

## GRIEF TALKING POINTS

Inspired by the widely popular Disney Inside Out, this tip sheet is designed to share suggestions on how to have open conversations with children about death and grief.

### General tips to keep in mind:

- When you think there is a teachable moment that can be made, consider your child's age and developmental understanding. Certain topics may not be appropriate for every child or warrant a conversation. Gauge their understanding by paying attention to their reactions and asking open-ended questions like "I wonder what you think happened?" or "I wonder why you think they are (insert feeling)?"
- Use simple, concrete terms when talking about death. Very young children struggle to understand euphemisms the way we do as adults. Use words like "dead", "died", and "dying". While these words may seem blunt, they help children begin to understand basic concepts around death and dying, are less confusing, and help normalize the conversation.
- Look for opportunities to discuss feelings and be open about your feelings, as well. Give feelings a name and discuss healthy ways to cope with feelings.
- Don't put too much pressure on the conversation. You know your child best. Follow their lead and answer their questions honestly. Don't worry about having all the answers to their questions. In fact, it is

perfectly okay to admit you don't know the answer. If it's a question you can explore together, we'd suggest doing so! Remember, it's okay for us to struggle with questions and feelings. When we offer opportunities for kids to share with us, we send the message that they don't have to struggle alone.

### Inside Out talking points:

- Inside Out provides many opportunities to explore feelings in general, but there are also a lot of great conversation starters around loss and grief. Remembering that grief can be the result of any loss in life, not just a death, we can take time to talk to kids about what losses they've experienced in their life. Especially right now with the conditions put in place due to COVID-19, kids may be grieving the loss of the rest of the school year, proms, ceremonies, sports, extracurriculars, seeing their friends, school support, and more. Check in with them to see how they're adjusting to new routines and acknowledge that they may be having intense feelings about the changes that are occurring in their lives. Assist them in understanding that there is no wrong or right way to feel about what is happening.

Encourage them to talk about how they are feeling and to find healthy ways to manage stress and cope. As adults, we have a large responsibility of being emotional role models for our kids. Don't be afraid to be share about your personal adjustments and feelings, too!

- Ask your child to identify times they've felt joy, anger, disgust, fear, and sadness. With younger kids especially, consider discussing times when they may have felt more than one emotion at time and help them understand that it's okay to miss their person and to be sad, but also still have fun and feel joy. Grieving children may be confused about new feelings and emotions brought on by their grief and benefit from hearing that all their feelings are normal. Help them put a name to their feelings and talk about who they can talk to and what they can do if they're having big or overwhelming feelings. Another idea is to create a game acting out the emotions.
- Some of Riley's islands were "Goofball Island", "Friendship Island" and "Hockey Island". Talk about what islands would make up the personality of the person who died in your family. This prompt allows for you to learn from your child what they remember their person for the most and allows you to talk as a family about what made your

person special. You can also talk about what islands would make up your child's personality and use that information to identify what is most important to them.

- Perhaps the biggest lesson Inside Out teaches us is that our emotions serve a purpose. While grief is a normal and natural reaction, it doesn't always feel normal and it's common to be resistant to new or uncomfortable feelings. Acknowledge and give your child permission to feel and embrace all the emotions that come their way and provide outlets for them to express their feelings. Remind them that feelings can coexist and that they can change over time. You can also explore how their emotions have helped guide them in their decision making, helped them get through adversity, and influenced other areas of their life.
- We witness Riley observing her parent's behaviors and emotions after their move to San Francisco and how she tries to cover up her feelings to be strong and happy for them. There are a couple of scenes in the movie that offer excellent reminders about how much more aware kids are than we sometimes give them credit for. They are picking up on our emotional cues and looking to us for guidance on how to adapt and cope. Grieving children may not



always appear to be grieving in a way that we expect them to, so we may assume that they are “fine” or coping well. Additionally, they may be hiding their feelings in order to please their parents/guardians or protect them from further distress. It's important that we help kids honor their emotions and find ways to work through them with our support and the support from others. It's equally important that we don't assume how they're feeling or what they understand, but to be curious and ask instead. This way you can come alongside them and help strengthen their understanding and offer supports.

