



REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE
MINISTRY OF FAMILY AND
SOCIAL SERVICES

GRIEF IN CHILDREN and SUGGESTIONS FOR FAMILIES



To support your children during the period of grief, it is important for you to understand how they perceive the situation and what they need first.

If your child is,

Between the ages of 0 and 2:

- They realize the absence of the person that they were attached to. A long-term separation is painful for the baby. You can sing a lullaby or a song, hug them, bounce them on your lap, or give them a favorite toy to make the baby relax. You should make sure not to leave them alone and not to disturb their routines (such as sleep, nutrition, games, and where they live).



Between the ages of 3 and 5:

- First, the child can be asked what they know about “death”; because at this age, children might have an idea about death from the media and their environment.
- You can say, “I need to talk to you about something right now,” and give your child an explanation in simple sentences similar to the way that they perceive death. You can use examples such as “... is not alive anymore, ... is not with us anymore, ... is dead, but she/he will always be in our hearts and she/he will always love you”.
- When talking about death, you can tell your child that “to live means to be able to breathe, walk, run, move, to have a beating heart, to talk... but she/he (mother/father/brother/sister/grandfather/friend etc.) cannot do those anymore”.
- When telling children about the deceased person, do not use expressions such as “She/he fell into a deep sleep, she/he went on a long trip”.

- Your child might quickly return to playing games and pretend not to care. They might include the concept of death in games for a while and then start asking questions. Sometimes they can directly start asking questions:

You can often hear questions such as; “Who will take care of me now? Is she/he going to come back?”. You can give answers that will relieve them, such as; “... will always love you and take good care of you./I will take care of you from now on. Unfortunately, she/he will not come back. But whenever we miss him/her, we can pray and send our love. You can take a look at his/her photographs and videos; you can tell him/her what you did at school...”. Since they will ask the same questions over and over again you should be careful to give the same answers, to keep your answers short, and not to make comments that they will not understand.



Between the ages of 6 and 12;

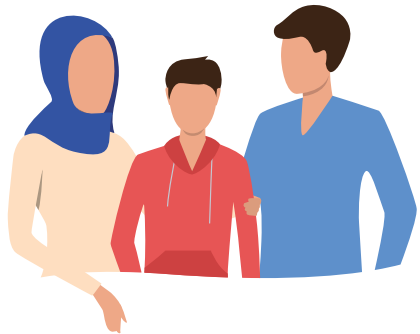
- They can now comprehend the reality of death.
- They might think that the deceased person will not come back, and they may be worried as it feels much more frightening to face this reality.
- They might start questioning death, asking whether it was their fault or not.
- It might be necessary to often repeat that it is not their fault and that it did not happen as a result of their actions.



- Some children might quickly return to playing games with their friends and they may seem insensitive, as if nothing had happened. In such situations, you should give them time and make sure to be loving, patient, and compassionate. When they feel ready, they might suddenly ask questions. This might be while watching a movie, painting, or eating. You can start by asking what they know and what death means to them. Then you can explain the issues that they are curious about the situation more clearly. You can visit the grave together and support them to cry, talk, or stand silently.

Between the ages of 13 and 18:

- They understand that death is irreversible and that it is something that happens to everyone.
- They have various reactions such as ignorance or excessive sadness, guilt, anger, inability to focus, and decreased interest in daily activities.
- After a disaster, some adolescents might question, asking “Why did I survive?” or feel guilty. Depending on the intensity of their emotions, they might exhibit behaviors such as not enjoying life, adopting bad habits, and doing self-harm.
- Some adolescents might start feeling overly responsible and want to undertake the role of a mother/father. You can discuss the life changes caused by death together with the children and support them in naming and controlling their feelings, without imposing parental responsibilities and giving them responsibilities beyond their age. For instance: “Now that ... will not be home anymore, we need to share the responsibilities at home. What are the things that you want to do?



Let's think about it. It might be better for all of us if you could help your siblings study.” You can ask them questions such as “I cry whenever I am reminded of him/her and I miss him/her so much. How do you feel in situations like this, what do you do?” and give them the opportunity to talk.

