

Tips for Families supporting children experiencing Change and Loss

1 Acknowledge your own feelings about change and loss and take care of yourself

Do not hide your feelings. At the end of a difficult day, take time for yourself. It's OK that we are not always calm and consistent in everything we do. Pay attention to what you need and then do what you have the energy and resources to do. The most important thing is taking care of yourself and your children.

2 Listen

A caring empathetic relationship is key for your child. Make eye contact with them, sit near to them at their level, allow them to talk, nod in response to their words and acknowledge the situation.

"I can see that you are sad"

3 Ask how your child is feeling

"Are you doing OK today?"

4 Use clear language

"I am upset that granny has died."

"I miss your mum"

Avoid ambiguous terms like "she went to sleep", "we lost your granny" or "she left us".

5 Normalise your child's reaction

"The way you are feeling is normal, this has happened to other people too and this feeling will change".



6 Let your child know he/she doesn't have to react like the adults and try to accept whatever your child is feeling

"It's OK not to be sad all the time, it's OK to have fun."

Accept children's play, it is normal for children to act out at times. Allow questions and conversations, look at photographs. Your child is more likely to share his/her emotions, thoughts, and concerns if he/she feels safe and accepted.

7 Answer questions honestly at the time when asked (where possible)

Your child may have lots of questions. If they ask a question to which you are not sure how to respond, ask them what they think about the issue.

Don't be afraid to say you don't know but will try and find out for them.

"That's an interesting question, let me think about it and get back to you" – gives you thinking time.

8 Remember children cope best when they feel included

If bereaved, experts suggest it is helpful and can help the grieving process if you let your child attend the funeral. Avoid unnecessary separations.

9 Consider how you are linking with the school

Good communication with school stimulates emotional coping. Check out with the school if any areas of difficulty have arisen and try to work out strategies with your child and the school to make school life easier.

10 Remember what you say can have a lasting effect on your child

Talk with your child about his/her worries; they can be worrying that something could happen to you or them. Talk with your child about potential guilt feelings.

For further information on change and loss, please ask your child's school for the change and loss leaflet and/or contact your school psychologist.

Educational Psychology Service, North Ayrshire Council,
Cunninghame House, Irvine Tel: 01294 324500

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