



Six common sentiments around loss

wise words

If you're worried about saying the wrong things to children, here are six common sentiments around loss that we've replaced to help you to help your children to share their feelings in a healthier way.

'Don't feel sad' It's ok to feel like that, it's perfectly normal'

We don't want others to feel unhappy, so we encourage them to push sad, painful, or negative emotions away to focus on being positive and logical. For example, "Don't feel down, tomorrow is another day." The single largest source of emotional confusion in our society stems from the false idea that we somehow should not allow ourselves to experience sad, painful, or negative feelings.

'Replace the loss' Acknowledge their emotions

When a child loses their favourite cuddly toy, a common response is, "Don't cry, we'll buy you a new one at the weekend." This reinforces the idea that if the child replaces the loss, it will fix everything, and they will feel better. In truth, they don't feel better, they just feel different. There is no need to fix a loss; children should be allowed to feel bad when their hearts are broken, and need to be heard without judgement, criticism, or analysis.

'Grieve alone' It's safe to talk

Grieving in isolation is a learned behaviour and a result of social conditioning. What's the first thing you want to do when you get good news? Share it with others! Your natural impulse upon receiving sad or bad news is the same. You want to tell others you trust. But after a lifetime of being told "laugh and the whole world laughs with you, cry and you cry alone" you begin to lose the normal impulse to talk about sad or painful things with those you trust.

'Be strong' It's ok to show your emotions

In attempting to "be strong" or "be strong for others," most people hide their own feelings. In effect, when we act strong that way and cover up our honest emotions, we are lying to those we interact with—not to mention that we may be lying to ourselves. Real strength teaches children how to communicate feelings, not bury them.

'Keep busy' Take a Moment

Keeping busy is a way to distract the mind from what's really going on. The busier we are, the less we will feel the pain. Children can develop behavioural problems to accommodate the energy generated by the lack of acknowledgment of the emotions they are trying to communicate.

'Time heals all wounds' You need to take some action to get through this

Time only passes, it does nothing. It is what we do within time that affects the quality of our lives. The false idea that time heals emotional wounds is based on a misunderstanding of the normal human reaction to losses of all kinds. As we adapt to the new, and usually painful reality of loss, we begin to be able to function a little better. With that comes the illusion that time has healed us, but all that's really happened is that we're adapting to the loss but still have unfinished business.

Further reading

Many of these myths are interlinked and are discussed in greater detail in the book *When Children Grieve* and also in blogs found on our website – www.griefuk.net/schools



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