- Additionally, you can also make it easier for the adolescent to cooperate with you by talking to this age group as if there is an adult in front of you.

How Can You Support Your Child In The Grieving Period?

- Do not hide the truth about death and do not delay telling them about it. If they do not understand what is happening, the grieving period may be postponed and they may feel more distressed.
- Find a safe, calm place where you can be alone together with your child or accompanied by someone the child trusts.
- Choose a safe place and plan your words ahead. Let your children take a favorite toy or belonging with them.



- Ask your children whether they know what is happening. Describe the concept of death, considering your children's age and comprehension.



- Speak slowly, pause in between. Give time to children for them to understand and to manage your own emotions.
- If you have children of different ages, you can tell them about the situation separately. Bear in mind that older children will ask more questions and younger children might get distracted easily.
- They might react differently; do focus on how your child reacts, not on the way you expected it to be.

- Be patient when they seem reckless or ask the same questions for weeks.
- Keep calm when they shout and deny, and emphasize that even if it is upsetting, the situation is real and that it is not their fault.
- Do not hide your emotions, talk to each other. Do not be afraid for your child to see your sadness, grief, and tears. Tell them how you feel, in a way that is appropriate for their age.

Do not hesitate to talk about death. Similarly, if they cry, give your children the opportunity to express their feelings.

Just as you experience your pain this way, they also have the right to relieve their pain by crying.



You can use sentences such as “I understand that you are very sad because of this situation” to clarify your children’s emotions and to show them that you understand the emotions they are experiencing.



- Do not try to change the topic when your child is talking about the deceased. Share memories of the deceased over time. Create opportunities to look at pictures, belongings, and videos. Help your child create a notebook or an album with happy memories, where they draw the deceased or write letters to them. Although this process might be difficult for you, it will help you cope with grief.

- Let them participate in the funeral and the condolence processes. This will help them accept the reality of death and say goodbye to their deceased. However, do not forget to keep the child away from intense crying, laments, or settings at the funeral and the mourning house, which would be difficult for the child to handle.
- Sometimes families prefer keeping the child away from the funeral house or sending them away to a place far from their home and their loved ones. However, do not forget that it might be better for children to be close to their loved ones and settings that make them feel safe.



- The priority should be given to avoiding traumatic experiences and ensuring the safety of the child. Plan together with the child to support them considering their age and development level, and involve them in the process.
- Support the child to go back to their usual routine. Do not make any changes in the environment, relationships, and daily life. Inform their teacher, friends, and other children in their life about the situation.

What can parents or caregivers do for themselves?

- Get back to your daily activities after a short while. Start regularly carrying out your usual responsibilities related to your home, work and social life, as a parent and/or caregiver.



- Instead of avoiding stressful situations, focus on how to better cope with stress and pressure.
- Pay attention to your sleep and nutrition, exercise, solve problems with positive perspectives, spend time with your loved ones, help others, and allow those who want to help you.
- Instead of negative ways to cope (anger, violence, introversion etc.), use ways that will make you feel good and activities that are good for you, such as exercising and starting a new hobby. Remember: If you do not take care of yourself, you cannot care for and support your children.



Do not hesitate to get help. When you are having difficulties finding solutions on your own, consult a mental health professional.



When To Consult A Mental Health Professional?

Reactions that occur after death (including introversion or aggressive behavior) are expected to subside over time. However; IF

- the reactions do not subside in 3 months and maintain their intensity in a way that affects the children's daily life,
- the changes in their emotions and behaviors cause difficulties in maintaining their social relations and school life,
- they want to be alone all the time or experience uncontrollable outbursts of anger,
- they are trying to harm themselves or expressing intentions regarding self-harm,
- they always want to be alone or have outbursts of anger that they cannot control, THEN your children should get immediate support from a mental health professional.
- If you are experiencing similar reactions, you can seek support from a mental health professional, too.





Remember!

You can seek help from psychosocial support staff deployed in times of disaster and emergency through Provincial Directorates of Family and Social Services.



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**FOR PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT APPLICATION AND
REFERRAL IN CASE OF NEED:**

..... Provincial Directorate of Family and Social Services

Address:

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Tel: