

10. **Avoid making extreme life changes.**
Don't make any important decisions involving your child until life feels more balanced. It can be tempting to make some important changes right after a major loss in an effort to feel more in control. If you can, put off such changes and decisions until later. If you have a teen, advise him or her to do the same.
11. **Remind your child that grief will not harm him or her.** Although grief is painful, your child will survive and even grow from the experience.
12. **Expect your child to regress.** Reversal in the recovery process will occur from time to time. This is normal. It may happen unexpectedly, but it probably won't last long.
13. **Acknowledge the anniversary of the loss.** Do something special. Be available to provide support. If the loss was a significant one and your older child or adolescent is likely to be aware of it, the anniversary could be a difficult day.

 **WHERE CAN I GO FOR MORE INFORMATION?**

Deits, Bob. *Life After Loss*. Tucson, AZ: Fisher Books, 1992.

Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth. *On Death and Dying*. New York: MacMillan, 1969.

SEE THESE HANDOUTS ON RELATED TOPICS

- Anxiety in Children
- Depression in Children and Teens
- Helping Kids Manage Angry Feelings
- Helping Your Child or Teen Manage Stress
- How to Cope When Parenting Seems Overwhelming
- How to Help a Friend through a Crisis (for Teens)

Helping Kids Recover from Loss

The process of recovering from loss is always difficult. The grief process applies to all kinds of losses—loss of loved ones through death and divorce, losing a job, moving to a new place, losing a friend. These experiences are difficult for everyone, children included.

 **WHAT ARE THE STAGES OF RECOVERY FROM LOSS?**

There are some predictable stages that most people—adults, adolescents, and kids—pass through after losing something or someone important. In her work on death and dying, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross outlined five stages of grieving.

1. **Shock and Denial.** The first reaction to loss is often the inability to feel anything. This may include feeling numb, weak, overwhelmed, anxious, not yourself, or withdrawn.



2. **Anger.** Blaming others for the loss. Kids may be angry, irritable, and difficult to get along with.
3. **Bargaining.** “If you’ll just let my mommy live, I’ll promise to do my homework every day.”
4. **Depression.** Feeling deep sadness, disturbed sleep and eating patterns, thoughts of suicide, excessive crying.
5. **Acceptance.** Beginning to look for the lessons of the experience.

Kübler-Ross said that the grieving process involves experiencing all five stages, although not always in this order. She also said that people often cycle back and forth through a number of the stages before coming to the stage of acceptance.

WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF LOSSES?

Your child's responses to loss will probably be different from those of another child. You can help your child express his or her grief, but you can't tell him or her how to grieve.

These are some examples of significant losses that children and adolescents may experience:

- Loss of a person through death
- Loss of the family structure through divorce
- Loss of a friend when he or she moves away
- Loss of everything familiar when you move away

- Loss of a pet
- Loss of a body part through an accident or surgery
- Loss of a physical ability, such as when blindness strikes

Each kind of loss affects each person in a different way, but the recovery process usually follows Kübler-Ross' five stages.

HOW DO KIDS RECOVER FROM LOSS?

Show your child how to express feelings by writing or drawing. This helps him or her express them, rather than keeping them inside.

If your child or adolescent is experiencing the grief process, the following points may help:

1. **Everyone grieves differently.** Your child's responses to loss will probably be different from those of another child. You can help your child express his or her grief, but you can't tell him or her how to grieve.
2. **Grief needs to be expressed.** Avoid sending the message that the grieving should end. The purpose of the grief process is to help one learn to accept the reality of the loss and to learn from the experience. Cutting it short prevents the process from being completed.
3. **Remind your child that the sadness will end.** Your child will not feel bad forever. He or she will heal.
4. **Help your child get plenty of rest.** Grief is extremely stressful, and it requires energy to manage the stress.

5. **Encourage your child to talk about the loss.** People sometimes avoid talking about the loss as a denial mechanism. However, this prolongs denial and the grieving process.

It can be tempting to make some important changes right after a major loss as an effort to feel more in control. If you can, put off such changes and decisions until later.

6. **Provide opportunities for downtime.** In the days and weeks following the loss of a loved one, there is often a flurry of activity and many visitors and phone calls. Added to the stress of the loss, this can be completely exhausting for children and adults alike. Make sure your child has opportunities to go to his or her room and close the door for a while.
7. **Maintain a normal routine if you can.** There are enough changes in your child's life right now. Help your child get up in the morning, go to bed at night, and eat meals at the same times as always.
8. **Give your child extra help.** The greater the loss, the more it will be needed. If your child doesn't want to be alone, or if he or she wants to be a little less independent, make it okay for now.
9. **Show your child how to keep a journal during the grief process.** Writing about one's feelings helps to express them, rather than keeping them inside. And recording one's experiences gives your child something to remember and review in the future.