

Tips for Supporting Children who are Grieving

Children often grieve differently from adults. When a loved one dies, it is often a child's first experience with death. We hope you will find the contents of this document helpful as you support your grieving child(ren)

1 There is no timeline for grief. Grief manifests itself physically, emotionally and spiritually. Even children from the same family can grieve differently and for varied amounts of time.

2

Reassure children that they will always have someone to take care of them.

3

Children often fear that if they talk about the deceased they will make others sad. Talk openly about the person who died and about how they will always be remembered.

4

Use words like "died," rather than "lost," answer questions as honestly as possible (as appropriate for a child's age), and don't be afraid to say "I don't know." Children want to be told the truth and in real language.

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Some of the common behaviors, emotions and reactions you may see in grieving children include: Accident proneness • Acting out • Anger • Blame • Denial • Despair • Fear • Feeling overwhelmed • Guilt • Loneliness • Loss of interest in hobbies/activities • Nightmares • Regressive behaviors (such as thumb sucking, clinginess, aloofness) • Sleeplessness • Tears • Trouble concentrating

5

Understand children may experience waves of grief and sadness. Be patient as children often don't know how to express their feelings or even understand what they are feeling.

6

Know that children sometimes use play to express their grief or to take a break from it. Both are normal.

7

Listen without interrupting or trying to "fix" what they are feeling. Children often want to share their story and feelings about the person who died, and know they have been heard.

8

Be reassured that children are resilient and they *will* eventually settle into a "new normal" without the physical presence of the person who died. Remember, everyone's timeline for getting through grief is different.



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