

HELPING YOUR CHILD COPE WITH GRIEF AND LOSS

The death of a loved one can trigger a wide range of emotions for any individual, but children and adolescents experience grief and loss in their own way. If you are grieving the same loss as your child, it can be even more difficult to offer him/her support because you may be experiencing the same overwhelming emotions.

Here is a list of ways to be helpful to your child following the death of a loved one:

1. Tell your child that it is okay to feel all kinds of emotions after a loved one dies. Explain that it is okay to feel sad, angry, hurt, frustrated, shocked, numb, etc. It is even okay to feel happy or relieved because your loved one is no longer suffering. It is okay to miss the person who died and to wish that you could see the person again or hear the person's voice. Tell your child that there is no right or wrong way to feel after a loved one dies, and that he/she might even feel more than one emotion at the same time.
2. Encourage your child to share his/her feelings with you and make time to talk about the death, as well as any feelings that might arise following religious, spiritual, or memorial services. Explain that it does more harm than good to keep feelings bottled up inside.
3. Tell your child how you have felt regarding the death of your loved one, so that your child knows it is beneficial and healthy to express these kinds of thoughts and feelings.
4. Let your child know that it is helpful to share memories of your loved one with one another. It is healthy for children and adolescents to remember happy times with the deceased, to look at old pictures, or to discuss things that they wish they could have done in the future with the deceased. You might also want to mention to your child that we sometimes remember our deceased loved ones by dreaming about them at night.
5. Be flexible and understanding if your child begins to behave in unexpected ways (e.g. wanting to sleep with a night light on again, arguing more often with his/her siblings).
6. Make your child's school counselors aware of the death, so that they can offer additional support if necessary. Instruct your child to seek out one of the counselors if he/she is having difficulty with the grieving process during the school day.

Signs that your child might need additional support:

1. Your child begins to isolate himself/herself from family members and friends.
2. Your child is frequently in conflict with family members, friends, or peers.
3. Your child begins to participate less in school or in after-school activities.
4. You notice persistent changes in your child's appetite or sleeping habits.
5. Your child's sad or angry feelings intensify or persist over an extended period of time.
6. Your child expresses feelings of guilt, hopelessness, or despair.
7. Your child is behaving recklessly (e.g. acting aggressively, using alcohol or drugs).

For more information on grief and loss, or to obtain support for your child who is grieving, please contact:

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