



LIFE & LOSS

a guide to help grieving children

Linda Goldman

3rd Edition



LIFE AND LOSS

Many clinicians and caring adults recognize that denying or ignoring grief issues in children leaves them feeling alone and that acknowledging loss is a crucial part of a child's healthy development. Really dealing with loss in productive ways, however, is sometimes easier said than done. For decades, *Life and Loss* has been the book clinicians have relied on for a full and nuanced presentation of the many issues with which grieving children grapple, as well as an honest exploration of the interrelationship between unresolved grief, educational success, and responsible citizenry. The third edition of *Life and Loss* brings this exploration firmly into the 21st century and makes a convincing case that children's grief is no longer restricted only to loss-identified children. Children's grief is now endemic; it is global. *Life and Loss* is not just the book clinicians and caring adults need to understand grief in today's society—it is the book they need in order to work with it in constructive ways.

Linda Goldman is the author of several books, including *Breaking the Silence: A Guide to Helping Children With Complicated Grief* and *Raising Our Children to Be Resilient: A Guide to Helping Children Cope With Trauma in Today's World*. She has been an educator in the public school system as a teacher and counselor for almost 20 years and has a private grief-therapy practice in Chevy Chase, Maryland. She also teaches as an adjunct professor in schools and universities.

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LIFE AND LOSS

A Guide to Help Grieving Children

Third Edition



Linda Goldman

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When anecdotes appear throughout this book, the names and specific incidents may have been modified to maintain the privacy of the people in the stories. The children and adults in the photographs may not be related to the material on the page on which they appear.

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the children of the world and the child within each of us.

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Preface

The Universal Child in a Grieving World



The new millennium ushered in exciting new technology, global communication, and increased social awareness of our planet and the interconnectedness of its people. Youngsters have sharpened their skills of intuition as thought transmission flashes instantaneously with modern technology. The ability to communicate ideas by e-mail, texting, blogging, and surfing the Internet has created a new world whereby girls and boys are immediately linked to a global community.

These enormous arenas of change are highlighted in this third edition of *Life and Loss*. They also produce challenges for our children. Natural disasters, terrorism, school shootings, violence, politics, and mature sexuality are made to seem normal as they inundate television and the Internet. Media brings distant alarming incidents, threats, and catastrophes into our homes and graphically imprints sounds and images onto our children's vulnerable, open minds. With information accessibility and overload becoming a part of modern culture, difficult and inappropriate data appear with the click of a channel or a mouse.

Privacy has diminished for kids growing up with Facebook, Twitter, and other social media. Communication with vast numbers of people is now possible, ranging from "friending" to cyberbullying and secret disclosure—underscoring the new paradigm that there are no secrets in today's world. This loss of privacy for our young people emerges out of the very scientific advancements so inherent in their surroundings. We, as caring adults, have a responsibility to meet the ever-changing challenges of each generation.

Today's children, and those of tomorrow, are grieving children. These children are not only those who have lost a toy, a pet, a secret, a home, or a parent, but are also the majority of our existing young people living in diverse life situations.

The world and daily life are changing rapidly. Young people often feel unprotected by the adult world, and their safety in school, outside the home, and even inside their homes may be threatened. Their ability to visualize a fulfilling future is becoming more limited. Our concern for our children's school performance and social and emotional well-being needs to address the huge, hidden realm of life issues that distract and preoccupy their thoughts and feelings.

Children's grief is not the isolated problem of children with identified loss. Children's grief is endemic—it is global. It is the norm, not the exception. Our goal is to learn to identify grief in its many forms and work with it constructively. We need to protect, prepare, and support our youth to live their lives fully and grieve death and loss as parts of a timeless journey of life in their complex universe of technology and change. As long as we deny any issue of grief or loss, at-risk young people emerge in a lonely environment. By our acknowledgment of their losses, children will feel we are affirming their reality. One of our primary challenges is to recognize the breadth and scope of the issues involving and related to grief and to emphasize the interrelationship between unresolved grief, emotional challenges, educational success, and responsible adulthood.

This third edition of *Life and Loss* includes a chapter on the losses often assumed or felt with varying family issues. The world has become a melting pot of cultures, religions, and family structures that include adoption, deployment, divorce, immigration, and all different kinds of families. It is essential to incorporate into grief work the concept of the loss of the idealized family. Acknowledging issues of imprisonment, deportation, blended families, and same-sex parenting enables us to instill core concepts that help eliminate idealized stereotyping and recognize the diversity of family structures so inherent in these modern times.

