

Children's Grief and Loss

Children generally do not understand that death and change is a natural part of life. Children often assume that their family will always stay the same. When someone a child loves dies it can be a life changing experience. Each child's response to grief and loss will be different and will depend on many key factors, most especially their age and stage of development. While younger children may not understand what is happening, they do feel and experience grief and loss.



How children grieve can be very different to how adults grieve. Children can be playing one moment and very quickly and sometimes for no apparent reason they can become overwhelmed by strong and intense emotions. While this is normal, it can be frightening for children who often do not have the words or the understanding to express how they feel. Most often, they do not know why they feel the way they do.

THE RAINBOWS PROGRAMME

The programme provides group support for children and young people aged 7 to 16 years experiencing grief and loss following a bereavement or parental separation. Throughout the nine week programme, a safe space in either bereavement or separation groups is provided by trained Facilitators. The group support helps children to name and express difficult feelings and begin a process of adapting and adjusting to significant change and loss. It is not counselling or therapy. Meeting and identifying with others of a similar age can be very comforting and reduce the sense of loneliness or isolation a child might feel - "I am not the only one", "We are not the only family".

CHILDREN ARE SUPPORTED TO:

- Identify, name and begin to make sense of the many different feelings and emotions they are experiencing
- Believe that all their feelings and emotions are normal and that they can be less intense and painful in time
- Understand that when they talk about their feelings, they can become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary
- Talk about very difficult and painful feelings – deep hurt can be given a voice and heard in a safe place
- Be listened to and to understand that what is said matters, this can be both supportive and empowering for children
- Grow their self-confidence and self-esteem
- Explore different ways to remember and honour the relationship they had with the person who has died
- Begin to cope, manage, adapt and adjust to a life without a special person or without the family being as it was

The Rainbows Programme is available in a variety of community based settings throughout Waterford, Wexford Carlow, Kilkenny and South Tipperary, for more information please contact:

Rainbows Ireland

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