



SIGNS A GRIEVING CHILD MAY NEED ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

*Recognizing When Grief May Be Interfering With
Safety, Development, or Daily Life*

Grief can affect emotions, behavior, sleep, concentration, appetite, relationships, and school performance. Many reactions change over time with patient support. There is no single timetable that determines when a child's grief has become a problem. What matters is the intensity, persistence, pattern, safety concerns, and how much the child's functioning has changed.

LOOK AT THE WHOLE CHILD

One difficult day or one strong reaction does not tell the whole story. Notice what is happening across home, school, friendships, sleep, eating, activities, and physical health. Compare the child's current functioning with their own usual patterns rather than with another child's grief.

WHAT YOU MAY NOTICE

- Persistent withdrawal from relationships or activities the child previously valued.
- Major or worsening changes in sleep, eating, school attendance, concentration, behavior, or physical complaints.
- Intense guilt, hopelessness, panic, traumatic reactions, self-harm, or statements about wanting to die.

GENTLE REMINDER

There is no deadline for grief. Concern is better guided by safety, severity, persistence, and functioning than by how many weeks or months have passed.

PAY ATTENTION TO FUNCTIONING

Ask whether the child can still participate in ordinary life with support. Grief can make school, sleep, or social activity harder without making them impossible. Concern increases when difficulties remain severe, spread across settings, or continue to worsen.

WORDS THAT CAN HELP

Try: "I have noticed you have not been sleeping and school feels impossible lately." "You are not in trouble. I want us to find someone who can help." "Talking with another supportive adult does not mean you are grieving the wrong way."

SAFETY CONCERNS NEED PROMPT ATTENTION

Take statements about self-harm, suicide, wanting to disappear, or not wanting to live seriously. Do not leave a child alone when there is an immediate safety concern. Seek urgent professional or emergency help appropriate to the situation.





TRAUMA REACTIONS MAY NEED SPECIALIZED CARE

After frightening circumstances, some children experience intrusive memories, nightmares, avoidance, intense startle, panic, or persistent fear. A qualified professional with experience in child trauma and bereavement can help assess what support fits the child.

CHOOSING ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

- Possible resources include the child's pediatric healthcare professional, school counselor or psychologist, licensed mental-health professional, grief program, or child bereavement specialist. Ask about experience with the child's age, type of loss, and relevant trauma when applicable.
- REMEMBERING DEVELOPMENT MATTERS
- A child may need help long after the death, especially when a new developmental stage changes their understanding. Seeking support later does not mean earlier support failed; the child may simply be facing a new layer of the loss.

A THOUGHT TO CARRY WITH YOU

Seeking help does not take grief away from the family. It adds another caring person to the circle supporting the child.

A MOMENT FOR REFLECTION

What has changed most in this child's functioning? Is the change improving, stable, or worsening - and is there any concern about safety?

WHEN IMMEDIATE HELP IS NEEDED

If a child may harm themselves or someone else, cannot remain safe, or is experiencing a mental-health emergency, seek immediate emergency or crisis assistance. In the United States, call or text 988 for the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, or call 911 when there is immediate danger.

A GENTLE CLOSING

Additional support is not a judgment about how a child is grieving. It is one more form of care when grief, trauma, or other difficulties are becoming too heavy for the child and family to manage alone.

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