



## Dealing with children's grief responses - anger

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- **Some children (not all)** feel angry that the person has died and left them.
- **Boys (like men) are more likely** to feel anger than are girls.
- **Anger tends to push others away** at a time when love and support is needed.
- **When children feel and express anger it's important** that they do not feel rejected for doing so.
- **It is important that children are helped** to differentiate between anger and aggression.
- **Children (like adults) tend to move away** when they feel angry – i.e. withdraw, look down, turn away, mutter under their breath – anger does not hurt self or others.
- **Aggression is expressed** by closing the distance between self and others or self and objects – aggression is designed to hurt in some way, verbal or physical.
- **Grieving children (like children at any time) need clear guidelines** about aggression – i.e. 'rules' or boundaries about what can and can't be done.
- **It is not OK** to hit, push, pinch, pull hair, throw things at or abuse others, or to damage objects like furniture etc.
- **Parents and teachers** are not doing the child a service if they tolerate unacceptable behaviour. Bereaved children will test limits to see if anyone is in control in a world which now seems to be chaotic and out of control. They feel safe when someone sets and maintains limits, but may rail against these limits. They may say 'it's not fair...etc...', - what is really being said is that the death is not fair, life is not fair. And they're right.
- **If parents and teachers allow children** to abuse them (or others), hit them etc., the child learns that violence is acceptable if they have an excuse. This belief can be externalized so that the child is more likely to act out as an adult whenever they are frustrated or distressed, rationalizing or excusing their behaviour. **Grief is an explanation, not an excuse.**
- **Absences from classroom activities** may be necessary for brief periods initially, but are best not prolonged. Teachers can help the child / young person find ways of making themselves feel safe in the classroom even when emotions are intense.
- **Concerns about your child's anger** or aggression can be discussed with a trained bereavement counsellor, child psychologist or family therapist.



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