



The Grieving Child

Children and adults grieve differently, but some adults are surprised to see just how different a child's grief looks. While adults are somber and may need to cry or talk, children often need to release physical energy by running or screaming or punching a pillow. While adults may have difficulty stopping the intense feelings of grief, children may be just the opposite. Children mourn in what has been called "grief bursts," where they express intense emotion - - sobbing, screaming or hitting - - and 10 minutes later, they are laughing and playing with friends.

Adults often mistake children's laughter and play after a loss for not caring or feeling, or worse, for not having loved the person who died. This simply isn't true. Children "dose" their feelings of grief, letting in only what they can handle, a little at a time, until the complete reality seeps in. This process, in the best of circumstances, can take three or four years and persist through several developmental stages.¹

¹ Wolfelt, A.D. (1996). Healing the Bereaved Child, Fort Collins, CO: Companion Press.