



REPUBLIC OF TURKEY
MINISTRY OF FAMILY AND SOCIAL SERVICES
DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

GRIEF IN CHILDREN and SUGGESTIONS FOR FAMILIES



In cooperation with the Ministry of Family and Social Services and UNICEF.

To support your children during the period of mourning, it is important for you to understand how they perceive the situation and what they need first.

If your child is,

Between the ages of 0 and 2;

- They realize the absence of the person to whom they felt connected. A long-term separation is painful for the baby. You can sing a lullaby or a song, hug them, bounce them on your lap, or give them their favorite toy to make the baby relax. You should make sure not to leave them alone and not to disturb their routines (such as sleep, nutrition, games, and where they live).



Between the ages of 3 and 5;

- First, the child can be asked what s/he knows about “death”; because at this age, children might have an idea about death from the media and their environment.
- You can say “I need to talk to you about something right now” and give your child an explanation with simple sentences similar to the way that s/he perceives death. You can use examples such as “... is not alive anymore, is not with us anymore, is dead but s/he will always be in our hearts and s/he will always love you”.
- When talking about death, you can tell your child that “to live means to be able to breathe, walk, run, move, to have a beating heart, to talk... but s/he cannot do those anymore”.
- When telling children about the deceased, do not use expressions such as “s/he fell into a deep sleep, s/he went on a long trip”.

- Your child might quickly return to playing games and pretend not to care. S/he might play the role of the deceased in games for a while and then start asking questions. Sometimes s/he can directly start asking questions: You can often hear questions such as; “Who will take care of me now? Is s/he going to come back?”. You can give answers that will relieve them, such as; “... will always love you and take good care of you/ I will take care of you from now on. Unfortunately, s/he will not come back. But whenever we miss him/her, we can pray and send our love. You can take a look at his/her photographs and videos; you can tell what you did at school...” Since they will ask the same questions over and over again you should be careful to give the same answers, to keep your answers short and not to make comments that they will not understand.



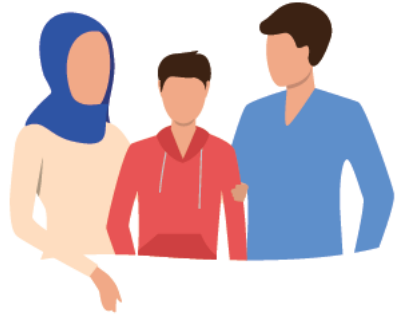
Between the ages of 6 and 12;

- They can now comprehend the reality of death.
- They might think that the deceased will not come back, and they may be worried as it feels much more frightening to face this reality.
- They might start questioning death, asking whether it was their fault or not.
- It might be necessary to often repeat that it is not their fault and that it did not happen as a result of their actions.
- Some children might quickly return to playing games with their friends and they may seem insensitive as if nothing had happened. In such situations, you should give them time and make sure to be loving, patient and compassionate. When they feel ready, they might suddenly ask questions. This might happen while watching a movie, painting, or eating. You can start by asking what they know and what death means. Then you can explain the issues that they are curious about the situation more clearly. You can visit the grave together and support them to cry, talk, or stand silently.



Between the ages of 13 and 18;

- They understand that death is irreversible and that it is something that happens to everyone.
- They have various reactions such as not caring or excessive sadness, guilt, anger, inability to focus and decreased interest in daily activities.
- After a disaster, some adolescents might question, asking “Why did I survive?” or feel guilty. Depending on the intensity of their emotions, they might exhibit behaviors such as anhedonia, adopting bad habits and self-harm.
- Some adolescents might start feeling overly responsible and want to undertake the role of a mother/ father. You can discuss the changes caused by death together and support them in naming and controlling their feelings, without imposing parental responsibilities and giving them responsibilities beyond their age. For instance: “Now that ... will not be home anymore, we need to share the responsibilities at home. What are the things that you want to do? Let’s give it some thought. “It might be better for all of us if you could help your siblings study.”



You can allow them to talk through answering their questions such as “Since ... died, I cry whenever I am reminded of him/her and I miss him/her so much. How do you feel in situations like this, what do you do?”

