

Helping Children Cope with Grief

1. Be available to listen.
2. Make time to answer any questions your child may have.
3. Tell the truth. Give simple, honest answers that are developmentally appropriate for your child.
4. Do not use phrases like “went to sleep” or “taken”. This may lead the child to believe the person will return.
5. Be patient. Your child may repeat questions before they can understand what has happened.
6. Talk about the loss together. Share your feelings with your child.
7. Help your child understand the death and correct any false perceptions.
8. Create structure and routine so your child experiences stability.
9. Recognize that grieving takes time.
10. Take care of yourself. To help your child, you have to take care of your own emotional needs. Seek support if you are struggling with grief.

Grief Reactions

Grief does not follow a specific pattern and these stages may vary in sequencing and intensity. The general stages of the grief process are:

- Denial (unwillingness to discuss the loss)
- Anger or guilt (blaming others for the loss)
- Sorrow or depression (loss of energy, appetite, or interest in activities)
- Bargaining (attempts to regain control by making promises or changes in one’s life)
- Acceptance or admission (acceptance that loss is final, real, significant, and painful)

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