

Tips on Child Grief

Some ways you can help your child understand death:

- 1. Be open to questions related to child grief.** Children are naturally curious about death, even before they experience a personal loss and child grief. Be as honest as possible while keeping it still simple enough for a middle-schooler.
- 2. Don't avoid the word "death."** Don't use phrases like, "gone away," "lost," or "went to sleep" to refer to someone who died, even when talking to a kindergartener. This can just create more confusion in a younger child, and give an older middle-schooler the impression that death is something to be feared and not discussed.
- 3. Don't assume your child understands everything the first time.** They may ask the same questions over and over again, over a period of weeks or even months. There are several reasons for this. It can be tough for a middle-school age child to digest everything at once. They may also be trying to work it out in their mind through repetition. And the same information can become meaningful to them in different ways as they mature emotionally and intellectually.
- 4. Don't be afraid to admit you don't know something.** A middle-school age child may pepper you with questions about things like what it feels like after you die and why you can't still talk to a person once he or she passes away. It's better to be honest about the fact that you don't know everything than to lie or give her an explanation that you think she'll want to hear.
- 5. Expect it to take some time.** Grief can be a process, even for adults. Your growing middle-schooler may seem nonchalant about the death of a loved one, and then fall apart over a broken toy.
- 6. Anticipate some emotions.** Your child may become angry over the loss of someone. He/she may feel guilt, especially about the death of a sibling or parent (a young child may believe that the person died because he/she was "bad.") They may regress, becoming clingier or wanting to come into your bed.
- 7. Give them room to grieve.** Let them know that you are ready to listen or answer questions but don't press them if they seem reluctant to talk.
- 8. Acknowledge your own feelings.** Middle-schoolers are more likely to be attuned to your emotions, so don't try to hide your grief. While you don't want your child to see you fall apart -- it can be too scary for kids to see their source of support crumble -- don't try to hide your feelings. By letting them know that it's okay to cry and be sad over the loss of someone you love, you are teaching them how to handle loss in a healthy way.

Modified from: <http://childparenting.about.com/od/physicalemotionalgrowth/tp/talkingdeath.htm>