
CHILDREN AND GRIEF

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Parents, teachers, family member and adults in general all play a role in helping children grieve. Sometimes it is difficult for parents to be the main support for grieving children. To protect their parents, they might not talk about their feelings. Other family members or friends can step in and assist the parent in helping the children grieve-always with the parent's approval. Some helpful tips for supporting children and teens include:

Create the opportunity and time to talk about their loved one.

Sharing memories is a good way to start a conversation. Letting children share their stories and their feelings is helpful and lends the child or teen to be more comfortable in doing so.

Spend one on one time with the child or teen.

Talking about anything and everything is better than talking about nothing. Encourage the child or teen to come to you anytime, for any reason! Schedule dates and times to visit or talk on the phone. This will help with "waiting" for the child or teen to come to you!

Open communication

When discussing the death, explain to the children in simple terms that the person has died. Do not be afraid to or avoid using the words "death" and "died" with children. We do not want to tell children that their loved one has fallen asleep. This can cause undue stress and anxiety over thought processes that go to "will me or my other parent or loved one die while they are sleeping"? Being honest with children that matches up with their ability to understand is especially important.

Take time to be “normal”

Children need to take breaks from grieving. Children cannot grieve all day, every day. Nobody would survive that. Let them laugh and be kids. Laughter and having fun releases feel good endorphins in the brain. Taking a Friday night to just be a “regular” family is good for children and teens. Taking that time to focus on them and creating an opportunity that makes them the center of attention is important.

Create

Any craft activity can give a child or teen something to do. It helps to pass some time doing something creative and fun. Ask the children what they would like to create and make it happen. Creating mementos for their lost loved one can be a special time together.

Journaling

Encourage children or teens to write in a journal. Going to the store and picking out a “special” notebook or binder and some colored pens or pencils can be a good start. Assure the child that whatever they write is for their eyes only. They will never be expected to share their writing unless they choose to do so. Suggesting that they write a letter to their loved one is a good way to get them started.

Allow children to make decisions.

Allowing children to make decisions, when appropriate, can help them to feel like they have more control of their world. Making decisions as simple as what to have for dinner or where to go for a day trip, helps them to feel that their opinion matters.

Stay close to children.

A child’s family is the center of their world. Children need routine and stability. If you cannot provide this for the children, please give careful consider to who can with you always being close by so your children do not feel abandoned.

Grief Support Groups

Grief support group for children are a helpful way to bring children together who share a common bond. Their losses can be shared with their peers in a safe place with the guidance and help of trained professionals. Reach out to a local hospice, faith-based organization, or the child’s school counselor for additional local resources.

Share your Grief.

It is more okay to let a child see your tears than to give them the false image that you are not grieving. It is okay to simply tell children that you are sad because your loved one died. Their experience with not only their grief but by sharing your grief with them will likely mold their overall belief about loss and grief that will stay with them long into their future. Ask your child for a hug or to sit with you.

Stay close.

Keep them close while doing ordinary things. Have a snack or watch tv together. Take a walk, ride bikes, swing on a swing. Turn off the electronics and spend time together! Cook or bake together. Preparing a special meal that your loved one liked is a special way to honor your loved one together. Baking their favorite cake on their birthday is always special.

Find ways to stay connected-together.

Finding ways to feel connected to your loved one is ultimately what we all need to do. Find ways to connect that are meaningful and that honor your loved one or reflects on who they were and what they meant to you. Wear their favorite color. Watch their favorite movie. Enjoy their favorite foods. Go to their favorite place. These things may be difficult at first but in time, they will provide comfort.

Create New Memories and Traditions

For holidays and special days, do something different and out of the ordinary for your family. New adventures, activities and memories can become a treasure that can be added to past treasures-all a part of the fabric of your life of which your loved one continues to be very much a part of!

Volunteer together

He who helps others, helps himself! Giving of your time and attention to helping those less fortunate is a gift to both the giver and the receiver. Give gifts to children in need, not only at the holiday time, but any time of the year. Seek out opportunities with local charities or places of worship.

Seek Comfort

Seek comfort in a higher power, in whatever ways that may mean to you. If you pray, pray with your children. Share your faith and your belief.

What is normal?

Children and teens need to learn about what is “normal” while grieving. Simply letting them know that crying, feeling mad, lonely, scared, uncertain, guilty, tired, or sometimes relieved, is all “normal”. Encourage them to share, with you, what they are feeling and to write their thoughts in their special notebook.

Most importantly, recognize that there is never really “closure” for anyone who loses a love one to death. For the rest of the children’s lives, their loved one will be remembered. With the help and guidance from an adult, children do process grief and they do learn to cope. They can move on with their lives. What is important is that they learn healthy coping skills. Keeping their feelings inside can set them up to many unfavorable trajectories in their lives that may not produce a favorable outcome. Children do not just adjust and carry on with their lives as though everything is the same! Children need to walk through their journey of grief. There is no going around grief. It must be experienced and dealt with. They too must learn all they can about what they are experiencing mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually so they are equipped to later walk with others who experience loss!

For more information about Children and Grief please visit:
<https://childrengrieve.org/>