

My Grief Rights: Ten Healing Rights for Grieving Children

by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

Author's note: This "bill of rights" for grieving children is intended to empower them to help themselves heal-and to help direct the adults in their lives to be supportive as well.

Someone you love has died. You are probably having many hurtful and scary thoughts and feelings right now. Together those thoughts and feelings are called grief, which is a normal (though really difficult) thing everyone goes through after someone they love has died.

The following ten rights will help you understand your grief and eventually feel better about life again. Use the ideas that make sense to you. Post this list on your refrigerator or on your bedroom door or wall. Re-reading it often will help you stay on track as you move toward healing from your loss. You might also ask the grown-ups in your life to read this list so they will remember to help you in the best way they can.

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

2. 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 about it, that's OK, too.

3. 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 awhile. I can play or laugh, too. I might also get mad and scream. This does not mean I am bad, it just means I have scary feelings that I need help with.

4. 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.

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

6. I have the right to have "griefbursts". Griefbursts are sudden, unexpected feelings of sadness that just hit 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.

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

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

9. 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, these memories help me keep alive my love for the person who died.

10. I have the right to move toward and feel my grief and, 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