

SOME CHILDREN MAY NOT WANT TO TALK

Playing, writing or drawing may give you a clue as to how children are feeling but none of these activities should be compulsory. You may get a sense of how your child is coping by observing them as they engage in their own chosen activities. Remember to talk to other carers such as grandparents and teachers to get support and feedback about your child.

SPEND TIME TOGETHER

Simply doing things together can help children feel safe. Make family time a priority whether its time when your sad or happy just being there sends a message of trust and love to them. Encourage your child to do things that can help her/him express feelings and emotions, such as drawing a picture or singing a song together.

MAINTAIN HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Encourage children to eat healthy foods and engage in daily physical activities. Plan for quiet intimate activities near bedtime such as stories and baths to help them sleep.

ENCOURAGE SPENDING TIME WITH FRIENDS

Engaging in imaginary play, talking and laughing with other children can be healing for your child.

TIPS FROM BEREAVED CHILDREN:

“Don’t ask personal questions”

“Let me be included”

“Be quiet and don’t give advice”

“Let me grieve in my own way.”

Further Information and Support:

BEREAVEMENT AND GRIEF SUPPORT SERVICES

Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement

www.grief.org.au | 1300 664 786

Mercy Western Grief Services – 9364 9838

Lifeline – 131114

Kids Helpline – 1800 55 1800

Reach Out – www.reachout.com.au (for adolescents)

BOOKS:

Adults

The Grief of Our Children – *Dianne McKissock*

Helping Children Cope with Grief – *Alan Wolfelt*

Great Answers to difficult Questions about death

Linda goldman

How it Feels When a Parent Dies – *Jill Kremetz*

Adolescents

Straight talk for about death for teenagers

Earl Grollman

Children

When Dinosaurs Die

Laurie Krasny Brown & Marc Brown

Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death

to Children – *Bryan Mellonie and Robert Inghen*

The Invisible String – *Patrice Karst Geoff Stevenson*



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*Supporting Children
in Grief*

*This brochure aims to assist you with
supporting bereaved children.*

How Children Grieve

Every child is different and they will grieve in their own way. Children use significant adults as emotional guides. If adults talk about their grief and give permission for others to grieve then children can feel more secure about their new feelings.

SOME SUGGESTIONS:

Provide opportunities:

Their loss may not be expressed in the same ways as adults as children do not have the same emotional control or verbal skills. By giving children opportunities to process what has happened and express their feelings they will grow with their grief rather than become afraid of it. Some activities may be making a memorial garden, filling a memory box, visiting the cemetery or special sites with gifts or looking at photos together.

Be consistent:

Children like consistency. As much as possible, stick to your usual daily routine. Be consistent in your routines and rules about life. The structure of home gives a secure container to explore their feelings and what has happened. To help your child feel calm and safe, encourage him/her to engage in everyday activities, such as playing, mealtimes and telling a bedtime story.

Rules of thumb:

- Say things you will never need to retract.
- Be consistent in the information
- Say things that are clear, simple and use age appropriate language or metaphors like the seasons and butterflies to explain what is happening.

Communicate and reassure:

Explaining to children what is going on in simple terms helps them to understand what is happening. Without this information, children may blame themselves for your feelings or imagine other bad things have happened or could happen.

Model how to grieve:

Children take their cues from adults. If there is a difference between your feelings and your behaviors it can be distressing and confusing for children. They may learn that they have to hide their feelings which can lead to anxiety and depression.

Tell them what you are feeling, why you are feeling it and so why you are behaving a certain way. Reassure them that they are good and not to blame for your feelings and situation. While many things may have changed, they will always have people to love and care for them a home, food, friends and toys.

Empowering Children – over 5 years of age:

Give them simple jobs and responsibilities to help maintain a sense of control. Keep them informed about what is happening and give opportunities to make educated decisions.

Praise the child's efforts:

This builds self-confidence and makes children feel important. If your child has been indirectly affected by a death, encourage them to show compassion to the bereaved and to help others; he/she will feel strengthened by doing so.



As a General Guide

2 YEARS OLD OR YOUNGER:

The child can sense the loss and changes in people around them. They will have feelings in response to this. Reassurance is best given through actions of affection, connection and consistent routine. A comfort object like a blanket can also help if they are behaving in a clingy way.

3-5 YEARS OF AGE:

The child views death as a temporary condition. They believe the deceased will return in a short time. Use the child's words to talk about their experiences and use examples from nature to teach them about the normality of life and death. Reassure them that they did not cause the death or other people's feelings. Reassure them that they are loved and good.

6-11 YEARS OF AGE:

Let your child know you are there for them and allow the child to take the lead in guiding the conversation. Give the child time to ask questions and discuss their feelings. Address any concerns the child talks about, checking you have understood what he/she is saying. Acknowledge with your child the 'awfulness' of their experience. Encourage your child to come up with ways of coping.

11 YEARS OR OLDER:

From this time children are beginning to think more abstractly. They are searching for meaning and values and are involved in religious and philosophical explorations. Creative expression through poetry, video, music, photos and being available to answer questions is important.