- You can invite your child to share some of the core memories they have or ask if they want to share any core memories that Include their person who died. Explore how you can ensure those memories don't fade such as making a memory box, talking about the person, looking at pictures, etc.
- Joy and Sadness try to support Bing Bong when he loses his song powered rocket wagon. Sadness offers him compassion by acknowledging that he must feel sad and providing a space where he felt safe to lean in to how he was feeling and cry. Joy, on the other hand, attempts to make him feel better by trying to get him to cheer up and be happy. When someone is grieving,

it is important to remember that it is not our job to fix anything and that it is best to meet someone where they're at rather than trying to change how they're feeling or attempting to make them look on the bright side. Instead, we can show compassion by listening to what their experience has been like, not judging their emotional response, and helping them feel safe to express themselves fully. Simply offering your presence and being an empathetic listener can be one of the most helpful things you can offer someone who is grieving. Help children understand that while some things may be hard to talk about, it's important to find ways to express themselves or talk to someone they feel safe with. When we help children understand their emotions and become aware of how to cope with them, we help them feel more in control and build resilience.

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## GRIEF TALKING POINTS

Inspired by the widely popular Disney Frozen II, this tip sheet is designed to share suggestions on how to have open conversations with children about death and grief.

### General tips to keep in mind:

- When you think there is a teachable moment that can be made, consider your child's age and developmental understanding. Certain topics may not be appropriate for every child or warrant a conversation. Gauge their understanding by paying attention to their reactions and asking open-ended questions like "I wonder what you think happened?" or "I wonder why you think they are (insert feeling)?"
- Use simple, concrete terms when talking about death. Very young children struggle to understand euphemisms the way we do as adults. Use words like "dead", "died", and "dying". While these words may seem blunt, they help children begin to understand basic concepts around death/dying, are less confusing, and help normalize the conversation.
- Look for opportunities to discuss feelings and be open about your feelings, as well. Give feelings a name and discuss healthy ways to cope with feelings.

- Don't put too much pressure on the conversation. You know your child best. Follow their lead and answer their questions honestly. Don't worry about having all the answers to their questions. In fact, it is perfectly okay to admit you don't know the answer. If it's a question you can explore together, we'd suggest doing so! Remember, it's okay for us to struggle with questions and feelings. When we offer opportunities for kids to share with us, we send the message that they don't have to struggle alone.

### Frozen II talking points:

- Olaf talks about change and transformation a lot throughout the movie. When a death occurs, it can disrupt our lives and cause a lot of changes. Similarly, it can bring about transformation. Create space to talk about these changes by asking your child what changes have happened in their life since their person died. You can ask what kind of things they have control over right now—maybe changes they think you should make together as a family to better adjust/cope. You can also explore whether they can identify ways the death has changed who they are, and how they view the world and relationships with others.

- Like Elsa, Anna, Olaf, and Kristoff, who has been the most supportive of you since your person died? What has been helpful/unhelpful?
- Throughout the movie, Anna is worried about Elsa's safety. After a death, it is common for children to worry other people in their life dying. You could discuss why Anna is so worried and if they have similar worries since their person died. Talk about ways you can stay safe as a family and who in their life helps take care of them.
- After Elsa and Anna find their parent's ship, Elsa expresses the guilt she feels. Guilt is a common reaction to death and younger children especially may think that their thoughts, feelings, or actions caused someone to die. Oftentimes guilt goes unaddressed/ unsupported unless we allow for opportunities to talk about it. Questions like "I wonder why you think Elsa is sad?", "I wonder what you think the word guilty means?" or "I wonder if you have ever felt guilty about your brother's death?" can be helpful in starting the conversation. Conversations around guilt are not intended to take away

someone's guilt, but rather help the child process their guilt with a person they trust. Instead of telling them not to feel guilty, help them understand why the death is not their fault.

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## GRIEF TALKING POINTS

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### UP talking points:

- The movie UP is a story of adventure and reminds us that many of life's most important adventures are possible because of our relationships with others. This theme offers an opportunity to talk about your family's adventure with grief and the relationship we had and can still have with our person who died. Encourage your child to explore what their experience with grief has been like so far and create a safe space for them to speak openly and honestly about the ups and downs that they have encountered. Talk to them about how sometimes we may learn that our relationships with others have grown stronger as a result of the death and help them consider how they can still have a different kind of relationship with their person who died. Share examples to help

shape their understanding and encourage them to share their thoughts and feelings.

