

GRIEF AND LOSS

THE HALLMARK OF CHILDREN IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM IS GRIEF –
GRIEF OVER THE LOSS OF AN ATTACHMENT FIGURE.

THE STAGES OF GRIEF:

SHOCK/DENIAL - CHILDREN MAY BE SHUT DOWN OR COMPLIANT

GUILT - CHILDREN FEEL RESPONSIBLE

BARGAINING - CHILDREN TRY TO WORK IT OUT AND SOMETIMES TO GET OUT

ANGER/DEPRESSION - CHILDREN ACT OUT OR TURN INWARD

SADNESS/DESPAIR - CHILDREN BEGIN TO FACE LOSS OR GIVE UP

RESOLUTION - CHILDREN CAN BEGIN TO BUILD ACCEPTANCE

While children experience the same stages of grief as adults, they do so without the emotional and intellectual resources of adults. Moreover, they have not just lost their parent or parents, they have often lost their whole world – home, siblings, relatives, friends, school, pets, neighbors. The result – normal grief in children often looks abnormal - which often leads to “labeling” the child and disrupted placements.

From the initial shock at the removal from the primary attachment figure to the point where a child may be able to reach resolution can be expected to take two years. Unfortunately, many children in the child welfare system move three or more times in these two years. The result is layers of unresolved grief with no resolution.