



## 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.

### 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.

### 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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We hope that this tip sheet provides you with the support you need to open up the conversation with your child about the 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](http://ErinsHouse.org)



#### OUR MISSION

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

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