



GRIEF AND LOSS: WHAT CAN FAMILIES DO?

It can be a challenge to help someone who is grieving, because that person may not know what they need, their needs may constantly change, or they may be unwilling to ask for or accept help. And, what helped one person may be the wrong thing to do for someone else.

Supporting a child who is grieving requires patience, honesty, flexibility, emotional and physical availability, and consistency. Help them by:

RE-ESTABLISHING STABILITY

Maintain structure and rules while allowing for flexibility, create new routines and traditions, give kids choices in decision making, identify people and activities that help children feel safe, and make a plan for difficult days.

TALKING IT OUT

Having honest conversations with children about death or loss builds trust, helps provide understanding and allows children to feel comfortable talking to you because they know they can trust you to tell them the truth. During these conversations:

- Allow children to talk about the experience and ask questions.
- Acknowledge their loss and validate their feelings.
- Discuss if they would like to share with teachers and classmates, what they would like to share, and how they would like to tell their story.
- Remind them that it is OK to still feel happy or excited about things.
- Be a good listener.
- Reassure them there is no right or wrong way to grieve and they can grieve for as long as they need.
- Ask them what would be most helpful from you.

While you cannot promise your child that they will never again experience a significant loss or death, you can discuss the plan if such an event occurs.

PROVIDING OUTLETS FOR EXPRESSION

Make time for recreation, play, creativity and friendships. Seek opportunities for your child to interact and talk to other children who are experiencing grief. Find grief support groups near you using the [Dougy Center's Grief Support Center Finder](#).





BEING A GOOD ROLE MODEL

There is a strong connection between a child's grief outcomes and how their adult caregivers are doing. Take good care of yourself. Model healthy ways to cope with strong feelings and grief. Express your feelings and cry in front of your kids if you need to. Your emotional honesty will build trust with your child.

PARTNERING WITH SCHOOLS

With your child's permission, reach out to teachers, school counselors and administrators for flexibility with schoolwork and opportunities for emotional support during the school day.

GETTING HELP

If your child experiences ongoing difficulty with attending school, sleeping, eating, forming or maintaining friendships, or talks about wanting to harm themselves or others, you may need to reach out to a peer support group, physician, school counselor or other mental health professional.

LEARN MORE

[Developmental Responses to Grief](#) (Dougy Center)

[Talking About Grieving as a Family](#) (National Alliance for Grieving Children)