- In the beginning of the movie, we see Carl and Ellie's love story unfold. This scene provides an excellent opportunity to share about the life and history of someone who has died in your family. Children often appreciate the opportunity to learn about their person. These conversations become especially significant as children are growing and making more sense about the death and its implications. They may have philosophical questions about who their person was, what was important to them, and what their morals and values were. While these discussions generally happen naturally over time, you can use this scene to start a conversation about what you know and remember about their person from when they were younger. You can also talk about important milestones their person encountered in their life and about times they overcame challenges.
- Carl and Ellie's dream is to travel to Paradise Falls together. As a family, you can talk about things you wish you could have done with your person who died or places you wish you could have gone to. You could also talk about plans to still do some of those things as a special way to honor your person.
- There are many times throughout the movie that we witness characters amid their grief. We see Ellie's grief after her baby dies in utero, we see Carl grieving Ellie during and after she dies of illness, and we even see Russell express his grief for his father through the divorce and separation of his family. All of these moments offer opportunities for us

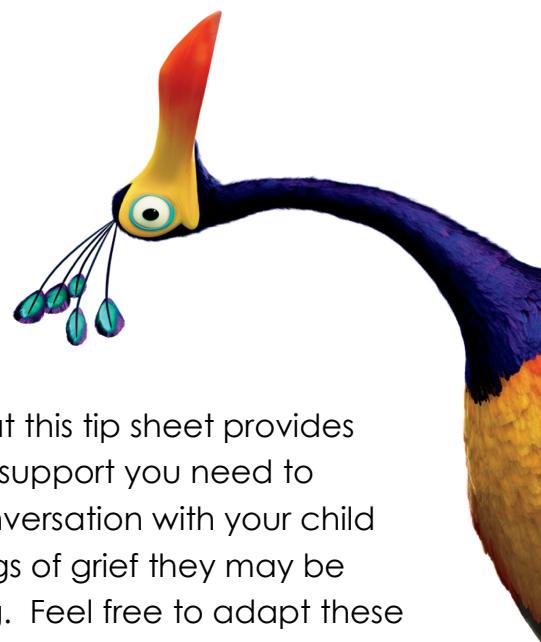
to explore our child's understanding of what is happening and how the characters might be feeling. Perhaps your family has experienced one or any of the mentioned examples. If applicable, talk about how the characters situations may be relatable in the context of your family's or child's experience. Allow for questions and answer them honestly. Even if your family hasn't experienced a death, you can still have developmentally appropriate conversations about grief and loss. Avoiding these conversations can lead to children receiving misinformation, silently wondering, feeling guilty or ashamed, or feeling left alone to explore difficult questions. Instead, we can build resiliency by normalizing these kinds of conversations and preparing children with tools to cope. It can be helpful to remember that these conversations don't have to happen all at once and the intention is not to divulge every detail; but rather, open the door for conversation and help them understand that they can trust you to help them navigate big questions and feelings.





- While Russell's dad is still alive, we can see the very real grief he is experiencing. Oftentimes, we may think about grief only in the context of someone dying. However, grief is the result of any meaningful loss to someone. We can talk about the many kinds of losses we have experienced in our lives. Maybe it was moving homes, switching schools, a separation due to incarceration or military leave, etc. There are also many secondary losses that occur after a death. When we give permission to have these conversations and validate their feelings, we help children understand that their experiences are normal and can help them identify supports and healthy ways of coping.
- While Carl is initially resistant to embrace his relationship with Russell, he eventually opens his heart to him. Explore with your child if it has been difficult for them to invest in their relationships with others after the death. Help them find ways to work through their feelings and to take steps towards feeling safe to open up to others and express themselves.
- In the end, Carl becomes a significant person in Russell's life, and vice versa. UP helps us remember how impactful it can be for a child to have at least one supportive and loving adult in their life and can help us

as adults consider how we can show up for the children in our lives. Erin's House is here to offers ideas of how to support grieving children and help families find ways to grieve together.



We hope that this tip sheet provides you with the support you need to open up conversation with your child about feelings of grief they may be experiencing. Feel free to adapt these suggestions to fit the needs of your child.

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## GRIEF TALKING POINTS

Inspired by the widely popular Disney The Lion King, this tip sheet is designed to share suggestions on how to have open conversations with children about death and grief.

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- Don't put too much pressure on the conversation. You know your child best. Follow their lead and answer their questions honestly. Don't worry about having all the answers to their questions. In fact, it is

perfectly okay to admit you don't know the answer. If it's a question you can explore together, we'd suggest doing so! Remember, it's okay for us to struggle with questions and feelings. When we offer opportunities for kids to share with us, we send the message that they don't have to struggle alone.

