

Children  
and Grief  
Preschool  
Ages 3 – 6




## A Guide to Easing Your Child Through Loss

Facing the loss of a loved-one can be difficult for children and for those who care for them. Mercy wants to provide support, and it's our hope that this information about age-appropriate grief response will be helpful to caregivers.

**Mercy**  **Kids**

*Every child. Every need. Every day.*



Preschool-aged children don't understand that death is permanent. They will benefit from lots of opportunities to express themselves through play. Kids of this age may continue to look for a loved-one who died and may ask when they will see this person again. They may also ask questions about death as it relates to others, including themselves.

## How preschool-aged children may experience grief and loss.

- May exhibit “Magical thinking” that a superhero, princess or some other imaginary being can bring back their loved one
- Believe their actions caused the death or can bring back their loved one
- Think death is punishment for bad behavior
- Have difficulty understanding abstract concepts such as Heaven
- Exhibit regression: bed wetting, thumb sucking or relying on a security blanket
- Have increased aggression
- Ask the same questions repeatedly
- Have somatic symptoms, such as a stomachache
- Exhibit little anxiety, or show sadness for only brief periods, due to belief that the deceased is coming back

## How to help.

When a very young child is experiencing the confusion of loss, you can help him or her through it by staying calm and offering constant comfort.

- Keep your child's routines as close to normal as possible
- Provide ample opportunities for your child to play and draw to express and work through their feelings
- Read books on death and loss with your child
- Give your child choices whenever possible. However, be sure to set flexible limits
- Allow the child to ask frank questions, and answer them honestly. If you're unsure how to answer, simply say “I don't know,” or ask the child, “What do you think is the answer?” This will help you clear up misconceptions
- Use clear, concrete language, such as “dead” and “not coming back.” Ambiguity like “Mommy has gone to sleep” or “God took Grandpa” can be confusing or hurtful

With time and patience, you can ease your child through the pain and confusion of loss.