



ACADEMY of Grief & Loss
INFORMATION
RESOURCES
EDUCATION
SUPPORT

Normal Grief or Clinical Depression?

From: Healing the Bereaved Child (1996) by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

Signs of Clinical Depression in Children:

- In normal grief, children respond to comfort and support; clinically depressed children often reject support
- The bereaved child is often able to use play to work out feelings of grief; the depressed child is more often resistant to the use of play
- The bereaved child is often openly angry; the depressed child may complain and be irritable, but may not directly express anger.
- Bereaved children will usually connect depressed feelings to the death; depressed children often do not relate their feelings to any life event.
- In normal grief, bereaved children can still experience moments of enjoyment in life; depressed children often project a pervasive sense of doom.
- Caring adults around the bereaved child can sense feelings of sadness and emptiness; the depressed child often projects a sense of hopelessness and chronic emptiness.
- While the bereaved child is more likely to have transient physical complaints, the depressed child may have chronic physical complaints.
- Bereaved children may express guilt over some aspect of the loss; depressed children often have generalized feelings of guilt.
- While the self-esteem of bereaved children is temporarily impacted, it is usually not the deep loss of esteem typically seen in clinically depressed children.

