



## HELPING CHILDREN TO GRIEVE

1. Be aware of yourself and what you are feeling. Identify safe ways to express your feelings that can be shared with children, and individually away from children.
2. The basics count and provide consistency and stability. When and where possible, prioritize maintaining regular routines, schedules, and contact with familiar people and places as well as access to nourishing food and comfortable surroundings.
3. When listening, provide children with ample time and when possible, a comfortable physical space for sharing.
4. Respect the many unique ways children express their feelings; know that their expression may differ based on their age, development, and understanding. Feelings may be big or small and may not seem commensurate or connected to what is happening. Feelings may be intense, brief, and repeated.
5. Feelings and emotions, especially anger, may sometimes benefit from movement and physical activity. Allow for access to physical methods, objects, and sensory experiences like painting, blocks, clay, old magazines to rip as well as safe spaces for bigger movements like jumping or dancing.
6. Do not overload children with information. Answer only the questions they ask; remember to be patient when they repeatedly ask the same question.
7. Answer children's questions with simplicity and honesty and describe death and dying in literal terms. Remember that "I don't know" is an acceptable answer, especially if it is the truth.
8. Death and loss may bring or exacerbate feeling of a loss of control. As much and frequently as possible, offer opportunities for decision-making with multiple appropriate choices.
9. Remember, young children will generalize and associate important people and emotions. Example: If a sibling died in the hospital, then hospitals are likely to hold certain fears.

10. Know that a child will grieve cyclically. I.e., With age and each new developmental level, they will re-live their loss and as they continue to age and develop, they will also continue to integrate it in their lives.
  
11. Families of all constellations exist, and children grieve as part of a family. When death occurs, the entire family structure shifts and what was previously “normal,” is now different and altered. This may bring changes in family roles and ways of living that bring additional losses to grieve.
  
12. Above all: Respect, encourage, and honor a child’s feelings whether they feel fear, grief, sadness, guilt, anger, or love. All of these and more are natural feelings that help the child process, integrate, and heal from the loss.