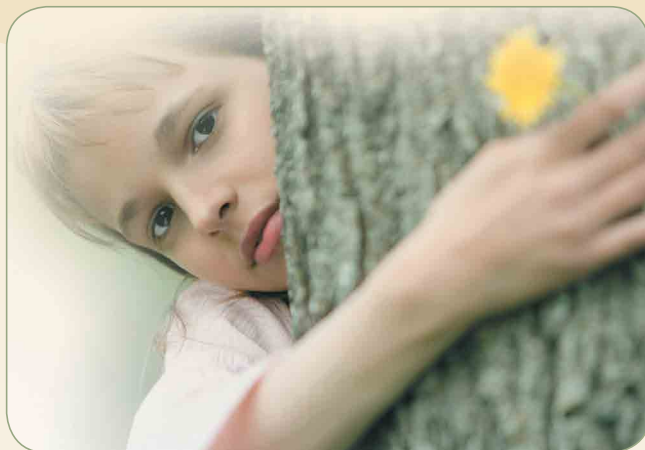


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### *Helping when you're hurting*

Someone your child loved has died — someone who was important to you, too. So now when you feel you need someone to help and comfort you, you must also help and comfort your child. It's a big responsibility. It can feel overwhelming. But it can also be a gift.



*Helping your child grieve can bring focus and purpose to your own grieving. And it can bring you and your child closer together.*

Think of this time as a journey through a strange land. It's not one you would ever have chosen for yourself — and you'd never want your child to go there alone. That's why it's important to stick together.

Going down this road will still be difficult, but it will be a little less frightening and confusing if you have each other. Together, you can continue to move forward.

---



This booklet will give you ideas about what your child may be experiencing, and things you can do to help your child work through grief in a healthy way.

You may not want to read all of this booklet right away. For now, the section on the first few days (pages 4 to 7) may help you most. Keep this booklet nearby and refer to it later for ideas of ways you and your child can remember your loved one together.

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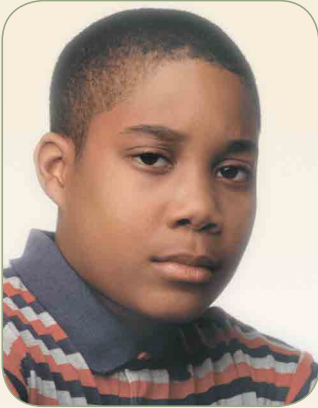
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## The First Few Days



.....

“When I first got the news, I remember yelling out “NO!” so much that I felt dizzy. It just didn’t feel real.

It was more like a dream. I needed to hug someone.”

— *Tanner, 12*

The first days after the loss of a loved one can be confusing and frightening for a child. People are coming and going, arrangements are being made, family members are upset, and a person your child loved is not there.

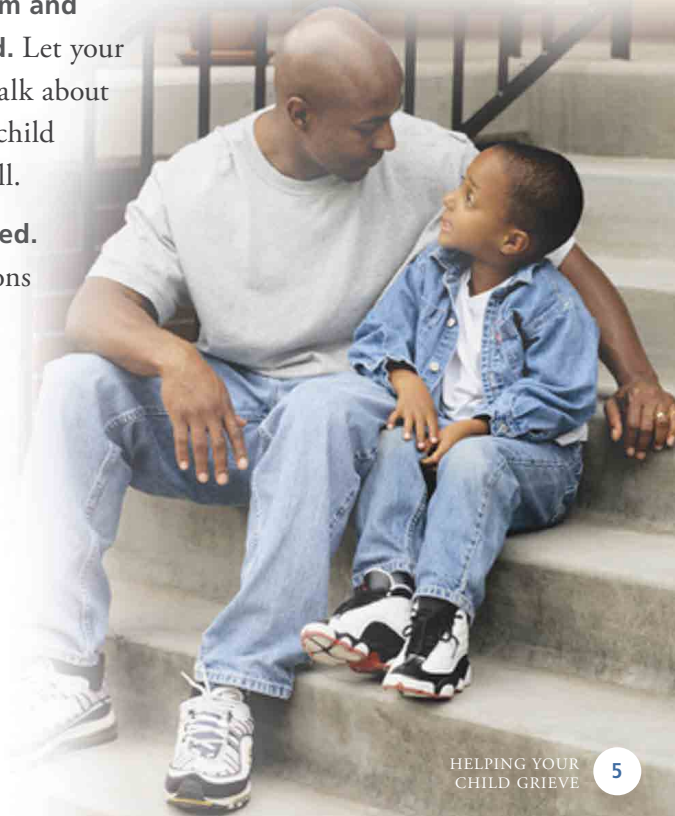
With everyone under so much stress, it’s easy for communication in the family to break down. Don’t let this happen. Even if you feel too upset or too busy, sit down with your child and explain what’s going on. If children know you’re being honest and know what to expect, they will feel more secure during this difficult time.

### Breaking the news

It’s difficult to deliver the bad news to your child. But if the news is delivered in an honest and loving way, your child will be less confused about what’s going on. There’s more than one suitable way to break the news, and you may have done it already. If you haven’t yet, here are some ideas on where to start.