The universal child no longer has a family unit of only a mom, dad, brother, and sister. Today's child may live with a grandparent, stepsisters, a brother of a different race or nationality, or two dads or two moms. Inclusion devoid of stereotyping is key in meeting the needs of an ever-growing multicultural and diverse population of family systems.



In beginning to lay the groundwork, parents, educators, therapists, clergy, physicians, and all caring professionals need to take a fresh look at the present model used for mental health and learning. Acknowledgment of the relationship between repressed grief, ability to learn, and self-growth is essential. The emergence of a therapeutic educational paradigm for the grieving child based on this obvious connection has been slow in coming. *Life and Loss, 3rd Edition*, presents new models for grief support revolving around death and other losses that allow children to freely express their process and feel supported by peers and caring adults.

This new paradigm that relates decreased quality of learning to the shutdown of traumatized children needs to be brought out into the light of day. Let's look at today's world . . . today's needs . . . today's children . . . with a new way of seeing.

Children, parents, and professionals need to receive comprehensive trainings, resources, and supports to work with the groundswell of today's grief and loss issues. Only then can we create an international grief community capable of safeguarding all of its children.

Too often, unresolved grief in children not only leads to an inability to learn but also results in overwhelming and powerful emotions that get trapped, many times in destructive ways. Young people may project their unrecognized grief feelings outward onto the world in the form of homicide, violence, and abuse, or they may project inward onto themselves as self-hatred and possible suicide ideation and completion. Our goal is to help them release these feelings to grow to become productive adults.

The future of the planet rests on creating today and tomorrow's children who do not become the criminals, the homeless, the uneducated, the drug addicted, or the abandoned. If young people carry unacknowledged grief issues to such an extreme, they can become a detriment to themselves as well as society. Unfortunately, this is the path of all too many of today's youth. We must move forward in the 21st century to support children in becoming a global society capable of carrying humankind safely through the years to come.



Creating a society of productive human beings demands work. This work includes using evolving systems that allow a child's grief to be *expressed* rather than repressed. Only then can the inner growth of the child light the way to his or her emotional maturity, inner wisdom and responsible place as a universal citizen of the world.

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Introduction

This book is written for and about children. It is also written for and about adults who want to help kids work through their issues of loss and grief. As a mom, wife, daughter, friend, teacher, therapist, educator, and pet owner, I am very aware of the importance of open communication, expressing feelings, and access to helpful resources during sensitive times in a child's life. My goal in creating this guide was to empower parents, educators, clergy, and health care professionals to acknowledge and respect children's loss and grief issues in an informed, open, and loving way, reducing the fear and denial often associated with these topics.

Each chapter of this guide includes suggestions that allow the mind, heart, and common sense to work together to create a caring environment for kids.

This guide is user friendly. One can open to any page and find useful information. Pictures are placed throughout the book as a reminder of the child's world and ways for adults to enter it. The reader may be surprised to see so many photographs showing children in a lighthearted fashion. These pictures illustrate how much time children spend with play and fantasy, no matter what their life circumstances or inner feelings may be. An active, playing child can still be a grieving child. Children escape and deny just as adults do, and often their mode of working through grief is play.

Real-life anecdotes have been chosen to illustrate typical situations. A section follows each story with practical ideas on how to help a child understand each situation and adjust to the change. Ways to prepare for grief, resources to use, and follow-up activities are included. This simplified but structured approach is beneficial in working with a wide range of circumstances. The basic ideas can be modified and expanded to fit new challenges that arise in the life of a child.

The title, *Life and Loss: A Guide to Help Grieving Children*, was chosen for several reasons. While we need to recognize death as an important part of life, it is only one of many losses children experience. Whether over a broken toy, a broken leg, a broken home, or a broken heart, children grieve and mourn. Moving, divorce, adoption, deportation, deployment, and illness are a few of the many issues interwoven into the threads of grief work that exist side by side with the death of a loved one (pet, friend, neighbor, sibling, parent, or grandparent). In today's world, we must also address the issues of violence, abuse, homicide, and suicide that impact our children's everyday lives.

The third edition of *Life and Loss* includes updated resources, websites, research from the past 12 years, and current information on loss of privacy and intimacy (Internet, secrecy exposed, cyberbullying), the digital age, pet death and loss, online memorializing, and children's grief-support groups. Two new chapters on *family loss issues* include discussions of diversity, divorce, adoption, immigration, deployment, imprisonment, and all different kinds of families.

