

10 Ways to Help Grieving Children

- 1. Take care of you** - Exercise, eat well-balanced meals, stick to regular routines, and reach out to others for support. These activities might be difficult when you are grieving, but taking care of yourself is still important. Grieving children do better when they have a healthy adult providing support and understanding to them.
- 2. Be honest with your child** - Discuss the tragic event with your child in a simple, direct, and age-appropriate manner. Be honest and share clear, accurate information about what happened. Children need to hear the truth from someone they love.
- 3. Listen** - Listen to your child share their story about what happened. Let them ask you questions and answer as best as you can. Do not be afraid to say, "I don't know."
- 4. Acknowledge your child's grief** - recognize that your child is grieving. Be careful not to impose your grief on your child, but allow them to grieve in their own way. It is normal for children to feel an array of emotions, including sadness, anger, frustration, and fear. It is also normal for children to move in and out of grief reactions, at times being very upset or getting angry easily and at other times playing as if nothing has happened. If you are not sure how grief is impacting your child, spend time with them playing, drawing, or sharing stories. Quite often children will give you clues through these activities.
- 5. Share** - Tell your child stories about your own life. Times you were afraid, sad, or angry. Tell them how you dealt with these situations and what you learned. Children love to hear stories about the adults in their lives and when those adults were children. Sharing stories helps a child normalize what they are experiencing.
- 6. Be creative** - Give your child a creative outlet to express feelings. This can be done through drawing, coloring, writing, doing crafts, listening to music, or playing games.
- 7. Maintain clear expectations** - Keep rules & boundaries consistent. Children gain security when they know what's expected from them. Children often use their pain as an excuse for inappropriate behavior. While you should acknowledge their grief, you should also teach them to be accountable for their choices, no matter how they feel.
- 8. Reassure your child** - Remind your child that they are loved and that you are there for them. Following the death of a person in their life, a child's sense of safety can be shaken. Children often fear that you or other people in their life might die. While you cannot make promises that you or other won't die, you can let your child know the plan if such an event occurs.
- 9. Create rituals and new family traditions** - Rituals can give your family tangible ways to acknowledge your grief and honor the memory of those who have died. Lighting candles, recognizing special occasions, sharing stories about those who have died, or volunteering with a local charity are some of the ways you can incorporate new family rituals and traditions.
- 10. Be patient** - You and your child are grieving, and the most intense parts of grief often take longer than we might want. Grief also changes us in many ways. So, be patient as you and your child experience your grief. Be patient when your child often has to come back to the same details and questions. Patiently spend time with your child as you all grow, change, and continue to construct your life story.