

## ANTICIPATORY GRIEF

**Definition:** *Anticipatory grief involves the feelings, thoughts and physical sensations that happen when you know someone is going to die or fear that someone may die. These feelings happen when a loved one is terminally ill or nearing the end of natural life. They also happen sometimes when a loved one is in danger, such as in a war or other life-threatening situation. These feelings can also be related to the fear of another loss after the death of a loved one, even if the loss is not likely to happen.*

THOUGHTS	FEELINGS	PHYSICAL
Worry What will happen to me? How can I help? How can I stop this? It's my fault.	Sadness Fear Anger Anxiety (Nervous) Loneliness Grouchy	Headaches Stomachaches Nausea Muscle aches Dizziness  <b><i>See a physician to rule out medical problems</i></b>

Read the information in the Children's Grief Section so that you will have a better understanding of how children grieve.

### TERMINAL ILLNESS

If you have a loved one who is terminally ill, allow the child to participate in a way that is meaningful to the child. Also, allow the child diversion from the intensity of the care of the loved one. If a sibling is terminally ill, remember to give the other children attention and opportunities for recreation.

Tonya remembers her experiences at age two, when her grandmother was terminally ill. She said that she help carry a tray containing a bowl of soup to her grandmother's room. She remembers that she knew that grandmother was very sick and *really* needed the soup. She also remembers visiting her grandmother in the hospital. These memories are meaningful to Tonya. While it is unusual for to remember something that well at age two, memories during times of crisis do tend to be stronger.

If your loved one is connected to medical equipment, tell your child what he or she will see before a visit. Explain what is happening in age-appropriate language. Children can grasp medical words and concepts with a little explanation. Facts are often better than imagination.

## **HIGH-RISK JOBS**

Children can become very distressed when a parent is in a high-risk job, particularly when there is media coverage about the danger of the position.

If there is a crisis that your loved one is involved in, it may be best to limit media exposure. Sensational reporting can increase anxiety and fears.

Be aware of how your words and your fears may influence your child. Children listen carefully to adult conversation, even when it appears they are distracted with play.

For military families, deployment to a combat zone can be very challenging. From history lessons to the news media, the potential lethality of a parent's work is underscored. We are confronted with statistics and losses online, on TV and cable and in conversation with others.

Justin was eight when his dad was sent into combat. Even though his dad explained that his job kept him out of the front lines and his helmet was bullet proof, Justin stated that his helmet could be knocked off and a rocket could come over the front lines and get his dad. Justin refused to be consoled and required several months after his father's safe return to experience reduced anxiety.

## **HOW TO HELP**

- Children need to know that there will always be someone to take care of them. Tell them your plan for their care if something should happen to you and the other parent.
- Turn off the news.
- Encourage your children to talk with you.
- Ask what they are hearing from other children.
- Create a memory box of the time the parent is away with a plan to share the contents with the absent parent upon his or her return.
- Try a "Worry Doll" in a little bag. The child tells the doll the worries and lets the doll hold the worries.
- Plan activities that the child can anticipate with excitement.
- Be honest about how you feel.
- Avoid making promises that you cannot keep, such as declaring that you promise that the loved one will return safely.
- For military deployment and other unpredictable situations, avoid telling children an exact date of return since this can change, even in the last hours.
- Get support from family and friends for yourself and your child.