In the first chapter, the stage of understanding is set by providing loss and grief statistics leading into the 21st century. It explores the categories of childhood losses, emphasizing the loss of a future and protection for today's children. A new loss so current for today's children is the loss of privacy and intimacy with exposure to social media and the Internet. Suggestions on how to help are presented. The remaining chapters develop a



deeper understanding of concepts that underlie [Chapter 1](#). The myths of loss and grief with which we, as caring adults, have been reared and then pass on to our children are explored in [Chapter 2](#). We need to acknowledge these myths and replace them with facts.

The four psychological tasks of grief are explained in [Chapter 3](#). Material is provided to create an understanding of each task. Limiting clichés are replaced by more appropriate responses. The child’s developmental understanding from birth to adolescence is presented. Ways to commemorate are offered. The story of Star, a pet dog that has died, offers practical ideas for real life situations.

Identifying behaviors associated with grief and loss is the first step in actively working with children’s needs. [Chapter 4](#) discusses this and then presents grief resolution techniques that can be used at home, in school, or on the playground, such as storytelling, letter writing, children’s questions, drama, artwork, music, crafts, and other projective techniques that access and expand grief work with children. Introducing social media as an avenue for children’s grief work will be explored. Computer folders for memory work, web support groups, memorializing online, and memory e-mails can be used effectively with standard cautions for children on the Internet.

[Chapter 5](#) is a special story that provides a needed answer to the questions of what to say when a child wants to say good-bye to a dying person. Through one mother’s experience, we are provided with a world of knowledge, and then we broaden her ideas to include a general format for other loss and grief issues. Resources for children who are living with dying and ways to say good-bye at a memorial service and funeral home are also included.

[Chapter 6](#) recognizes the grief and loss issues associated with pet death and loss. “The Story of Thatcher: A Celebration of Life” shares a family’s journey in saying good-bye to their beloved dog Thatcher. Resources on pet death are included.



[Chapter 7](#) highlights issues of technology for children that have emerged so quickly onto the horizon of daily life. The digital age has created losses as well as gains that challenge young people.

[Chapter 8](#) addresses special loss issues involved with diversity in families. [Chapter 9](#) continues highlighting loss involving family separation involved with divorce, adoption, deployment, and imprisonment with accompanying resources to provide words to use with children on these issues.

[Chapter 10](#) is especially for educators. It describes the challenges they and their students face daily. Guidelines for educational referrals and a children's loss inventory are included. Practical ways to use teachable moments in the classroom are described, as are helpful resources for educators.

The idea of a *global grief community* is developed in [Chapter 11](#). Parent education, advocacy in the school system, child education, professional training, and multicultural considerations are explained, and a model of a grief team is presented. Children's grief support group programs are highlighted as well as national resources that can be helpful to adults working with children. Children's grief camps and hotlines are included as important supports.

An exploration of materials is provided in [Chapter 12](#), where annotations are included for books for adults and children, videos, manuals, CDs and DVDs, guides, and curricula, and valuable websites for families and professionals about loss and grief. Children's literature is divided into specific loss issues with age recommendations.

Life and Loss, Third Edition, lays the foundation for working with children's grief and loss and sets the stage for acknowledging complex grief issues such as suicide, homicide, AIDS, and violence, which were addressed in my book *Breaking the Silence* 2nd Edition. It also discusses traumatic grief (terrorism, school violence, and shootings) and supporting children in natural attributes of resilience—issues that were highlighted in my book *Raising Our Children to Be Resilient*.

Life and Loss, Third Edition, creates a framework for children's grief work with today's universal child. Importantly, vast amounts of current resources, information, and research have been updated. Grief resolution techniques have been added, demonstrating children's written work and artwork. The inclusion of three timely childhood losses—the loss of the protection of the adult world, the loss of a future, and the loss of privacy—highlights issues emerging in terms of grief and loss for present and future generations.

