



Together hope grows.

Helpful Hints for Adults Supporting Grieving Youth

TELL THE TRUTH.

Be honest when talking to children about the death. Though they may not need to know all the details, it is important for them to receive truthful explanations. Do not lie about the death or what it means to die. In case you don't have an answer, it is OK to say, "I don't know."

EXPLAIN CONCRETELY.

Children aren't able to process figurative language like adults. Say "died" rather than "passed away," "lost," or "went to sleep." Explain that when someone dies, he or she no longer needs to eat, sleep, or go to the bathroom. If the person died of an illness, explain that it was different than getting sick like the cold or flu.

DON'T DENY.

It is OK for children to see you cry or to let them know how you are feeling. If you deny or try to hide your emotions in front of them, they will likewise try to hide their emotions.

EXPECT MANY EMOTIONS.

Grieving children will experience a variety of emotions including sadness, anger, guilt, confusion, jealousy, and even happiness. Let them know that it is OK and normal to feel however they are feeling. Expect these emotions to come and go quickly, too. One minute they may be sad and crying, and the next they may be playing and laughing.

BE ALL EARS.

It is important for children to tell their story and express their emotions. Check in with them regularly and let them know you are there to listen. Ask questions and let them do the talking.

ENCOURAGE PLAY.

Play is a normal and healthy outlet for children. It is not uncommon for young children to play funeral or heaven much like playing school or house. Encourage activities that help children express their emotions.

ALLOW CHOICES.

Following a death, a child's world will feel out of control. Offering choices will help children regain some sense of control and promotes a healthy grief experience.

ROUTINE.

Because of this "out of control" feeling, it is also important to maintain a routine as much as possible. This provides children a sense of stability and security and reassures them that the adults in their lives will continue to take care of them. Try to stick to the same schedule, expectations, and consequences as much as possible.

Coping With Grief

Dealing with grief and loss is something most people have to do sometime in their lives. Grief is a natural response to the loss of someone or something very dear to us. Losses that may lead to grief include the death or separation of a loved one, loss of a job, death or loss of a beloved pet, or any number of other changes in life such as divorce, becoming an "empty nester," or retirement. Anyone can experience grief and loss, but each person is unique in how he or she copes with these feelings.

Some responses are healthy coping mechanisms, while others may hinder the grieving process. The acknowledgment of grief, time, and support facilitate the grieving process, allowing an opportunity for a person to appropriately mourn a loss and then heal.

Common Reactions to Grief or Loss

The stages of grief reflect a variety of reactions that may surface as an individual tries to make sense of how a loss affects him or her. An important part of the healing process is allowing oneself to experience and accept all feelings that are experienced. The following are the stages of grief:

- **Denial, numbness, and shock:** This stage serves to protect the individual from experiencing the intensity of the loss. It may be useful when the grieving person must take action (for example, making funeral arrangements). Numbness is a normal reaction to an immediate loss and should not be confused with "lack of caring." As the individual slowly acknowledges the impact of the loss, denial and disbelief will diminish.
- **Bargaining:** This stage may involve persistent thoughts about what could have been done to prevent the loss. People can become preoccupied about ways that things could have been better. If this stage is not properly resolved, intense feelings of remorse or guilt may interfere with the healing process.
- **Depression:** This stage of grief occurs in some people after they realize the true extent of the loss. Signs of depression may include sleep and appetite disturbances, a lack of energy and concentration, and crying spells. A person may feel loneliness, emptiness, isolation, and self-pity.
- **Anger:** This reaction usually occurs when an individual feels helpless and powerless. Anger can stem from a feeling of abandonment through a loved one's death. An individual may be angry at a higher power or toward life in general.
- **Acceptance:** In time, an individual may be able to come to terms with various feelings and accept the fact that the loss has occurred. Healing can begin once the loss becomes integrated into the individual's set of life experiences.

Remember, throughout a person's lifetime, he or she may return to some of the earlier stages of grief. There is no time limit to the grieving process. Each individual should define his or her own healing process.

WebMD Medical Reference

Reviewed by Joseph Goldberg, MD on May 31, 2014
© 2014 WebMD, LLC. All rights reserved.

Factors That May Hinder Grief and Healing

Some factors may hinder grief and the healing process following a loss. These can include:

- Overworking oneself on the job
- Abusing drugs, alcohol, or other substances
- Compulsive behavior
- Avoiding emotions
- Minimizing feelings

Factors That May Help Resolve Grief

An individual can help to resolve grief by:

- Allowing time to experience thoughts and feelings openly to self
- Expressing feelings openly or writing journal entries about them
- Remembering that crying can provide a release
- Confiding in a trusted person about the loss
- Acknowledging and accepting both positive and negative feelings
- Finding bereavement groups in which there are other people who have had similar losses
- Seeking professional help if feelings become overwhelming

Useful Websites for Grief



American School Counselor Association ASCA Crisis Booklet

<http://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/Crisis/crisisbook.pdf>

The National Center for Grieving Children & Families

<http://www.dougy.org/grief-resources/death-impacts-your-school/>

Death: Dealing with Crisis at School Practical Suggestions for Educators

http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/neat_poland.aspx

Great Page One Page Guide on How Students Grieve Teachers to Give Out

<http://teaching.monster.com/benefits/articles/1927-how-to-help-your-students-deal-with-grief-and-loss>

Memorial Activities at School: A List of "Do's and Don'ts"

http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/memorialdo_donot.pdf

Death and Grief: Supporting Children and Youth

http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/deathgrief.pdf

Kidhealth: Great resources for so many topics

http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/emotions/someone_died.html

<http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/emotions/death/index.html>

General Guideline on How Children Deal with Death

<http://www.powayusd.com/schools/safety/documents/DevelopmentalStagesUnderstandingDeath.pdf>

Grief Counseling – Ideas for Rituals to Remember the Deceased (Section 6)

<https://www.omh.ny.gov/omhweb/grief/>

Dealing With Grief and Loss – Language Arts Unit

http://www.scholastic.com/childrenandgrief/pdfs/Educators/Educator_Guide.pdf

Healing Activities for Children and Teens

<http://campbell.k12.va.us/tes/wpuckette/media/justforme.pdf>

Helping and Healing in a Time of Crisis

<http://crisisguide.neahin.org/crisisguide/images/SchoolCrisisGuide.pdf>

Student Assistance Program that Helps Children Mourn and Move On – old but some good ideas for activities

<http://www.kidspeace.org/uploadedFiles/grief%5B1%5D.pdf>

Kids and Funerals

<http://www.marysplacect.org/kids.php>