

Grief vs. Depression in Children

Since 1980, EveryStep's Amanda the Panda program has delivered love and caring through innovative services such as weekend grief camps, support groups, fun days, school visits and holiday support to inspire hope and healing after the death of a loved one. For more information, visit everystep.org
(515) 223-4847 | (877) 533-4847

Grieving children are often mistakenly diagnosed with depression. While the two are very similar, it is important to know that grief is a physical, mental, and emotional reaction to the death of a loved one, while depression is a very serious mood disorder. It is normal, however, to see an overlap in the signs and symptoms of depression in a typically grieving child. Please let teachers, doctors, and counselors know about your child's loss to avoid a misdiagnosis.

A Child Who is Depressed...

- Feels sadness mixed with anger, sometimes directed at him/herself
- May consistently feel tired, loss of appetite, or have trouble sleeping; may be hyperactive or aggressive (masking depression)
- Expresses anger in the form of rage or denies being angry altogether
- May not recall dreams, and fantasizes infrequently
- May see himself as bad and worthless; is preoccupied with him/herself
- May be unresponsive to others or responds to pressure and urging
- Is rarely able to enjoy pleasure

A Child Who is Grieving...

- Feels sadness but mood can also stabilize the same day
- Has variable moods, activity levels, appetite, and sleep patterns
- Expresses anger at appropriate times even if not in appropriate ways
- Dreams and fantasizes, particularly about the loss
- May blame him/herself for somehow not preventing the death, is preoccupied with the loss
- Responds to warmth and reassurance
- Is able to experience pleasure at varying times

A grieving child, like a grieving adult, will experience some symptoms of depression. However, when the signs of depression seem to be prolonged, excessive, or destructive, or impair function, it is important to seek professional help from teachers, clergy, counselors, grief services, or doctors. It is also important to note any drastic changes in behavior, as this may also indicate a need for extra help.

