



HELPING A CHILD FEEL SAFE AFTER SOMEONE DIES

Rebuilding Security, Trust, and Predictability After Loss

When someone dies, a child's sense of safety can change. The world may suddenly feel less predictable, and questions can appear: “Who will take care of me?” “Will you die too?” “Where will I live?” “What happens if I get sick?” Helping a child feel safe does not mean promising that nothing difficult will ever happen. It means creating dependable care, honest information, and a clear sense of what the child can count on now.

SAFETY IS BOTH PRACTICAL AND EMOTIONAL

Children need to know who will care for them, where they will sleep, who will take them to school, and what routines will continue. They also need emotional safety - permission to ask questions, express feelings, remember the person, and know that adult emotions are not their responsibility to manage.

WHAT YOU MAY NOTICE

- Repeated questions about who will care for them or whether another person will die.
- Clinginess, checking behaviors, difficulty separating, or wanting detailed information about plans.
- Increased sensitivity to changes in routine, adult conversations, illness, sirens, travel, or other reminders of the death.

GENTLE REMINDER

You cannot promise a child that no one else will ever die. You can promise that caring adults will tell the truth, make plans for their care, and help them through what happens.

MAKE THE NEAR FUTURE PREDICTABLE

Tell the child what will happen today and tomorrow before trying to solve every future concern. Use calendars, written schedules, or simple routines when helpful. If plans change, explain the change rather than allowing the child to discover it unexpectedly.

WORDS THAT CAN HELP

Try: “You will be cared for.” “Here is who will pick you up from school.” “I expect to be here, and we also have other adults who can care for you if needed.” “You can ask me when something feels scary or confusing.” Honest reassurance builds more trust than impossible promises.





A DEEPER LOOK

Children often listen to adult conversations even when adults think they are not paying attention. Fragments about finances, medical problems, legal matters, or family conflict can sound frightening without context. Protect children from unnecessary adult details while giving them the information that directly affects their lives.

KEEP CAREGIVING AS CONSISTENT AS POSSIBLE

Familiar people, routines, rules, meals, school attendance, bedtime rituals, and activities can communicate stability. When major changes are unavoidable, prepare the child ahead of time and explain what will stay the same as well as what will change.

LET THE CHILD HAVE SOME CHOICES

Death removes control. Small, appropriate choices can help restore agency: which comfort item to bring, whether to look at photographs, what memory activity to do, which trusted adult to sit beside, or how to personalize a remembrance.

REMEMBERING DEVELOPMENT MATTERS

What creates safety changes with age. Younger children may need concrete caregiving information and closeness. Older children may need honest inclusion in plans, privacy, peer connection, and reassurance that their questions will be taken seriously.

A THOUGHT TO CARRY WITH YOU

After loss, safety grows from what a child can repeatedly experience: truthful words, dependable people, familiar routines, and loving presence.

A MOMENT FOR REFLECTION

What does this child seem most uncertain about right now? Which parts of daily life can you make clearer, more predictable, or more connected?

WHEN MORE SUPPORT MAY HELP

If fear remains intense, worsens, significantly limits normal activities, or is accompanied by persistent panic, traumatic reactions, self-harm, or safety concerns, seek support from an appropriate qualified professional.

A GENTLE CLOSING

Safety is rebuilt through repeated experiences of dependable care. Every kept promise, clear explanation, familiar routine, and calm response can help a grieving child learn that although life has changed, they are not facing that change alone.

What does this child seem most uncertain about right now? Which parts of daily life can you make clearer, more predictable, or more connected?

