



National Alliance for Grieving Children

10 Things Grieving Children Want You to Know

#1 – Grieving children want to be told the truth.

- Tell grieving children the truth with these considerations in mind:
- The age of the child
- The maturity level of the child
- The circumstances surrounding the death
- Answer questions as honestly as you can

#2 – Grieving children want to be reassured that there will always be someone to take care of them.

- Grieving children spend a lot of time worrying about another person in their life who might die.
- To help alleviate this fear, it's important to reassure them that there will always be someone in their life who will take care of them.
- Enlist the aid of their parent or caregiver to determine a plan for the children. Let the children know what the plan is.

#3 – Grieving children want you to know that their grief is long lasting.

- Children will grieve the person who died for the rest of their life.
- Grieving kids don't "just get over it".
- They will often be bewildered when other people in their life have seemed to move on.
- Their grief changes over time as they grow and change over time.

#4 – Children often cope with grief and loss through play.

- Children grieve through play.
- Typically, they cannot sustain prolonged grief.
- Children use play as a way to cope with their grief and to take a break from the grief.

#5 – Grieving children want you to know that they will always miss the person who died.

- People die, but love doesn't die.
- Grieving children will miss the person who died for as long as they live.

#6 – Often, grieving children want to share their story and talk about the person who died.

- Having an opportunity to tell his or her story is often beneficial to a child's healing process.
- Sharing memories about the person who died is also very important.
- Grieving children don't want to forget the person who died – they are also worried that others will forget their person.

10 Things Grieving Children Want You to Know (continued)

#7 – Every child grieves differently.

- Every child has his or her own grief journey and own way of grieving.
- Some children might be more expressive with their grief.
- Some children might keep it all in.
- Siblings grieve differently.
- Just because children come from the same family doesn't mean that their grief will be the same.
- It is important to honor each child's story, even if it is different than his or her sibling's story.

#8 – Grieving children often feel guilty.

- Grieving children will often feel pangs of guilt.
- Even if the guilt is not justified and has no basis in reality.

#9 – Even though I might be acting out, what I'm really feeling is intense emotions of grief.

- Grieving children frequently feel sad, angry, confused, or scared.
- Since they might not know how to express all of these emotions, they often end up acting out instead.

#10 - If you're not sure what a grieving child wants, just ask him!

- When in doubt, ask a grieving child how you can help.
- Check in with the child – do they want to talk about the person who died? Maybe not.
- Expect myriad answers.
- Do they want to write about their grief or do some other activity to express their grief?
- What do they need?

You can help grieving children by:

- Listening
- Really hearing them when you're listening
- Following their lead
- Validating their feelings
- Answering their questions
- Seeking out additional resources, as needed

Written by: Pamela Gabbay, M.A., FT

Program Director

The Mourning Star Center for

Grieving Children and Teens

Camp Director, Camp Erin

(760) 836-0360

www.mourningstar.org