



INFORM

Tell the child about the death as soon as possible using clear, age-appropriate language. Invite and encourage children to ask questions. Be prepared to repeat information as the reality of death can be difficult to absorb. Tell the child's teacher and/or daycare provider of the death and its impact on your child.



ENCOURAGE

Grieving children are likely to act out their angry feelings in negative ways, as they often do not have a well-developed emotional vocabulary. Allow your child/teen to express his or her feelings through play, art, writing or other expressive means. Such activities can help him or her manage overwhelming feelings.



EXPLAIN

Relay that death means the body no longer works, and the person who died cannot come back. Discuss the plans for the visitation and/or funeral and encourage, but never force the child or teen to participate in some way.



UNDERSTAND

Keep in mind that young people may need extra attention and reassurance. Nighttime fears, separation anxiety, emotional outbursts, and regression in behavior are all common reactions. Reassure your child or teen that you are still a family, you will get through this together and there will always be someone to love and care for him/her.



MAINTAIN

Adhere to routines as much as possible. Children and teens are reassured by predictable and familiar routines such as bedtime, chores, homework, etc.



COMMEMORATE

Find ways to remember or honor the deceased person's life with your child. It can be planting a garden, cooking a special meal or donating to a charity. Teach the young person that life has meaning and is not forgotten.

Things to keep in mind

There is no time limit on grief

- There are times when children will re-grieve the death, especially around certain occasions such as holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries.

Be aware of grief triggers

- Grief triggers are everyday occurrences that remind us of our person who died such as a song, a scent, or an upcoming birthday. It's important, especially for children and teens, to have an outlet to release those emotions they may be feeling.

There is no way to "fix" grief

- Grief is the natural reaction to death. Grieving is normal; it is healthy. It is our body and mind's way of handling the death of someone significant in our life.

Ways you can help right now

- LISTEN: Sit back and allow the child to take the lead
- DONATE: All of our programs and services are offered at no cost to children, teens, and their families who are grieving. In-kind and monetary donations are always welcomed.



HEALING HEARTS. BUILDING HOPE.

- VOLUNTEER: It takes a lot of volunteers to help us heal so many hearts each year.

Examples

My child has not cried/cries all the time over the death. Is this normal?

- Children and teens can react to a death very differently than adults. Some children may not show outward signs of grieving. This does not mean that they are not impacted by the death. Often children may be playing and acting like nothing has happened, but then may become inconsolable over something as seemingly trivial as their shoe coming untied. They may regress in behaviors and experience separation anxiety. This is typical of a grieving child. Remember, they do not have the verbal skills or the life experience to put their feelings into words like adults do.

My best friend's dad died recently. I want to help, but I don't know how. What can I do?

- Sometimes it's hard to find the "right words" when a person you care about is grieving. That's okay. Simply being there for your friend can help a lot. Letting them know you are willing to listen whenever they are ready to talk is important. Saying things like "I've been thinking about you" and "I don't know exactly what you're going through, but I'm willing to listen if you want to talk" or simply "I'm here for you" can provide comfort. Invite your friend out for coffee or over to your house to watch movies or a ball game. Don't be offended if they don't accept your offer the first few times. Grieving can be exhausting, both mentally and physically. Give them some time and they'll let you know when they're ready. In the meantime, a caring Facebook message, a friendly call/text, or a gentle hug can help a friend through this painful time.