



GRIEVING THE DEATH OF A GRANDPARENT

*Supporting a Child After the Loss of a
Grandmother, Grandfather, or Grandparent Figure*

For many children, a grandparent is a source of comfort, tradition, stories, fun, caregiving, faith, family history, or unconditional attention. Some grandparents are daily caregivers; others live far away but remain emotionally important. The impact of the death depends less on the title “grandparent” than on the relationship the child actually had.

UNDERSTAND THE RELATIONSHIP

Ask what the grandparent meant in the child's everyday life. Did they provide childcare, live in the home, call every week, attend activities, tell family stories, or create special traditions? Understanding the relationship helps adults understand what the child has lost.

WHAT YOU MAY NOTICE

- Questions about where the grandparent is now or whether other older relatives will die.
- Sadness around visits, holidays, family meals, vacations, or routines that included the grandparent.
- Concern about a grieving parent who has just lost their own mother or father.

GENTLE REMINDER

The depth of a child's grief is shaped by the relationship, not by a family title. A grandparent may have been one of the most important people in the child's world.

HELP THE CHILD UNDERSTAND WHAT CHANGED

Explain clearly that the grandparent died and what that means physically. Then talk about practical changes: who will pick the child up, whether visits will change, what will happen to the grandparent's home, or how family gatherings may be different.

WORDS THAT CAN HELP

Try: “Grandma died, and we will not be able to visit her the way we used to.” “Dad is very sad because Grandpa was his father. Dad's sadness is not your job to fix.” “We can keep telling Grandpa's stories and remembering the things you loved doing together.”

MAKE ROOM FOR FAMILY GRIEF

A child may see a parent grieving intensely for the first time. Explain adult emotion without making the child responsible for it: “I am crying because I miss my mom. I am sad, and I am still able to take care of you.”





PRESERVE STORIES AND FAMILY HISTORY

Grandparents often connect children to earlier generations. Record stories, recipes, sayings, photographs, traditions, family history, or memories while they are available. Invite the child to choose what feels meaningful rather than turning remembrance into an assignment.

ALLOW THE RELATIONSHIP TO BE REAL

- Not every grandparent relationship is simple or close. A child may feel sadness, anger, confusion, relief, or very little emotion. Avoid telling the child how much they should miss someone based only on the family role.
- REMEMBERING DEVELOPMENT MATTERS
- As children grow, they may understand more about who their grandparent was and what has been lost. Stories shared by family members can help the relationship continue to develop even after death.

A THOUGHT TO CARRY WITH YOU

Stories are one way generations remain connected. When a grandparent dies, sharing memories can help a child continue carrying both the person and the family's history forward.

A MOMENT FOR REFLECTION

What did this grandparent uniquely bring to the child's life? Is there a story, tradition, object, recipe, photograph, or activity that could help preserve that connection?

WHEN MORE SUPPORT MAY HELP

Consider additional support when grief, anxiety, behavioral changes, or concern for a grieving parent become persistent, severe, or significantly disruptive to the child's daily life.

A GENTLE CLOSING

A grandparent's physical presence may be gone, but the relationship can remain woven into family stories, traditions, values, memories, and the child's developing sense of where they come from.

What did this grandparent uniquely bring to the child's life? Is there a story, tradition, object, recipe, photograph, or activity that could help preserve that connection?