- Additionally, you can also make it easier for the adolescent to cooperate with you by talking to this age group as if there is an adult in front of you.

How Can You Support Your Bereaved Child?

- Do not hide the concept of death and delay telling them about it. If they do not understand what is happening, they will feel more distressed and their grief might be delayed.
- Find a safe, calm place where you can be alone together or accompanied by someone the child trusts.
- Choose a safe environment and plan your words ahead. Let your children take a favorite toy or belonging with them.
- Start by asking your children whether they know what is happening. Describe death, considering your children's age and comprehension.



- Speak slowly, pause in between. Give time for children to understand and manage their emotions.
- If you have children of different ages, you can tell them about the situation separately. Bear in mind that older children will ask more questions and younger children might get distracted easily.
- They might react differently; do focus on how your child reacts, not on the way you expected them to react.

- Be patient when they seem like they do not care or ask the same questions for weeks.
- Keep calm when they shout and deny, and emphasize that even if it is upsetting, the situation is real and that it is not their fault.
- Do not hide your emotions, talk to each other. Do not be afraid for your child to see your sadness, grief and tears. Tell them how you feel, in a way that is appropriate for their age.

Do not hesitate to talk about death. Similarly, if they cry, give your children the opportunity to express their feelings. Just as you experience your pain this way, they also have the right to relieve their pain by crying.



You can use sentences such as "I understand that you are very sad because of this situation" to clarify your children's emotions and to show them that you understand the emotions they are experiencing.

- Do not try to change the topic when your child is talking about the deceased. Share memories of the deceased over time. Create opportunities to look at pictures, belongings and videos. Help your child create a notebook or an album with happy memories, where



they draw the deceased or write letters to them. Although this process might be difficult for you, it will help you cope with grief.

- Let them participate in the funeral and the condolence period. This will help them accept the reality of death and say goodbye to their deceased. However, do not forget to keep the child away from intense crying, laments or settings at the funeral and the mourning house, which would be difficult for the child to handle and make sure you help them get the support suitable for their age.



- Sometimes families prefer keeping the child away from the funeral house or sending them away to a place far from their home and their loved ones. However, do not forget that it might be better for children to be close to their loved ones and settings that make them feel safe.



- The priority should be given to avoiding traumatic experiences and ensuring the safety of the child. Plan together with the child to support him/her in accordance with his/her age and development, and involve him/her in the process.
- Support the child to go back to his/her usual routine. Do not make any changes in the environment, relationships and daily life. Inform his/her teacher, friends and other children in their life about the situation.

What can parents or caregivers do for themselves?

- Get back to your daily activities after a short while. Start regularly carrying out your usual responsibilities related to your home, work and social life, as a parent and/ or caregiver.



- Instead of avoiding stressful situations, focus on how to better cope with stress and pressure.
- Pay attention to your sleep and nutrition, exercise, solve problems with positive perspectives, spend time with your loved ones, help others and let people help you.
- Instead of negative ways to cope (anger, violence, introversion...), use ways that will make you feel good and activities that are good for you, as well as exercising and starting a new hobby. **Do not forget: If you do not take care of yourself, you cannot care for and support your children.**



Do not hesitate to get help. When you are having difficulties finding solutions on your own, consult a mental health professional.



When Should You Consult a Mental Health Professional?

Reactions that occur after death (including introversion or aggressive behavior) are expected to diminish in intensity over time. However;

- If the reactions do not subside as time goes by and maintain their intensity in a way that affects the children's daily life,
- If the changes in their emotions and behaviors cause difficulties in maintaining their social relations and school life,
- If they constantly want to be left alone and experience bursts of anger that they cannot control,
- If they are trying to harm themselves or expressing intentions regarding self-harm, your child needs to get support from a mental health professional immediately.
- If you experience similar reactions, you can also get support from a mental health professional.





Remember!

You can seek help from psychosocial support staff deployed in times of disaster and emergency through the provincial directorates of the Ministry of Family and Social Services.



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FOR PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT AND COUNSELING IN CASE of NEED:

.....Ministry of Family and Social Services

Address:
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Tel: