Introduction

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Grieving is a natural reaction to a major loss. Grief progresses through stages, is manifested in a variety of ways, and can become stuck in what is termed “Complex Grief.”

Understanding Grief and Loss

All parties in a foster care situation grieve:

- Birth parents
- The child
- Siblings
- Foster family

Grieving is a normal process:

- Allows people to accept and understand their loss
- Involves many different emotions over a period of time
- Helps “come to terms” with the loss

Stages of Grief

Normal grieving process has several emotional stages:

- Shock and denial
- Despair
- Anger
- Mourning
- Guilt
- Acceptance

Not all grief follows the stages of the “normal” grieving process. Complicated grief is prolonged in one or more stages; it can become unhealthy.
Understanding the Foster Child’s Grief

The child's abrupt removal from the home and loss of parents, pets, neighbors and known environment are traumatic to a child.
- Foster family members are strangers
- Home is unfamiliar
- New neighborhood and school
- New routines

Expressions of Grief

The age and developmental stage of a child influences why a child grieves and how grief is expressed. Advice for helping children work through the stage of grief they are in.
- Interactive exercise on the child's stages of grief

Understanding Grief in Birth Parents

Birth parents experience grief and loss as well. This section examines birth parent grief and how it affects their behavior.
- Interactive exercise on the birth parent's stages of grief

Grief and the Foster Parent

The job of foster parents is emotionally loaded. When a child leaves the home, especially one the parent loved and bonded with, it’s normal to grieve.
- The stages of foster parent grief
- Supports
- Rituals to encourage acceptance and closure
- Coping with complex grief