



Dianne McKissock

Children, like adults, tend to regress when they are sad. Every cell in their body aches and yearns for the person who has died. They may return to thumb sucking, cuddling a security blanket, wanting a dummy or bottle, needing a night light and a bedtime story. When your own grief is so intense that meeting the child seems impossible, talking books are a good alternative. They can also help grieving adults.

Children may express more sadness watching a sad movie, TV, or when a pet dies than they do at the death of a parent or other relative. In this way sadness might be let out in manageable amounts, be projected onto characters in a story, or onto toys as a defence against unbearable pain.

It is important to let children cry if they are able to do so. Most benefit is gained in the first ten minutes of intense crying. If crying is not held back, chemical changes occur which create a feeling of tranquillisation that may make the child (or adult) feel tired but peaceful. After this period of time, provide comfort and the warm reassurance of your presence. If the child is distressed, a gentle distraction might be helpful so that they learn to develop a rhythm of contact with, and withdrawal from, necessary pain; a rhythm that is right for them.

The **National Centre for Childhood Grief** provides loving support in a safe place where children grieving a death can share their experience as they learn to live with its impact on their lives.

The centre also provides education and training for individuals, schools and other organizations handling the grief of children and young people.

For more information visit www.childhoodgrief.org.au or call 1300 654 556



Factsheet reproduced from Dianne *Our Children* with the express permission from The National Centre for Childhood Grief www.childhoodgrief.org.au