Grief is the body’s reaction to the loss of someone or something that was important to us and the more important it is then the bigger will be the resulting grief at the loss.

When we experience grief there are a number of different things that can happen to a person. We can feel shock and disbelief - not even being able to accept that it has happened. Or anger that it has happened. Sometimes we blame ourselves and start to say or think things like "If only I had (or hadn't)..." We can even become depressed.

With a very large grief the sadness and loss can last a very long time, sometimes months or even years. Some people even get ‘stuck’ in grief, because the hurt was so bad, and do not return to normal life even after years of sadness.

A small grief will normally take care of itself fairly quickly. But we should never dismiss even a small grief as silly because this can leave the person feeling like they don't matter. For big grief it is important that we continue to allow the child to express the pain they are feeling. This can sometimes be very hard if we are also feeling the grief. Children also, unlike adults, shift in and out of grief very quickly and easily. They can be sobbing uncontrollably at a funeral one minute and then playing outside with their friends the next. This is actually one of the ways they cope as they are more in the moment than adults. Don't ever interpret this as they are over it or that they don't care.

If you feel you need assistance or just need to talk to someone, make an appointment with your GP or call Lifeline on 13 1114.

Cherie Gibson - School Welfare Officer
Working Through
And Saying Goodbye

At the beginning grief can be all consuming. At this time support is all that is needed. As time goes on an opportunity to express the grief will be important. Things such as painting, memory boxes, storytelling, music, etc can be very useful ways of getting out the painful emotions that are stuck inside.

It is important to remember that grief is a process not an event. It can take time to move through and cannot be rushed. Establishing or taking part in rituals, telling stories about the person, going back to a favourite spot, etc. can all be good ways of incorporating the grief back into daily life.

Grief and Saying Goodbye

One of the hardest and yet most healing rituals that can be done. By allowing children to be present at a time of saying goodbye you can do them and yourself some real long term good. It does bring up strong emotions but this is the point - it doesn't create them, it brings them out to be shared in a supportive family environment. It can be very healing. It is definitely not good to use vague language when speaking to children about death because their brains interpret language literally not symbolically. Statements like "...went to sleep", "gone to be with the angels", "we have lost...", etc. can lead children to fear going to sleep, be continually searching for the ‘lost’ person, have a terror that the ‘angels’ will come to get them. It is best just to say that they died.

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