



IRISH FA SAFE SPORT GUIDANCE

PHYSICAL INDICATORS OF GRIEF IN A COACHING CONTEXT

Physical indicator	Why this occurs	How this may present on the training pitch or on match day
Tiredness/fatigue	Children may be afraid to sleep in case further death or incident occurs, so their sleep patterns are disrupted; they may also experience nightmares	Too tired to engage in training drills; slower running pace than normal; appearance of lethargy or tiring early during a match
Unexplained pain/injury/illness	Anxiety symptoms often present physically e.g. sore head or tummy; children can also draw attention to physical pain as a way of masking emotional upset; they may fear injury or illness and convince themselves they are injured/unwell	Faking injury; going down easily when tackled and staying down; asking to be subbed off because of injury
Changes in appetite	Children may lose their appetite or eat more than usual for comfort; eating patterns may change e.g. not wanting to participate in family meal times or social eating	Lacking in energy; unable to complete more physically demanding drills or finish a full game; snacking on high fat or sugar foods during training or at half time
Over-sensitivity to noise	Children experiencing grief can be in a heightened state of alert and emotional reactivity, which can mean loud noises contribute to sensory overload	May be sensitive to raised voices in training or on the pitch; can become distracted by pitch-side noise and lose focus during the game

**Physical and behavioural indicators are not exhaustive and may not all be displayed by every child. If coaches are concerned about the presence of indicators within their team they should seek advice from the club DCSO/Welfare Officer and make their concerns known to parents/guardians*



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BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS OF GRIEF IN A COACHING CONTEXT

Behavioural indicator	Why this occurs	How this may present on the training pitch or on match day
Withdrawal	Children can be overwhelmed by their own emotions or may struggle to express their feelings. They often find it easier to withdraw as a way of coping rather than confronting grief or trauma openly	Absence from training; unwillingness to play matches; refusal to engage in drills; less engagement with team mates
Aggression	Grief leads children to feel frustrated and out of control. Aggressive behaviour can be displayed as a way of regaining control in very uncertain times	Shouting or raising voice unnecessarily during training; overly aggressive tackles; frustration or lack of patience with team mates; uncharacteristic swearing or use of inappropriate language; starting fights on the pitch
Over-confidence	Children may display false bravado to mask feelings of sadness or to give the appearance that they are fine and coping well in times of grief or trauma	Insisting they demonstrate drills or take the lead in matches e.g. taking the penalty or free kick when this is not their normal role; cocky or arrogant mannerisms; cheekiness or back chat towards coaches
Heightened responses	Hyper-vigilance is a common grief response, particularly when loss has been sudden or traumatic. They can enter a heightened state of awareness to protect against perceived future threats as a way of feeling safe	Nervous or anxious before a match; overly emotional after a loss; overly concerned about a team mate's injury; overly concerned if they inflict injury on others; concerned for own safety during matches e.g. pulling out of tackles



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Behavioural indicator	Why this occurs	How this may present on the training pitch or on match day
Depressive responses	Children can experience depressive responses (different from clinical depression) when the reality of bereavement or recent trauma sets in	Low energy during training or matches; complaining their body feels 'heavy' or weak; day-dreaming on the pitch; absent-mindedness e.g. forgetting boots or shin pads
Forgetfulness	Thoughts of grief or recent trauma can overwhelm a child's ability to think and memory can often be affected - the child's brain only has so much 'space' for everything it is trying to process	Forgetting previously perfected drills in training; forgetting tactics or coach instructions during a match
Regressive behaviour	Sudden death or traumatic experiences can make children feel unsafe. They often display regressive behaviour (behaving or speaking like they are younger) to return to earlier childhood when they felt more safe	Displaying football behaviours uncharacteristic of their age e.g. kicking the ball away, not listening to coach instructions, crying when they fall or are tackled; loss of confidence in long established abilities or skills
Obsessive or repetitive behaviours	Children find comfort and safety in routine, but this can become problematic when the child obsesses over changes to routine or insists on exaggerated repetition	Wanting to complete a drill over and over; becoming obsessive or superstitious about e.g. kit, boots, pre match rituals