

10 Ways to Help a Grieving Child

- 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 his or her story about what happened. Let them ask you questions and answer their questions 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 him or her to grieve in his or her 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, coloring, drawing or sharing stories. Quite often children will give you clues to their grief 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 he or she is experiencing.
- 6. Be creative** -- Give your child a creative outlet to express feelings. This can be done through drawing, writing, doing crafts, listening to music, or playing games.
- 7. Maintain clear expectations** -- Keep rules and boundaries consistent. Children gain security when they know what is expected from them. Children will often use their pain as an excuse for inappropriate behavior. While you should always acknowledge the grief your child is experiencing, you should also teach them to be accountable for their choices, no matter how they feel.
- 8. Reassure your child** -- Remind your child that he or she is loved and that you are there for him or her. Following the death of a person in his or her 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 promise that you or others will not 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 as a family are some of the ways you can incorporate new traditions or rituals.
- 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 with your child with repetition. A child often has to come back to the same details and questions. Patiently spend time with your child as they (and you) grow, change and continue to construct their (your) life story.

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