

Common Myths About Grief

Myth: There are 5 stages of grief, and everyone goes through them in order.

 **Truth:** Most grievers experience sadness, shock, anger, and guilt. However, grievers do not move through those feelings in set stages and in a specific order. There is neither a road map for grief nor an end that everyone reaches.

Myth: The goal is to “get over” the death of someone you love.

 **Truth:** Children will always miss the person who died, and that is normal. Grief will change and look different over time. Tasks of mourning can include accepting the reality of the loss, learning healthy coping skills, and maintaining a connection to the loved one.

Myth: Staying busy is the best way to help grieving children.

 **Truth:** It is important to make time to grieve. Children are already feeling sad and missing their loved one. Staying busy does not stop those feelings; it only prevents the child from being able to express them.

Myth: Everyone grieves the same way.

 **Truth:** Children, adolescents, women and men all grieve differently. Children grieve differently from other children. Some process emotions through play, some through talking, and others process internally making it seem as if they are not grieving. Especially within families, it is important to remember that everyone is grieving, they are just doing it differently from each other.

Myth: Children are too young to understand what’s going on.

 **Truth:** It is important to tell the truth to children in an age-appropriate way, and allow opportunities for their questions to be answered. Children are absorbing what grown-ups say and do even if they appear to not be paying attention.

Myth: Children should not attend funerals or memorial events.

 **Truth:** Children’s grief should be acknowledged. Many children benefit greatly from being included in the planning of memorial events, and the opportunity to do something that is meaningful to them. Prepare the children what to expect at a memorial event and give them options to participate or not. Allow children permission to back out of an event if they change their mind.

Myth: Adult grief does not impact the children.

 **Truth:** Children will look to the adults in their life to learn about grief. If it is not okay to talk about their loved one or show emotion, children will not think it is okay to grieve. It is important for adults to take care of themselves too, so children can feel a sense of stability within their lives.

Myth: Adults should be able to instantly explain religious or spiritual issues about death.

 **Truth:** It can take time to explain heavy concepts about death and spirituality. It is normal for children to ask questions repeatedly over time as they try to understand.

Myth: Death loss will permanently scar children for life.

 **Truth:** Children who are grieving often experience intense feelings; however that does not mean they need medical attention or psychological interventions. Most children can work through their grief with the help of loving adults and guided peer support. Many children build resilience and insight into the deeper meaning of life after they experience loss at a young age. Self-destructive behaviors, thoughts of suicide, and further isolation are warning signs that should not be ignored, and may be an indication that medical attention is needed.