

## Supporting a Grieving Child: Guidance for Parents & Caregivers

### Key Recommendations

- **Parents and caregivers are the most important support.**  
Children who are grieving need to know they are loved, cared for, and not alone. Your presence and reassurance matter more than perfect words.
- **Learn about grief.**  
Take time to understand how grief may affect children of different ages. Being informed helps you respond with patience and compassion.
- **Build a circle of support.**  
Teachers, counselors, extended family, and youth workers can all play important roles. A child benefits most when home, school, and community work together.
- **Encourage healthy outlets.**  
Creative expression—through art, music, writing, movement, or play—can help children process feelings that are hard to put into words. Support groups for children and teens can also be powerful.
- **Honor each child's unique experience.**  
No two children grieve the same way. Culture, age, personality, and the type of loss all shape their experience. Respect differences in how children express themselves.
- **Care for yourself, too.**  
Adults supporting grieving children also carry their own losses. Tending to your grief helps you stay emotionally available to your child.
- **Model honesty.**  
Children learn how to grieve by watching the adults around them. It's okay to cry, to say you're sad, or to admit you don't have all the answers. Sharing honestly helps children see grief as a natural part of life.
- **Be patient.**  
Grief takes time. Children will revisit and reprocess their loss at different stages of development. Ongoing patience and understanding are key.
- **Prepare children for rituals.**  
Funerals, memorials, and other cultural or spiritual traditions can be important for healing and connection. Let children know what to expect, give them choices, and allow them to participate in ways that feel comfortable.

- **Remember their resilience.**

Children are often stronger than we realize. With steady love and support, most adapt to their loss and continue growing—one step at a time.

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## **How to Help a Grieving Child**

- **Partner with parents.**

When others (teachers, relatives, clergy, health providers) are helping, the parent or guardian should guide the process. Ask about their wishes, traditions, and expectations.

- **Respect cultural and religious traditions.**

How children experience death and mourning is deeply shaped by family practices, beliefs, and ceremonies. Follow the family's lead.

- **Don't try to "fix" grief.**

Loss is not something that can be solved. Children may revisit their grief again and again as they grow and gain new understanding. Offer presence, not quick solutions.

- **Listen more than you explain.**

Invite questions, give simple and age-appropriate answers, and notice when a child's comments may hold a deeper request for help or understanding.

- **Accept differences in coping.**

Some children may want to talk; others may be quiet or express themselves through play or art. Neither approach is more "right" than the other.

- **Include children in rituals.**

Funerals and memorials can help children feel connected and supported. Guide them in what to expect and offer safe ways to take part.

- **Encourage play and creativity.**

Younger children often work through grief by playing, drawing, or storytelling. Older children may benefit from writing, music, or peer connection.

- **Support peer relationships.**

Friends may not always know how to respond when someone is grieving. Parents and teachers can help peers understand and provide support.

- **Be transparent about adult feelings.**

Children notice adult behaviors. Briefly explaining your own tears, fatigue, or sadness helps normalize emotions and shows that it's okay to feel.

- **Help preserve memories.**

Encourage children to talk about the person who died, look at photos, keep mementos, or visit meaningful places. Memory work may need to be revisited again and again over time.

- **Know when to seek extra help.**

Most children adapt with the care of loving adults. Professional support may be needed if a child shows ongoing withdrawal, intense anger, self-harm, or other concerning behaviors.