

What to Expect from Preschool-aged Children Dealing with Loss or Trauma

While no one reacts to traumatic events in the same way, pre-school aged children may exhibit the following behaviors when dealing with loss or grief:

- They may perceive losses as reversible and not permanent.
- They may feel responsible for the tragedy, “It’s my fault, I was mad at them.”
- They may engage in repetitive questioning, “How?”, “Why?”.
- Many young children are present oriented and may act as if nothing happened.

- Typical reactions could include:
 - Regression in previously mastered skills (bed-wetting, thumb sucking, fear of the dark, or fear of parental separation)
 - Increased behavioral difficulties (hitting, kicking)
 - Irritability
 - Trouble with eating and/or sleeping
 - Nightmares
 - Reenactment play of traumatic event

- Severe reactions to trauma are rare and not always indicative of a mental illness. If symptoms don’t go away or begin to interfere with the child’s day-to-day life, they should be brought to the attention of a licensed medical or mental health professional. Severe reactions could include:
 - Hypervigilance/panic attacks
 - Extremely inappropriate and repeated aggression towards others
 - Suicidal or homicidal ideation
 - Severe depression and loss of interest in most activities

Note. Adapted from: The Dougy Center and School crisis prevention and intervention: The PREPaRE model (3rd ed.)