### The Lion King talking points:

- The beginning of The Lion King starts with, and is arguably most famous for, the song "The Circle of Life". While it is important to keep in mind a child's development, it is never too soon to start the conversation about death and how we are all connected by its universality. Children best understand and process when they are given honest facts about death. Speak simply and use concrete terms to gently help them understand that all living things will eventually die. The intent for this discussion is not to scare children, but to support them in their understanding so that they can acquire the tools they need to cope when death inevitably will touch their lives. The Lion King offers many opportunities to explore what death is. We can gauge a child's understanding by simply asking what

they think it means when someone dies and then follow their lead and answer their questions with age appropriate responses. Reassure them that most people live a long time and that you can take steps as a family to stay safe and healthy. Children may worry about who will take care of them if you die, so it can be helpful to talk about who will be there to take care of them if something happened to you.

- During Mufasa's life on earth, and even after death, he teaches Simba great life lessons. He talks to him about respecting and protecting their kingdom, about bravery, and fear. We can ask our child what lessons their person who died taught them. Ask open-ended questions like "I wonder if there is any important lesson that Dad taught you?" or "I wonder if Mom's death has taught you anything about yourself that surprised you?" This gives children permission to explore these big questions with someone they trust and to find their own meaning in their grief.
- When Simba asks Mufasa if they will always be together, Mufasa shares his belief that all the kings of the past are looking down from the stars to guide them. This scene offers a great opportunity to talk about your family's beliefs about what happens after death. You can also talk about ways they think their person is still guiding them or watching over them even after death. You could also ask if they can relate to Simba's confusion about not being able to "see" the kings. This enforces the idea that children are concrete thinkers and that abstract ideas are hard for them to grasp. Remember that it's not about forcing or pressuring them to think or believe one thing, but to help them

feel safe to share their own thoughts and feelings and to think about ways they are still connected to their person. We don't want to tell kids what they think or believe is wrong, as they have amazing imaginations. Instead of correcting, you can listen and acknowledge their ideas then share what you believe as well. Again, always creating that safe, respected space to openly talk.

- It is nearly impossible to ignore the scene when Mufasa is killed and Simba is left with feelings of guilt and shame. For some children, they may or may not have witnessed their person die or were present in their final moments. This scene may trigger their own personal feelings about what that experience was like for them. We can help them reflect on their experience and ask about what was helpful or not helpful during that time. This may also be a good opportunity to explore guilt and shame. Children tend to believe their own thoughts, feelings, or actions can cause things to happen, which can lead them to feel that a death is their fault. Help them understand that they are not to blame for the death and talk about ways they can express their feelings in healthy and safe ways.
- Much like when Simba starts a new life with Timon and Pumbaa, families often look different after a death. You can have honest conversations with your child about the changes that have happened in your family since the death. Acknowledging these changes and recognizing that most of them are probably unwelcomed and difficult can affirm for children that you understand that it has been hard to adjust to your new normal. Talk together about things you can be doing to stay connected

as a family and best support each other. Ask who has stepped up to support them like Timon and Pumbaa did for Simba.

- The notion that Simba runs away to escape the reality that awaits him if he returns to his kingdom may resonate with some kids. When we're faced with adversity, it may feel easier to avoid or withdrawal from the people or things we love most. You can talk to your child about times that may have been true for them, or even for us as adults. When we share examples of times we have struggled and overcame and help kids reflect on choices they've made, we model for kids ways they can be resilient and help them create their own path for healing. Create a safe place to talk about their fears and worries and help them design a plan to face the people and things they have been avoiding, but don't push or force them to do anything they are not ready to do.
- Timon and Pumbaa talk about not being able to change the past and "embracing what's next". While we don't want to minimize a child's experience, we can encourage them to name and feel their feelings fully. Kids look to adults to help them navigate new and difficult feelings, so we can model this for them by not hiding our emotions and by demonstrating healthy ways to cope or take a break for ourselves if we need one.

- Rafiki helps Simba discover that his dad "lives in him". Talk to your child about ways they think their person still lives on through them. Maybe it's through lessons they learned because of the person, by doing things the person loved or would be proud of, etc. Share your own examples to help them come to their own conclusions. You can also ask what things they think their person would be proud of them for.
- Ultimately, The Lion King is a story of remembering who we are, even when times are tough. When someone dies, it can feel impossible to persevere and move forward, but we can support children by helping them identify their strengths and reminding them of times they overcame challenges in the past. Explore ways you can best support them by simply asking what you can do to be most helpful in this moment, and help them recognize that they don't have to feel those feelings alone.

