



CALIFORNIA Child Abduction TASK FORCE

Children's Normal Grief Responses to Experiences of Loss

Depending on the severity of the trauma or loss (the death of a parent is probably the most traumatic), children may show any of these symptoms during their grieving process. They are attempting to heal the pain of loss.

Denial

- Acting as though nothing has happened
- pretending not to hear or understand
- tuning out

Confusion/Disorganization

- "I can't remember..."
- mixed up about details
- forgetful
- difficulty concentrating
- academic difficulties

Shock/Numbing

- Feelings seem blunted
- Acting like a robot
- Spacey and listless

Guilt

- "This happened because I am bad or I caused it"
- "I should have done something"

Withdrawal/Depression

- Refusal to interact with others
- Loss of interest in activities
- Sadness/tears
- Loneliness

Avoidance

- Avoid feelings or discussions that bring up painful subjects
- Avoid places associated with loss or trauma
- Escape into TV /videos/books

Anger/Blame

- Acting out
- Sullenness (suppressed anger)
- Unwillingness to cooperate
- Trouble-making behaviors
- Fighting with other children
- Mad at other children having fun

Protective Behavior

- Being strong or very adult-like
- Appearing not to be affected
- "taking care" of others

Physical Problems

- Stomach upsets
- Loss of appetite
- Difficulty sleeping
- Infections/rashes/allergies

Regressive Behaviors

- Thumb-sucking
- Toileting accidents/bed-wetting
- Tantrums
- Security blanket, sucking
- Loss of a skill/language skills/coordination
- Comfortable old behaviors

Unusual Sensory Experiences

- Transient experiences of thinking child saw or heard loved one

Heightened Fears/Separation Anxiety

- Clinging behaviors
- Separation anxiety problems
- Nightmares/night terrors
- Fears of being alone
- Worried about parent disappearing
- Difficulty falling asleep

Yearning and Pining

- Hope keeps flickering
- Want to believe a different ending is possible

Searching

- Can't sit still/restlessness
- Preoccupation with lost person or places associated with them

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