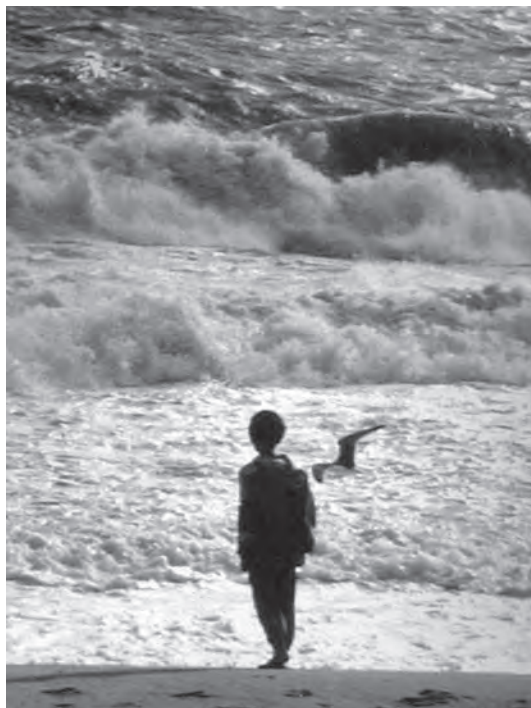
Denial, fear, shame, and lack of appropriate role models have shaped the lives of many adults. This often makes it difficult for us to relate to children with innocence, simplicity, and openness, especially in the sensitive areas of loss and grief. Yet children are constantly immersed in this ever-changing environment, and they need grown-ups to provide mentorship. Parents, educators, and other caring professionals have the responsibility of helping these young people with their grief process.

Life and Loss, Third Edition, has been written to serve as a guide and model. Through the use of photographs, children's work, anecdotes, simple techniques, and resources, we can tune in to the world of children. Hopefully, this book will unlock the door of respect for the child's inner universe and allow us to enter it with integrity.

There appear to be so many grieving young people with so many difficult and diverse problems that we who live and work with them may often feel overwhelmed with the possible futility of impacting their lives. With the enormous amount of hurting children in our society, we may wonder if whatever strides we make actually create a difference for the endless sea of grieving children.

It is my hope and prayer that we all begin today—bound together as co-creators of a global grief community—by going back to our homes, our neighborhoods, our schools, our offices, our communities, our countries, and our world—with a shared vision and a renewed commitment to help each and every child float through their ocean of grief on the unified minds and caring hearts of the adults and children who surround them.

LINDA GOLDMAN



CHAPTER

1

CHILDREN'S LOSS AND GRIEF



Adoption Illness **Deployment**
Terrorism **Natural Disasters**
School Shootings Deportation
Homelessness **Poverty** Bullying
Suicide **Violence** Divorce
Imprisonment Abuse
AIDS Drugs **Death** Murder
Social Media **Cyberbullying**

There are two things we can hope to give our children
One of these is roots; the other, wings.

—Hodding Carter III

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH KIDS TODAY?



We may ask ourselves, “What’s the matter with kids today?” and realize the very fact that we are asking this question is in itself an answer. We adults have created this grieving world, and our children are left with its fear, its chaos, and its denial.

Donna O’Toole, children’s grief educator and author of *Growing Through Grief* (1989), warns that so often the children “are the forgotten ones, lacking role models and assurances for a safe journey, they accumulate losses—attaching themselves to their memories,” and can be left “frozen in time and buried alive in inner space” if they don’t have the opportunity to work through their feelings.

We ask ourselves, “What’s the matter with kids today?” The answer is that the world is very different from the one in which we grew up.

Today’s children witness violence daily. A little boy asked his teacher who George Washington was. “He was our first president” was the reply. “Who shot him?” he asked, automatically assuming all presidents get shot. In the movie, “Grand Canyon,” a teenager involved in gang violence was asked by his uncle, “Why are you doing this? What will you do when you’re 20?” “Are you kidding me?” The teenager responded, “I’ll be dead by 20.”

FACTS ABOUT THE GRIEVING CHILD

Today's children live in a world of experiences and memories inundated with children's loss and death issues. The following statistics illustrate the picture of the grieving child as the norm in the present millennium.



Each Day in America

*2 mothers die in childbirth.
 4 children are killed by abuse or neglect.
 5 children or teens (die by) suicide.
 7 children or teens are killed by firearms.
 24 children or teens die from accidents.
 67 babies die before their first birthdays.
 208 children are arrested for violent crimes.
 467 children are arrested for drug crimes.
 892 babies are born at low birth weight.
 1,208 babies are born to teen mothers.
 838 public school students are corporally punished.
 1,825 children are confirmed as abused or neglected.
 1,208 babies are born without health insurance.
 2,712 babies are born into poverty.
 2,857 high school students drop out.
 4,500 children are arrested.
 4,475 babies are born to unmarried mothers.
 16,244 public school students are suspended.*

—Children's Defense Fund (2013)

THE NORM IS THE GRIEVING CHILD

Death

The death of a parent, which is experienced by 4% of children in Western countries, is consistently rated as one of the most stressful life events that a child can experience.

