

Teachers Can Help Children Deal with Sadness and Loss



Everyone experiences sadness and grief when separated from loved ones. Healthy grieving is necessary to come to terms with loss. Responsive teachers and caregivers help children feel more comfortable with expressing sad, unhappy feelings.

Encourage children to talk about their feelings.

The death of a classroom pet, the unexpected move of a child, and the loss of a favorite plaything all provide opportunities to talk about their feelings.

Encourage children who are experiencing loss to remember the person or thing that they have lost.

Accept the child's need to talk about good and bad memories of the missing person, pet, or plaything. A child might say, "Sometimes Spike used to bark and bite, but he also liked to play catch."

Talk about and express your own feelings of sadness.

Your vulnerability also provides children with an opportunity to respond in a caring and loving way to give you support. If the loss is so great that you fear loss of control (the death of a child in your classroom, for example), take the time to share your feelings with an adult friend before talking with the children.

Provide an accepting atmosphere.

Children experiencing loss need to feel free to openly express their feelings of sadness and grief. Be careful to avoid minimizing their feelings by saying things like "It's not so bad" or "Cheer up!" Avoid probing questions that may distract and confuse.

Accept as normal some changes in behavior.

For both children and adults, it is hard to leave our emotions outside the classroom. Each child will react differently to loss. A loss at home may cause some children to have difficulty concentrating. Others may lash out at their friends and teachers. Still others may become very quiet and withdrawn.

Recognize when children's grieving requires professional assistance.

Recommend that parents seek professional help if their child's grieving becomes a problem for the child.