD.**

that a child who's having a sad time may show a lot of anger or become scared, as well as sad.

- Understand that a child may want to talk about other feelings related to a loss. If a child's parent dies or moves out, the child may need to talk about his fear of what will happen to him, how his life will change, and fear of losing the other parent.
- Make sure there are a lot of activities where children use their senses. Playing with clay, play dough, sand, rice, and water can help children who are angry or sad to work out those feelings.
- Children may want to act out a funeral in pretend play if someone they know just died. You may want to get out doctor's kits and put a sheet over a table or chair to make a hospital bed if a child has a friend or family member in the hospital. Pretend play is a good way for children to understand and make sense of what is happening in their lives.
- Talk with the children about your own sad feelings. You might say, "I'm feeling sad today because my best friend is moving away," or "I'm feeling sad today because Sarah goes to school tomorrow and this is her last day with us."

- It's okay if you cry when you talk about your sad feelings. Your tears let children know that they can cry and talk about sad things too. You may be surprised to find that the children will want to care for you and help you through this sad time.
- Be open to children talking about their feelings and crying — even boys. You may want to say, "It's okay to let your tears come out."
- Protect crying children from others who may want to call them a "crybaby." Tell children that crying is a good way for adults and children to show their sad feelings.
- Remember: It's okay to be sad. Avoid saying things like, "It's not so bad" or "Cheer up!"
- Understand that a child's behavior may change at this sad time. A child who often played well with the other children may now want a lot of your attention and cling to you. Give him lots of hugs and time to talk about what he's feeling.
- Let children know that you care about them and their feelings. Try to stay near a child who is having a sad time.

**CRYING IS A GOOD
WAY TO SHOW SAD FEELINGS — EVEN FOR BOYS**

**SAD AND HAPPY TIMES
ARE BOTH PART OF LIFE**

Sometimes children will need professional help to work through a time of sadness. Talk with a child's parent about getting professional help if you see any of the following signs:

- The child pretends nothing has happened.
- The child has been sad for a long time.
- The child has become aggressive and often hurts others.
- The child will no longer play or talk with the other children.
- It is hard for the child to play or her grades in school have dropped.
- The child talks about suicide.

For more information on helping children with sad times, you may want to borrow the book *Are You Sad Too?* from your local county Cooperative Extension Resource Library.

Sources: *Sad Times and Bouncing Back*, by Ron Goldsmith, *Dealing with Sadness and Loss*, by Charles Smith.

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