

## COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF GRIEF

### PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

- Clinging, whining, crying
- Stomach aches
- Nausea
- Headaches
- Inability to eat
- Inability to sleep
- Nightmares
- Restlessness
- Fatigue
- Physical symptoms of the illness experienced by the loved one who has died (Example: brain tumor → migraine headaches)

### COGNITIVE & EMOTIONAL SYMPTOMS

- **Forgetfulness:** Children may forget school assignments, book reports, or backpacks at home.  
**Help:**
  - ✓ Help the child establish routines or develop schedules. Remind them to write down important things.
- **Disorganization:** It may take a grieving child an hour to do what previously took 15 minutes.  
**Help:**
  - ✓ Allow ample time to complete a task.
- **Inability to concentrate:** Do not be surprised to see children “day dreaming.” It may be hard for them to stay focused, and their grades may go down for a while.  
**Help:**
  - ✓ Be patient and refocus the child – breaking information into smaller segments and again allowing ample time to complete a task..
- **Inability to retain information:** Educators/parents can help children change their study habits by using some of the following study aids:  
**Help:**
  - ✓ Outline reading material.
  - ✓ Highlight important facts.
  - ✓ Read “out loud” instead of to oneself.
  - ✓ Complete homework in segments. Encourage children to work in 20-minute segments with 5-minute breaks.
  - ✓ Have a “weekend party” with friends to help the grieving child catch up with piled up homework due to missed school days.
- **Preoccupation with the event:** Children may appear to be “day dreaming” because their minds will wander back to what has happened. Even if they are doing something they enjoy, like watching a football game or a soap opera, they will find their mind going back to the situation at hand.  
**Help:**
  - ✓ Sometimes working in small increments of time will help them to stay focused and on task.
- **Lack of interest or motivation:** Even if children are doing something they love, they may be thinking about what has happened to them. Caution grieving children to be careful to avoid a “why bother” attitude.  
**Help:**

- ✓ Encourage children to use their experience to reach out to help others in need.
- **Lowered tolerance level and increased impatience:** Grieving children may be impatient – especially if someone complains of something they think is trivial – i.e., a “bad hair day.”  
**Help:**
  - ✓ Make other children more aware of what and how they say things around the grieving child – especially around holidays, birthdays, & anniversaries.
  - ✓ Remind the grieving child not to take grief out on other people.

## **SYMPTOMS OF SEVERE GRIEF**

### **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder**

***Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)* is an emotional and psychological reaction to trauma caused by a painful and shocking experience. The stress resulting from this sudden shock may show up days, weeks, or even months later. In the days and weeks ahead, parents need to look for:**

- Recurring recollections of the event that interfere with school and home life.
- Recurring nightmares.
- New problems not previously experienced in falling/staying asleep or sleeping too much.
- Intense anxiety.
- Avoidance of feelings.
- Preoccupation with event.
- Outbursts of irritability and anger at home and school.
- Being overwhelmed with emotions – feeling out of control.
- Difficulty concentrating on things usually enjoyed.
- Significant decrease in normal activities at home and school.
- Detachment & withdrawal from friends.
- Depression.

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