

Eight Ways of Helping a Child in Grief



1. Children need to know that they will be cared for if something happens to you

- Create a plan with your child. Offer reassurance that they will be cared for.
- This will help your child overcome their primal fear for their own safety, which was activated when their parent died.
- Consistency in limit setting will aid in child's ability to feel safe again in the world.

2. Relieve your child of any feelings of guilt or responsibility that they might have about the death

- Kids aged 4-6 and teens tend to engage in magical thinking and are egocentric so they often blame themselves.
- Test out their thoughts with them to help them understand what caused the death so they won't blame themselves.

3. Provide Clear, Truthful Information

- Kids fear a contagion effect (that they can "catch" death)
- May not be cognitively able to understand death related concepts.
- Kids don't have the experience to help them understand what is happening to them.
- Add additional details as developmentally appropriate or when they ask for information.
- Remember that you are the best person for them to hear the facts from because they feel most safe with you.

4. Involve children in mourning and anniversary rituals

- Prepare them for what will take place. Involve them in the decision making process.
- Designate another adult to companion them during the ritual, allowing breaks as needed.
- Never force them to view the body or visit the

cemetery if they do not want to.

5. Continue routine activities

- Provide opportunities to engage in activities which will increase their self-esteem and give them a sense of control over their life.
- These activities will give them the necessary breaks from their grief.

6. Encourage child to express fears, fantasies, and ask questions, assuring them that you can "handle it"

- Expressing emotions helps them move through their grief process.
- If they ask the question then they are old enough to hear the answer.

7. Help child retain their memories and connection to their person who died

- Greater the connectedness the more likely the child is to want to continue desired behaviors that would have pleased the deceased.
- Children fear loss of memories including sound of voice and what the person looked like.
- Minimize secondary losses, which threaten those memories. Ex: Allow them to keep possessions, pictures, and delay moves or changes in school as long as possible.

8. Serve as a Healthy Role Model for Grief

- Get grief support for yourself
- Your child's adjustment is dependent on your own healthy adjustment to the death
- Recognize you can't do it all and take care of yourself.

© OUR HOUSE Grief Support Center
www.ourhouse-grief.org