

QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU DECIDE WHEN TO CLOSE FROM DOUGY CENTER



In keeping with our philosophy, we encourage you to let your child or teen take the lead in deciding when they are ready to close from their group. The 'right time' to say goodbye is different for every family and we know deciding when to close can feel complex. Here are several Q&As to help you navigate the decision. You can also reach out to your Staff Coordinator at any time to talk it over.

What are some reasons families decide to close?

The answer to this question is as unique as each child, teen, and adult who attends, but there are some common themes for families who decide they are ready to close.

- 1. A child or teen feels like they no longer need the type of support our groups provide.** Peer grief support groups are designed to help children and teens know they are not alone in their grief and to have a safe place to talk/play/express their grief with others who understand. Some children and teens may realize they would be better supported in a different environment, such as individual or family therapy. Others might find they have the support they need through friends, family, sports, youth groups, mentoring programs, or others community-based offerings.
- 2. Schedule conflicts.** If your family is unable to attend consistently – at least 75% of the time – it's best to talk with your Staff Coordinator about either switching to a different day/time or closing from the program for now.
- 3. A different activity becomes a greater priority.** If your child or teen is starting to prioritize other interests such as sports, spending time with friends/family, homework, or after school activities, over attending their Dougy Center group, this could be a good indicator they are ready to close.
- 4. Your child consistently says they only come to Dougy Center to play.** It's true that many children say they come to Dougy Center because they like to play in our various expression rooms. Given that, it's helpful to ask follow-up questions like, "What do you like about playing at Dougy Center vs. playing elsewhere?" "Is there something about playing with other kids who have also had someone die that's helpful?" "What is it like to play at Dougy Center vs. when you play with your other friends?" Their answers may help you determine if there's something important about playing in the context of a peer grief support group, or they are ready to close and continue to play in other environments.
- 5. Your child shares with us that they no longer want to be part of a group.** If the Staff Coordinator gets the sense that your child no longer wants to attend, they will discuss it with you to ensure everyone is on the same page.



Who decides that it is time for us to close?

While there are several scenarios where it's not possible for a child or teen to make the decision to close – moving away, schedule conflict, job change, or when a child's needs are different than peer grief support – ideally the decision to close should be made by your child or teen. Our peer support groups function best when all participants want to be there. Even if you'd prefer your child to continue, it can be detrimental if a child or teen who doesn't want to participate is pressured to attend. It can negatively affect them, their peers, and the group dynamic.

Is there an ideal time of year to close?

While the ideal time is whenever your child or teen decides they are ready to close, there are some natural breaks in our group schedule that provide a good time to check-in with how they are feeling about continuing or closing. These breaks occur over Spring Break (late March/early April), late July and August, and over the winter holidays (late December/early January).

What if, as an adult, I'm not ready to close?

We understand that there are times when a child or teen is ready to close from their group before you as their parent/caregiver might be. Since we aren't

able to accommodate adults attending without their child or teen being enrolled in a group, we are happy to talk with you about other support options in the community. Please reach out to your Staff Coordinator who coordinates your group to learn about other resources.

If we decide to close, what are the next steps?

When you and your family are ready to close, it's best to reach out to your Staff Coordinator. They'll help you navigate the best way to share the news and plan a meaningful goodbye. Each child, teen, and adult is invited to participate in a special rock ceremony at their last group. While this is completely optional, it can be a meaningful way for the group to appreciate you and your child or teen and for each of you to say goodbye.

If we close, can we return?

Grief changes over time, so in most cases, the answer to this common question is yes. Some children and teens will decide peer support would be helpful again when they move into a new developmental stage, or if another loss occurs, that brings up their grief in new ways. While we can't guarantee that you'll be able to rejoin the same group, we will work to get you signed up for one that works with your schedule and needs.



The National Grief Center
for Children & Families

Dougy Center Bookstore/Resources

Dougy Center's practical, easy-to-use materials are based on what they have learned from more than 65,000 Dougy Center participants. To order online, visit dougy.org or dougybookstore.org, or call 503.775.5683.

About Dougy Center

Founded in 1982, Dougy Center provides grief support in a safe place where children, teens, young adults, and their families can share their experiences before and after a death. Dougy Center provides support and training locally, nationally, and internationally to individuals and organizations seeking to assist children in grief.

©2026