

Helping a Child to Grieve

Death Is A Part of Life

- Discuss “small losses,” such as the death of a plant, a fish, or other pet. This will lay the groundwork for discussing a more painful death when it occurs.

Consider Telling Your Child Simply, But Honestly, About the Death That Has Occurred

- Feeling excluded can be much harder than feeling sad.
- A child’s keen senses will tell him/her that something is wrong.
- Feelings of uncertainty may arouse feelings of anxiety.
- Prepare your child for what she/he will see and do at the funeral or memorial service.

Grieve with Your Child

- This gives you a chance to comfort each other and work through some of the grief together.
- A child may feel guilty, as though somehow, she/he caused this death by something that was said or done. Talk about these feelings and reassure the child that they did not cause the death, nor could they have prevented it.

When Answering Questions About Death, Avoid Clichés or Euphemisms

- Children take things literally. If a death is likened to “sleep”, the child may fear going to bed.
- If a child hears that they have “lost” a grandparent, they may conclude that someone will find them eventually.
- It is all right to use words like “dead” and “died” with children.
- What kids imagine with “being lost” or “sleeping forever” or “being ill”, can sometimes create more anxiety than hearing that someone they love has “died”.

Children May Ask Many Questions

- Some of the same questions are asked again and again in an attempt to understand the finality of death. Even if you have answered your child’s questions already, answer them again to provide reinforcement for them.

Children Can Work Through Their Grief

- Your child may wish to make a “memory book” of the person who has died. It can include notes, pictures, or other special items related to the loved one.
- Feelings about the death can be expressed through play, drawings, or even with puppets. A child may express his anger, or guilt as well as his sadness through play.
- Remember that children often don’t have the ‘words’ to express how they are feeling.



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- Talk with your child. In the days and weeks that follow the death, she may have moments of unending questions; or, she may go several days without mention of the loved one.
- Like adults, children grieve in their own ways.
- Even a brother and a sister may express their grief differently.