Bereaved children had a threefold increased risk of depression.

—Melhem, Walker, Moritz, and Brent (2008)

More than 1.25 million children receive benefits as the result of their parent's death.

—Paventi (2010)

Children's Deaths by Guns

In 2007, 3,042 children and teens died from gunfire in the United States—8 every day—as a result of homicide, suicide, or accidental or undetermined shootings.

—Children's Defense Fund (2010)

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Learning Disability

In 2006, NCHS (National Center for Health Statistics) estimated that 4.5 million school-aged children (5–17 years of age) had been diagnosed with ADHD and 4.6 million children with LD.

—Pastor and Rueben (2008, p. 5)

Children who lived in a mother-only family were more likely than those in a two-parent family to have each of the three diagnoses (ADHD without LD, LD without ADHD, and both conditions (children 6–17 years of age until 2006).

—Pastor and Rueben (2008, p. 3)

Divorce

Half of all divorces involve minor children, with 1 million children a year joining the ranks.

—Portnoy (2008)

Half of all marriages are expected to fail before a child reaches 18.

—Fagan, Fitzgerald, and Rector (2009)

Adoption

Approximately 120,000 children are adopted each year in the United States.

—American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (2011)

Grandparents Raising Children

Almost 7.8 million children under age 18 live in homes where the householders are grandparents or other relatives (10.5% of all children under 18).

—AARP et al., citing 2010 U.S. Census

Single Parents

An estimated 13.7 million parents had custody of 22.0 million children under 21 years of age while the other parent lived somewhere else.

—Grall, 2011

Blended Family

Seventeen percent of all children under age 18 (12.2 million) live in blended families.

Forty-six percent of the children in blended families, or 5.5 million, live with at least one stepparent.

One in 10 children living with two parents lives with a stepparent or adoptive parent.

2.9 million children live with no parents (308,000 children live with one or more foster parents).

—Kreider (2007)

Economic Loss

Child poverty increased by almost 10% between 2008 and 2009.

A total of 15.5 million children, or 1 in every 5 children in America, lived in poverty in 2009, an increase of nearly 4 million children since 2000.

Almost 60% of all children in poverty lived in single-parent families.

In 2009, more than 1 in 3 Black children and 1 in 3 Hispanic children lived in poverty, compared to more than 1 in 10 White non-Hispanic children.

The number of homeless preschool-age children increased by 43% in the past two school years. The number of homeless children and youth enrolled in public schools increased 41% between the 2006–2007 and the 2008–2009 school years.

Millions of children and families fell into poverty in 2008 from the economic downturn.

—Children’s Defense Fund (2011, p. B2)

A record 46 million Americans were living in poverty in 2010.

Children under 18 suffered the highest poverty rate, 22%, compared with adults and the elderly.

—Morgan (2011)

Children With Imprisoned Parents

Fifty-three percent of the 1.5 million people held in U.S. prisons in 2007 were the parents of one or more minor children. This percentage translates into more than 1.7 million minor children with an incarcerated parent.

African American children are 7 and Latino children 2.5 times more likely to have a parent in prison than White children. The estimated risk of parental imprisonment for White children by the age of 14 is 1 in 25, while for Black children it is 1 in 4 by the same age.

—Justice Strategies (2011)

Deportation

Of the nearly 2.2 million immigrants deported in the decade ending 2007, more than 100,000 were the parents of children who, having been born in the United States, were American citizens.

—Falcone (2009)

More than 5 million children live in the United States with at least one undocumented parent. Close to 75% of those children are U.S. citizens. When one or both parents are deported, children often have to choose between living with their immediate family—in another country—or living without them in the United States.

—Reitmayer (2010)

TV Viewing

Preschoolers, aged 2 to 5, spend 32.5 hours a week in front of the television. Children aged 6 to 11 spend 28 hours a week.

—McDonough (2009)



Social Media Use

From 2005 to 2010, there has been a huge increase in ownership among 8- to 18-year-olds 18% to 76% for iPods and other MP3 players: from 39% to 66% for cell phones.

During an average day, 8- to 18-year-olds devote an average of 7 hours and 38 minutes to using entertainment media (more than 53 hours a week).

The proportion of young people who read a newspaper in a typical day dropped from 42% in 1999 to 23% in 2009.

Children in grades 7 through 12 report spending an average of about 1.5 hours a day sending or receiving texts.

—Kaiser Family Foundation (2010)