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# Loss and Change

**Children and young people can experience loss and change throughout their lives. It may be a best friend moving away, parental separation, moving house, moving into care or a family bereavement.**

When faced with major changes in their lives, children and young people can try to resist or ignore the change. Some changes can throw their lives into chaos and disarray and they will be forced to see the world very differently, knowing that things will never be the same again.

There are many experiences of change, some also involving loss. This may not be a dramatic loss, like the death of a loved one, but could be the loss of a child or young person's sense of stability and safety in the world.

A change of circumstance of any kind, meaning a change from one state to another, could make a child or young person feel sad for what has been lost. If they feel they have lost something particularly important and the issue isn't resolved properly, it could lead to sustained grieving and possible behavioural problems.

## **Responses to change**

### **Shock**

A sudden change can lead to a child or young person feeling numb and totally bewildered, or they could feel relieved and then feel guilt at this relief, as if they have betrayed someone.

### **Anger**

Children or young people may feel angry about change and loss. Let them know that it is normal to feel anger, but that they must try not to allow their anger to get out of control, as they may do something that they will regret later.

### **Pain**

Children and young people may feel like they are in a lot of pain, and that it will never get better. Try to reassure them that the pain will gradually lessen over time.

### **Grief**

A child or young person may be mourning for how the person used to be and the way they used to feel. They may be tearful or feel empty and tired all the time. They may be troubled by bad dreams and have problems concentrating.

## Loss and Change

### Depression

Children and young people may feel lonely and stressed, and that no-one understands their situation. They may also start to feel lazy and lose interest in a favourite hobby or have trouble sleeping. They may start eating too little or too much, and feel that life is not worth living. They may not want to see friends anymore.

### What can I do?

It may be upsetting for the child not to have their loss acknowledged. Children at this time will benefit greatly from support and understanding. You could provide much needed support just by being available to talk and really listen to the child's thoughts and feelings without being judgmental.

- Ask the child or young person if they want to talk about their loss.
- Ensure they feel loved and valued. Encourage them to be gentle on themselves, and discourage them from blaming themselves – reassure them that loss and change is an inevitable part of life.
- Encourage them to seek a preferred form of release – this could be through physical activity, or playing their favourite music.
- Encourage them to see their friends.
- Consider letting their school or nursery know what has happened.
- Encourage them to write a diary, as this can be positive way to help children and young people understand their thoughts and feelings.



### Points to ponder/training ideas

- Children can experience both positive and negative changes at some time throughout their lives. **And this can be positive or negative.** It may help to let the child or young person know that sometimes a negative change can have positive aspects because the person who goes through it may come out stronger and better able to cope.
- **It is worth remembering that change is a choice and that choosing not to change is also a conscious, rational choice.** What's important is why a child or young person would choose to accept or reject change.
- **Change is most satisfying when the individual chooses to change.** Children may feel that they are not in control of a situation when someone is making a change for them, and they don't feel they have a say in what's going on. Talk to them about what could be done to help them feel more involved with the process, and how they can help regain the feeling that they have some control over what is happening.

### Links to other topics in this pack

See: *Anxiety; Bereavement; Depression; Resilience; Suicide.*



#### Useful contacts

##### ChildLine

ChildLine is a free helpline for children and young people in the UK. Children and young people can call trained counsellors to talk about any issue or concern.

Tel: 0800 11 11

Website: [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

##### The Samaritans

Where no problem is too small and where you can feel safe and understood. For the text service, a person doesn't have to give their name and they try to text back in 10 minutes. There are no automated messages.

Tel: 08457 90 90 90

Text: 08457 909192

##### YoungMinds

YoungMinds is a children's mental health charity. The Parent Information Service provides free, confidential information and advice for any adult with concerns about the mental health of a child or young person.

Tel: 020 7336 8446

Parent information service: 0800 018 2138

Website: [www.youngminds.org.uk/pis](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/pis)



#### Useful leaflets/resources

*Heal the Hurt: How to Forgive and Move on* A. Macaskill (Sheldon Press, 2002).

*Living with Loss and Grief* (Sheldon, 2005).

Both are available from Mind.

Tel: 0845 766 0163 info line

Website: [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

