

Support for Children Who Are Experiencing Grief and Loss

Grief and loss are difficult emotions to process for anyone, especially for children. Times like these are fraught with uncertainty, and we all need support and a bit of help.

- ▶ Allow children to be the lead about their grief experience. Give children the opportunity to tell their own story and be a good listener regarding what they are thinking and feeling.
- ▶ All children are different, and their view of the world is unique and shaped by different experiences. Don't assume that every child in a certain age group understands death in the same way or with the same feelings.
- ▶ Grieving is a process, not an event. Parents and schools need to allow adequate time for each child to grieve in the manner that works for that child. Pressing children to resume "normal" activities without the chance to deal with their emotional pain may prompt additional problems or negative reactions.
- ▶ Don't lie or tell half-truths to children about what happened. Children are bright and they will often see through false information and wonder why you do not trust them with the truth. Lies do not help the child through the healing process or help develop effective coping strategies for life's future tragedies or losses.
- ▶ Help all children, regardless of age, to understand loss and death. Give each child information at the level they can understand. Allow them to guide adults as to the need for more information or clarification of the information presented. Loss and death are both part of the cycle of life that children need to understand.



- ▶ Encourage children to ask questions about loss and death. Adults need to be less anxious about not knowing all the answers. Treat questions with respect and a willingness to help the child find his or her own answers.
- ▶ Don't assume that children always grieve in an orderly or predictable way. We all grieve in different ways and there is no one "correct" way for people to move through the grieving process.
- ▶ Let children know that you really want to understand what they are feeling or what they need. Sometimes children are upset but they cannot tell you what will be helpful. Giving them time and encouragement to share their feelings with you may enable them to sort out their feelings.
- ▶ Children will need long-lasting support. The more losses the child or adolescent suffers, the more difficult it will be to recover. This is especially true if they have lost a parent who was their major source of support. Try to develop multiple supports for children who suffer significant losses.
- ▶ Be aware of your own need to grieve. Focusing on the children in your care is important, but not at the expense of your emotional needs. Adults who have lost a loved one will be far more able to help children work through their grief if they get help themselves. For some families, it may be important to seek family grief counseling, as well as individual sources of support.
- ▶ Keep in mind that grief work is difficult: it is hard work for adults and hard for children as well.

Facts and resources

Highmark Caring Place <https://www.highmarkcaringplace.com/cp2/index.shtml>

Tips For Caregivers On Dealing With Grief and Loss https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/eva-zatrak/caregiver-grief_b_6719882.html

Family Caregiver Alliance: Grief and Loss <https://www.caregiver.org/grief-and-loss>