

The Counselor's Clipboard

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Believe it or not, these are all situations in which young children experience the emotion of **Grief**.

- Death of a close family member, friend, or pet
Divorce
- Personal injury or illness
Moving
- Change in health of a family member
- Beginning or ending of a school year
- Gaining a new family member

You may be thinking... "Grief?? About the end of a school year? About having a new baby sister? That's crazy. Grief is only about death." In fact, grief is an emotion applicable to any change in the status quo of a child's life. Grief is about loss. What may be perceived as an exciting event by the parent

(ie: moving to a new town, summer vacation, graduation, the birth of a child) can be the cause of emotional sadness and anxiety in children.

So, what can I do?

- Try not to predetermine the level of a child's emotional reaction to a situation. ("You should be happy because it's summer vacation." "Your Grandpa lived far away, and you only saw him once a year. Why are you still upset about his death?") These statements are not helpful in really listening to what is going on in your child's heart. The child may be feeling the loss of *the way things used to be*.
- Reiterate to your child that all feelings are normal. There are no "bad" feelings, and there is not a "hierarchy" of feelings. All feelings deserve respect.
- Children need the opportunity to "let go" of certain feelings and emotions. Letting go

should not be characterized as "getting over it". Help your child let go of an old home, an old school year, an old marriage, by listening and acknowledging their feelings about the past. Remember that you don't always have to understand the emotion. The key is to listen with your heart. Seek professional help if you feel like your child is "hanging on" to feelings that are working against him.

<p><u>When Children Grieve.</u> By John W. James and Russell Friedman</p>
