

# SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD THROUGH GRIEF

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It is normal to feel sad, angry, confused, upset, even anxious after someone you love dies. All feelings are okay. There is no timeline, no one way and no right way to grieve. Everyone processes, expresses and responds to grief differently (in their own way and in their own time). This is normal.

**Model for your children how to put feelings into words by talking about your own feelings:**

*I am feeling sad. It makes me sad that \_\_\_ died.* Then ask your child how they are feeling. It is important to listen and validate (try not to project, assume, or challenge their feelings).

**Repeat their words back to them:**

Your child: *I am sad and overwhelmed.*

You: *You are feeling sad and overwhelmed.*

**Normalize:**

*This is a really sad and overwhelming time.*

**Model and encourage healthy coping through creative expression, positive distraction, self-care, and connection:**

- Would you like to try and draw a picture of how you are feeling?
- Would you like to make a collage with pictures of you and \_\_\_\_\_ together?
- Would you like to take a bubble bath and listen to music?
- Why don't we go for a walk, play basketball, go to a spin or yoga class (choose physical activities they like).
- Let's watch a funny (or favorite) show or movie.
- Let's play cards.
- Let's snuggle on the couch.

Help your child create a comfort tool box. Let them decide what should go in it. Some examples are:

- Play dough
- Crayons, colored pencils and markers
- Paper
- Pictures/quotes that make them feel happy or calm
- Coloring books for stress relief
- Favorite books
- Dolls or action figures that they can use to role play and work through their feelings
- A stress ball
- A journal and special pen

Give your child permission to do the things that make them feel better. Introduce the concept of

duality. Help them to understand that they can feel really sad and miss their loved one or friend and still participate in the activities they enjoy (and even try to have fun while doing them). Reinforce that their loved one or friend would want for them to be happy, to be with friends, to go to school, to participate in their activities, to do the things they love.

Help your child try to transform their sadness into positive remembrance by celebrating the qualities they loved, respected and enjoyed about their loved one or friend.

\_\_\_\_\_ was so helpful. Let's volunteer and help others in their honor.

\_\_\_\_\_ was so creative. Let's collect and donate art supplies to the children's hospital in their name.

\_\_\_\_\_ loved to read. Let's donate their favorite book to the library in their name.

\_\_\_\_\_ loved music. Let's make a playlist of songs that makes you smile as you remember them.

*\*For younger children you may need to brainstorm and actively participate in helping them transform their sadness into positive remembrance. While you may begin the brainstorming process with your teen they may want to move forward on their own or with their friends, support and encourage them in doing so.*

There is no recipe for healing through deep grief. There is no magic wand. Follow the lead of your child. Try not to project or assume how they are feeling or what they should do to feel better. If your child is showing you they want to talk, listen. If your child is showing you they need time alone or with friends respect their space while still checking in and staying connected (leave notes of love and encouragement on their pillow, send supportive texts of quotes, emojis, pictures, loving words...keep it simple).

Grief work is hard work and unfortunately there is no formula or timeline that works the same for everyone. Each person will approach, manage and express their grief differently. Some days will be harder than others. Let your child know that you are there for them. Ask if they would like to speak with a counselor at school or a grief counselor outside of school about their feelings. Normalize and encourage them to access additional support if they feel, or you feel, they need it. A counselor is like a coach for their feelings. It takes great courage, self-awareness and maturity to know that you need extra support and want to learn to cope better with difficult feelings. Talking to a counselor is no different than getting a tutor for school work, a piano teacher for piano lessons, a batting coach for baseball. Learning ways to process, talk about, and cope with loss can be empowering and healing.

Deep grief can feel debilitating and depleting. Your child may not know how they will grow and heal through grief, but they will. Deep grief does not last forever. Eventually, they will learn to live in duality, longing for what was while living forward. Feeling deep sadness while returning to the familiar routine of school, activities, sporting events, parties, time spent having fun with friends.

The loss of a family member or friend is painful. Learning to cope with complex and unpredictable

emotions is important. There are many resources available.

<https://www.dougy.org/> The Dougy Center

<https://childrengrieve.org/> The National Alliance for Grieving Children

<http://www.hospicewr.org> Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Bereavement Center

If you have concerns about your child call and speak with their pediatrician, the school guidance counselor, or engage a therapist. If you fear your child might be in crisis and need immediate support call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/) (1-800-273-8255). Trained crisis workers are available to talk 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. All calls are confidential. If the situation is potentially life-threatening, call 911 or go to a hospital emergency room.

**There are no comments yet.**