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## GRIEF TALKING POINTS

Inspired by the widely popular Disney Big Hero 6, this tip sheet is designed to share suggestions on how to have open conversations with children about death and grief.

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- Look for opportunities to discuss feelings and be open about your feelings, as well. Give feelings a name and discuss healthy ways to cope with feelings.
- Don't put too much pressure on the conversation. You know your child best.

Follow their lead and answer their questions honestly. Don't worry about having all the answers to their questions. In fact, it is perfectly okay to admit you don't know the answer. If it's a question you can explore together, we'd suggest doing so! Remember, it's okay for us to struggle with questions and feelings. When we offer opportunities for kids to share with us, we send the message that they don't have to struggle alone.

### Big Hero 6 talking points:

- In the beginning of the movie, we learn how influential Tadashi is in Hiro's life. Ask your child who in their life motivates them to make good choices. Who is their biggest cheerleader? Someone that believes in their abilities? If their biggest supporter was the person who died, encourage them to share what that person did to show their support and love? Explore who in their life has been helpful since the death and identify other supports who may be able to provide similar encouragement.
- After Tadashi dies, we see a memorial and funeral with his family and friends present. During our grief, we may not always



remember to check in with kids before or after a funeral or memorial. Sometimes, even after having open and honest conversations to help children know what to expect about a funeral, they may still have questions or concerns. You could use this scene as a conversation starter. Some examples of questions you could ask might look like this: “I wonder what you remember from grandma’s funeral?”, “I wonder if you wish anything could have been done differently?”, or “I wonder if anything happened at the funeral that was confusing for you?”

- Hiro keeps Tadashi’s hat after his death. When someone dies, sometimes we may have a special memento or keepsake that we get to hold onto. As a family, you can have your own mini “show and tell”. Invite your kids to pick something they have that reminds them of their person who died. Altogether, go around and share what you

picked and why it’s important to you or why it was important to your person. If you don’t have a tangible item, you can still share memories — “Dad always wore his red hat when he fished” or “Mom loved to listen to this song when we were in the car”.

- We witness Hiro become withdrawn and lose interest in attending college after his brother dies. Sometimes, after someone dies, it can be hard to do the things we love or do things that remind us of our person. As a family, you can explore what kinds of things are maybe harder to do now that your person died. Reassure your children that this is normal. Reinvesting back into life is an important part in someone’s grief journey, and for some kids that may mean they continue to do the things they loved before the death, but for others that may mean discovering something new that interests them. Be a support for them as they explore what brings them joy now.



Provide ideas about healthy ways to cope and adjust to their new normal and offer as many outlets as possible to help them express their grief. In time, they'll discover what fits best for them.

- Throughout the movie, Baymax helps Hiro realize the ways Tadashi is still present in his life. While our person who died can't be with us physically, we can learn to appreciate the ways in which they live on through our memories and legacies they leave behind. Invite your child to think about ways they are still connected to their person. Here are some examples to explore: through music, through rituals we practice, through lessons our person taught us, through common interests, etc.
- Hiro and his friends all have unique super powers. In our grief, we may uncover new strengths. We can empower kids by pointing out times they have shown strength and by encouraging them to talk about the "superpowers" they have discovered in themselves since their person died. \*Note: It may be helpful to talk about how showing and talking about our emotions is a way of showing strength, as some kids may have been told that "they need to be strong" and interpret that to mean they shouldn't express their emotions.

- Tadashi encourages Hiro to "look for a new angle" — a quote that resonates with Hiro and helps shape his perspective throughout the movies. Sometimes, when kids are grieving, their grief may present itself in harmful or unhelpful ways. If your child is struggling with expressing their emotions in healthy and safe ways, talk to them about ways they can "look for a new angle". For example, if they are struggling with acting out (biting, hitting, throwing, screaming, etc.) help them think of other ways they can get their big feelings out. Maybe that's screaming into a pillow, punching a pillow, or doing something active.

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Inspired by the widely popular Disney Onward, this tip sheet is designed to share suggestions on how to have open conversations with children about death and grief.

