

# ***Loss of a Loved One***

## **A SELAS Connections Article from Community Consolidated School District 181**

Losing a loved one is a milestone in each of our lives. Whether it is the death of a close family member, a dear friend, a long-time neighbor, or the family pet, such permanent loss changes a child's worldview in a dramatic way.

Grief is a normal response to loss, but we experience it in varied ways as we make sense of our experience. Children at different ages react to loss with a [range of behaviors](#). For young children, death itself is a new concept that must be understood for its irreversibility, causes, and association with all living things. We can be most helpful by understanding children's developmental stages and being sensitive to [cultural differences regarding death](#) by providing honest answers, and maintaining a close physical presence.

Our behavior changes when we experience grief so it is important to inform teachers and other adults close to your family when a significant loss occurs. If you notice unhealthy or destructive behaviors developing in your child after a loved one has died, it is important to [seek support](#) from a teacher or school counselor, pediatrician, bereavement support group, community mental health services, special camp programs, or hospice programs.

Whether children are 2, 10 or teens, your simple, honest words and close physical presence will be most reassuring. Don't avoid the words *death* or *dead*; it can be confusing to children to hear euphemisms such as "passed away." Children think in concrete terms but the youngest of children do not have to know everything about the situation of the death in order to grasp it. Allow children to talk about their feelings; adults can help when they acknowledge children's feelings of sadness, anger, and fear, for example. It is recommended to include children in funeral proceedings rather than shield them. Children and teens can benefit from reading, journaling, the arts, and sports and play ~ any ways they can express themselves at this very difficult time.

In our area, [Tommy's Kids](#), a project of Adventist St. Thomas Hospice, provides camps in the spring, summer, and fall for children age 5-17 who have experienced the loss of a loved one. Contact Laura Cottrell at 630-856-6985 to learn about these programs.

There are many excellent online resources to help families through the process of understanding death and the loss of someone close.

- The Coalition to Support Grieving Students, a new resource for parents, teachers, and community members to support children in grief and crisis (<https://grievingstudents.org>)
- A Child in Grief, and many resources on the website for NY Life Foundation (<http://www.newyorklife.com/achildingrief>)

- National Alliance for Grieving Children (<http://childrengrieve.org/about-childhood-grief>)
- Children’s Grief Education Association (<http://childgrief.org/childgrief.htm>)
- PBS: When Families Grieve (<http://www.pbs.org/parents/whenfamiliesgrieve/>) and books for children, tweens, and teens ([http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/emotions/death/print\\_books.html](http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/emotions/death/print_books.html))
- Confident Parents, Confident Kids, blog, *Helping Children Understand Death* (<http://confidentparentsconfidentkids.org/2013/09/27/helping-children-understand-death/>)
- Nemours Foundation provides resources in English and Spanish:
  - Supports for kids (<http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/emotion/somedie.html>)
  - Supports for teens ([http://kidshealth.org/teen/your\\_mind/emotions/someone\\_died.html](http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/emotions/someone_died.html))
  - When a pet dies ([http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/talk/pet\\_death.html](http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/talk/pet_death.html))
  - How to talk with children about death (<http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/talk/death.html>)

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