

Learning . . . Bill of Rights for Grieving Children

I have the right to my own unique feelings about death. I might feel mad, sad or lonely. I might feel scared or relieved. I might feel numb or sometimes not anything at all. No one will feel exactly like I do.

I have the right to talk about my grief whenever I feel like talking. When I need to talk, I will find someone who will listen to me and love me. When I don't want to talk, that's okay, too.

I have the right to show my feelings of grief in my own way. When they are hurting, some kids like to play so they'll feel better for a while. I can play or laugh, too. I might also get mad and misbehave. This does not mean I am bad. It just means I have scary feelings I need help with.

I have the right to need other people to help me with my grief, especially grown-ups who care about me. Mostly I need them to pay attention to what I am feeling and saying and to love me no matter what.

I have the right to get upset about normal, everyday problems. I might feel grumpy and have trouble getting along with others sometimes.

I have the right to have "griefbursts." Griefbursts are sudden, unexpected feelings of sadness that happen to me sometimes — even long after the death. These feelings can be very strong and even scary. When this happens, I might feel afraid to be alone.

I have the right to use my beliefs about God to help me with my grief. Praying might make me feel better and somehow closer to the person who died.

I have the right to try to figure out why the person I loved died. But it's okay if I don't find an answer. Why questions about life and death are the hardest in the world.

I have the right to think and talk about my memories of the person who died. Sometimes those memories will be happy and sometimes they might be sad. Either way, memories help me keep alive my love for the person who died.

I have the right to move forward and feel my grief over time, to heal. I'll go on to live a happy life, but the life and death of the person who died will always be a part of me. I'll always miss the person who died.

Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D.