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### Onward talking points:

- Throughout the movie we hear Ian's mom and brother refer to their "inner warrior". When our lives are touched by death, many times we have to dig deep to find the warrior in ourselves to help us have strength to cope and reason to move forward. You can ask your child about times they have had to seek their inner warrior. Maybe it was when learning about an illness, when they found out their person died, or when attending the funeral. Perhaps maybe it was returning back to school and facing their friends and teachers. Affirm how scary and hard those times must have been and acknowledge the courage it takes to be aware of our feelings and finding the strength to overcome those moments. Remind them that just like they have overcome hard times in the past, they can

continue to do so and that you will always be there to support them during those times.

- Ian and Barley talk a couple times about the memories Barley still has of their dad. A lot of times, children may have little or no memories of their person who died. Siblings may even recall completely different memories from a similar event or occasion because of the way they perceived it. Sometimes, adults try to protect their children by withholding information or limiting how much they share about the person who died. Onward does an excellent job of reminding us how important it is for children to learn about their person and be able to talk about their memories the way they remember them. You can simply ask your child if they want to learn more about their person and follow their lead. Remember to focus on the love that person had for the child and not let our own biases or feelings jade the conversation.
- We also witness another scene where Ian runs into an old friend of his father. Ian is pleasantly surprised to learn more about his dad. Another reminder of how much those left behind typically enjoy hearing their person's name and hearing others talk about them. Sometimes, we may hold back because we're worried that if we bring up the person who died that we will upset someone. Gently remind yourself that it's not you bringing up their person that is upsetting them, it is the fact that their person died. When they show your distress to you, it is not because you have made the situation worse. Rather, view those times as opportunities to show them that you are there for them and that they don't have to

be alone during those times of sadness.

- Ian and Barley's dad was remembered for being "bold", among other things. You can ask your children what word(s) they would use to describe their person who died. Remember to not try to correct or change their answers. Be supportive by withholding judgement or assumptions and let the child express themselves freely.
- Oftentimes, family dynamics are impacted after a death. As families adjust to their new normal, they may find that their roles within the family look different. Sometimes, families have to move or new people are introduced as parents start dating again. We see this with Ian and Barley's mom and her boyfriend, Colt. Onward provides many opportunities to start a conversation about how your family may look differently after a death. Explore how these changes are affecting your child and how they are feeling about it. If it's appropriate, ask for their input about decisions you can be making as a family to help them feel involved. Set limits, but also be mindful of their feelings. Maybe they know you're going on a date, but you decide together that you'll call to check-in at a certain time. Involving children helps them feel like they have more control when their lives feel out of control. Remind them that their main responsibility is to keep being a kid and help them find safe and healthy ways to cope.
- Onward starts with Ian turning 16, and we're reminded that while he has no memories of his dad, his grief is still very real. Sometimes, as adults, we overlook how much a child can actually grieve for someone they have never met. In reality, though, they are grieving all of the memories they will never



be able to make with their person. We are also reminded how developmental milestones can serve as moments when grief may resurface more intensely. We can help support kids when we remember to check-in during big life events or during special days that we know are significant. Simply acknowledging that they may be missing their person more during those times can help normalize the experience for them. We can be supportive by offering the option to honor their person during those times if they choose or by simply sharing memories or asking open-ended questions about how their person may have been feeling or thinking if they were still here.

- Ian makes a list of things he hopes to do with his dad. We can promote healthy conversations with our kids by asking what they wish they could do with their person. It isn't about trying to fulfill the need or fix anything, but rather just letting them talk openly about what would be important for them to be able to do with their person. Conversations like this help them understand it is okay to have these thoughts and that you are there to listen and talk about the person if/when they want to.
- Explore with your kids how your family has moved onward despite the pain and challenges that you've faced since your person died. Talk about things you've

overcome or are still working through individually and as family.

- Onward ends with Ian recognizing how grateful he is for his brother, someone he can look up to and who has supported him. He also realizes how his dad was right there with them all along. Help your child think about who in their life has been supportive or made an impact on them since the death. Explore what qualities that person exhibits that makes them so special to them. You can also discuss times when they may have felt their person present. Remind them that while our person is not physically with us, we can still carry them with us through a different kind of relationship.

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We hope that this tip sheet provides you with the support you need to open up conversation with your child about feelings of grief they may be experiencing. Feel free to adapt these suggestions to fit the needs of your child.

If you need additional support, please contact Erin's House:

- **By phone:** 260.423.2466
- **By email:** [Info@ErinsHouse.org](mailto:Info@ErinsHouse.org)
- **Online:** [ErinsHouse.org](https://ErinsHouse.org)



#### OUR MISSION

Erin's House provides support to children, teens, and their families who have experienced a death.

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