



Suggested Guidelines – What to Say

| Can be helpful... | Can be hurtful... |
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| <p><i>“I know just what you’re going through.”</i> You cannot know this. Everyone’s experience of grief is unique.</p> | <p><i>“Can you tell me more about what this has been like for you?”</i></p> |
| <p><i>“You must be incredibly angry.”</i> It is not helpful to tell people how they are feeling or ought to feel. It is better to ask. People in grief often feel many different things at different times.</p> | <p><i>“Most people have strong feeling when something like this happens to them. What has this been like for you?”</i></p> |
| <p><i>“This is hard. Buts it’s important to remember the good things in life, too.”</i> This kind of statement is likely to quiet down true expressions of grief. When people are grieving, it’s important that they be allowed to experience and express whatever feelings, memories, or wishes they’re having.</p> | <p><i>“What kinds of memories do you have about the person who died?”</i></p> |
| <p><i>“At least he’s no longer in pain.”</i> Efforts to “focus on the good things” are more likely to minimize the student or family’s experience. Any statement that begins with the words “at least” should probably be reconsidered.</p> | <p><i>“What sorts of things have you been thinking about since your loved one died?”</i></p> |
| <p><i>“I lost both my parents when I was your age.”</i> Avoid comparing your losses with those of students or their families. These types of statements may leave children feeling that their loss is not as profound or important.</p> | <p><i>“Tell me more about what this has been like for you.”</i></p> |
| <p><i>“You’ll need to be strong now for your family. It’s important to get a grip on your feelings.”</i> Grieving children are often told they shouldn’t express their feelings. This holds children back from expressing their grief and learning to cope with these difficult feelings.</p> | <p><i>“How is your family doing? What kinds of concerns do you have about them?”</i></p> |
| <p><i>“My dog died last week. I know how you must</i></p> | <p><i>“I know how I’ve felt when someone I loved</i></p> |

be feeling.”

It is not useful to compare losses. Keep the focus on grieving children and their families.

died, but I don't really know how you're feeling. Can you tell me something about what this has been like for you?”