

### 2.1.3 Loss

CLA have often experienced loss before they are looked after, as a result of the difficult relationships that they have with their care givers and the challenging circumstances that they live in. For example, they may have frequently felt abandoned and feared that they had lost their care giver forever. Alternatively, the child may have experienced inconsistent care, and felt loss and sadness during those times that their needs were not being met.

Being taken into care represents a further loss for the child, even if the attachment that they had to their birth parent was insecure or disorganised. The child loses all that is familiar to them, even if their experiences are far from ideal. Instability in foster placements leads to further experiences of loss. Thus, CLA often have multiple losses.

Kubler-Ross (1969) suggested that there are stages that people experiencing loss or grief go through. The stages are

- Shock and denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Despair and depression
- Acceptance/understanding.

Each individual will go through the stages at their own pace, and in different orders. Section 2.2.2 indicates how schools can support children and young people with loss.

The experience of attachment difficulties, trauma and loss can have long lasting effects on how children and young people relate to others, even if these new relationships are with people who are safe and positive. These experiences can lead to behavioural, emotional and mental health difficulties. Suggestions for how schools can address these issues are covered in section 2.2.

Read more:

Clements, J (2013). *A good practice guide for schools: Understanding and meeting the needs of children who are looked after, fostered, adopted or otherwise permanently placed*. London: PAC. Available: <http://pac.org.uk/about/publications/>

The following website provides excellent support for becoming an attachment aware school: [www.attachmentawareschools.com](http://www.attachmentawareschools.com)

The Nuffield Foundation website: <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/news/family-drug-and-alcohol-court-more-effective-ordinary-care-proceedings-treating-parental-substa>

### 2.2.3 Supporting children and young people with loss and grief

Stage	Behaviour
Denial/shock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Displaying few emotions</li> <li>• Being withdrawn</li> <li>• Confusion</li> <li>• Numbness</li> <li>• Fear</li> </ul>
Anger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical lashing out</li> <li>• Irritable</li> <li>• Argumentative</li> <li>• Blaming others for events</li> <li>• Embarrassment</li> <li>• Shame</li> </ul>
Bargaining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asking lots of questions about the loss/situation</li> <li>• Wanting to tell their story</li> <li>• Reaching out to other to find a solution to the loss</li> <li>• Making bargains with the universe or God 'I promise I'll...if you bring back...'</li> </ul>
Despair/depression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behaving as if they don't care</li> <li>• Rejecting others</li> <li>• Feeling overwhelmed</li> <li>• Lack of energy</li> <li>• Feeling helpless</li> </ul>
Acceptance/ understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploring options</li> <li>• Become more hopeful about the future</li> <li>• Cope better with the outcomes of the loss, such as forming new relationships and trusting new carers</li> </ul>
Other signs of grief or loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decreased verbalisation</li> <li>• Increased anxiety (e.g. clinginess, whining, fear of separation)</li> <li>• Regressive behaviours (e.g. bedwetting, thumb sucking)</li> <li>• Difficulty concentrating or inattention</li> <li>• Somatic complaints (e.g. headaches, stomach problems)</li> <li>• Sleep disturbances (e.g. nightmares, fear of the dark)</li> <li>• Repeated telling and acting out of the event</li> <li>• Withdrawal</li> <li>• Increased irritability, disruptive behaviour, or aggressive behaviour</li> </ul>

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Stage	Behaviour
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depression, guilt, or anger</li> <li>• Flashbacks</li> <li>• Emotional numbing or depression</li> <li>• Nightmares</li> <li>• Avoidance or withdrawal</li> <li>• Peer relationship problems</li> <li>• Substance abuse or other high-risk behaviour</li> <li>• loss of interest in daily activities (e.g., extracurricular activities and friends)</li> <li>• Changes in appetite</li> <li>• School refusal</li> <li>• Fear of being alone</li> <li>• Severe drop in school achievement</li> </ul>

## What the school can do

- Talk about loss. This gives children permission to talk about it, too
- Ask questions to determine how children understand loss, and gauge their physical and emotional reactions
- Maintain consistent routines in school as these provide stability and reassurance
- Listen patiently. Remember that each person is unique and will grieve in his or her own way, and in their own time
- Be prepared to discuss the loss repeatedly. Children should be encouraged to talk about, act out, or express through writing or art, the details of the loss as well as their feelings about it, and about other changes that have occurred in their lives as a result of the loss
- Give children important facts about the loss at an appropriate developmental level. Do not tell lies or half-truths
- Help children understand the loss and intervene to correct false perceptions about the cause of the event, ensuring that they do not blame themselves for the situation
- Help the child to create memories such as using scrap books to recognise the people who have been important to them
- Provide a model of healthy mourning by being open about times when you have experienced sadness and grief
- Take care of yourself so you can assist the children and adolescents in your care
- Acknowledge that it will take time to mourn and that recovery from loss is a process that occurs over months and years
- Overcoming grief and loss is hard work and the child may become tired very easily. Allow opportunities to take a break

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- Children who have suffered multiple losses will need long lasting support. Try to establish multiple support mechanisms

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Australian Childhood Foundation (2006). *SMART: Strategies for managing abuse related trauma*. Discussion paper Melbourne, Australia: Author. Available at [www.childhood.org.au](http://www.childhood.org.au)

Downey, L (2007). *Calmer classrooms: A guide to working with traumatised children*. Melbourne, Australia: Child Safety Commissioner

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