

## Key Issues in Understanding Children's Grief

- **Grief is natural and normal.**
- **Grief involves thinking, feeling, doing, and being.** Grieving children experience physical symptoms as well as rapid changes in thought and feelings. You can see these changes in how a child can concentrate, how they use their imagination, their behaviors, and in the way they feel about themselves as being a good or bad person.
- **No two children grieve alike.** Children are like flowers. Not two will experience the darkness, the rain, the soil's dryness or will turn to the light in the exact same way. The way to know a particular child's grief is to be with them through time; to listen, observe, to give information, to give care, and to give support.
- **Children often show rather than tell their grief.** Grief is a sensory experience that often does not have words. Children are still learning to name and describe their feelings. You can see children grieve through their social interactions and in their play.
- **Children grieve in doses-in spurts and stops.** Children naturally limit their awareness of a loss, taking grief in small doses. A child who is grieving can quickly change from being sad, angry or frustrated to wanting to play. Grieving in doses is healthy.
- **Many factors influence grief.** These factors include the child's developmental age and maturity, the type of loss, and their previous experiences with loss. Other factors include a child's place in the family, the availability of parents and other caring adults for physical and emotional care, and how much the loss affects his or her safety, routines, and sense of belonging in the world.
- **Growing through grief takes time.** Some losses have new meanings at different times in the life cycle. Over time and throughout the child's development the loss may resurface so that it can be understood in new ways. At any developmental period growing through grief happens as a child feels safe enough to endure the thoughts, emotions, and physical and spiritual consequences that a grievous loss brings. Under the right conditions, with time, feelings of loss often change to comfort and symbolic connection. A child will need to revisit the loss at each developmental stage.
- **Sometimes children seem unaffected.** Since children may not understand the permanence of a loss, or its meaning to them, they may not experience a loss as grief for some time. Perhaps they do not understand that the loss will really happen or has happened. A child may not have formed an attachment and not care the way someone else does. When children feel overwhelmed by intense feelings, they may not naturally make their world safe by distancing themselves physically or emotionally, by pretending or by denying the reality of the loss.
- **Grief is more than good-bye.** Through grief, children honor and remember the people, animals, places, and objects they have feelings and attachment to. To grow through grief is to gradually understand what has been lost, what remains, and to envision and realize (say hello to) what is possible for the future.