- **Try to get to your child right away**, before friends or relatives can deliver the news.
- **Find a quiet place to sit down.** Try to talk calmly.

- **Move into the story gently.** “Something very sad has happened.” Build on information your child might already know: “You know mommy’s been sick,” “You know grandpa is very old.”
- **Speak as plainly as possible.** “Your sister has died.” Don’t try to soften the news with indirect language such as “passed away,” or “gone to sleep.” This might confuse a young child. If the child is young, explain what “dead” means, that the person’s body has stopped working. Explain that the person won’t be coming back.
- **Reassure your child about your own reactions.** Tell your child that you and others may be crying a lot, or may seem very upset or short tempered. Tell your child you’ll try your best to be calm, and that you are not upset because of your child’s actions.
- **Let your child know you love them and that you’ll be there when needed.** Let your child talk about their feelings and talk about how you are feeling, too. Tell your child that you will stay close through it all.
- **Repeat what you’ve said as needed.** Children often ask the same questions over and over again as they try to understand what happened.



## A CHILD'S HELPER

If you're the one making the arrangements for the person who died, you may find it helpful to assign another trusted adult to watch over your child during the first few days. You can then carry out the necessary duties with less worry, and save some energy to offer love and understanding to your child during the quieter moments. Once the initial chaos subsides, you can return to your child's side.

## Setting expectations

When someone dies, the activity around the house often picks up dramatically. It's confusing for just about everyone. But it's especially confusing for children. You can help your child stay grounded by describing what will be happening in the next few days.

- **Tell her that there will be extra visitors.** Answer questions about who's coming and going and why they're behaving as they are.
- **Explain what's going to happen in the next few days** — that there will be a funeral or memorial service, and a burial or cremation. Tell your child who will be taking care of them during this time and what they need to do.
- **Make sure your child is dressed and fed and given the chance to participate in activities.**
- **Help your child decide when the time is right to go back to school.**
- **Make sure your child's questions, concerns, and needs are heard.**



## Preparing your child for the funeral

Should children attend the funeral? Most families and professionals agree that children should be invited to the funeral and given the choice whether to attend. A funeral is an important time to say goodbye, to learn more about the person who died, and to feel included in a meaningful ritual.

Children do, however, need to be prepared for the funeral. You can help prepare your child by explaining:

- Why we have funerals
- What the funeral will be like and who will be there
- How the body was moved from the place of death to the place of the funeral and burial or cremation
- The process of the viewing, the funeral service, the burial, or cremation
- Whether your child will see the body and what it will look like (lying down and not moving)

If a viewing is not part of the service, some families arrange to have the child view the body in the funeral home so they can understand that the person is really dead.



“My grandma lived across the street so I saw her almost every day. She was sick for a few years, and I’d take her things after school. When she died I was 7. My parents thought I was too young for the funeral. Nobody even asked me. But I wanted to say goodbye. I wanted her to know I cared.”

— Sarah, 16



## What You Can Expect

.....

About a year after his mom died, my son — who was 9 at the time — started acting out in school. The teacher kept sending him to the principal. The school nurse thought he had attention deficit disorder. I tried to explain that this was about the death, and they said, “Then why didn’t he do this before?”

— *Daniel*

Your child feels much of the same sadness, anger, and worry that you feel during grief. But your child’s reactions to those feelings may seem different from yours. Because a child’s understanding of death and language skills are less developed, their responses are usually more physical. As a child grows — physically, emotionally, socially, and in every other way — their responses change as well. You can better understand your child’s concerns by learning about common expressions of grief and watching your child’s behavior.

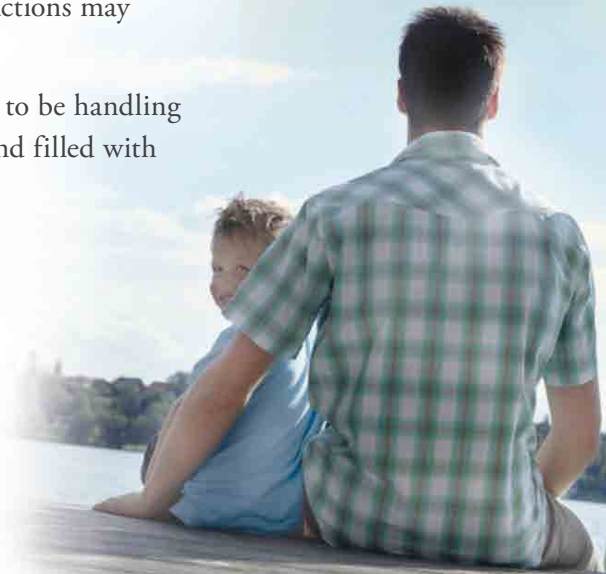




## Children's patterns of grieving

While your child's reactions to grief may be similar in some way to yours, they may look different when expressed. Your child's reaction may be:

- **Physical.** Children don't have the same verbal skills as adults, so they often work out their feelings in actions.
- **Regressive.** Children may temporarily regress to what was appropriate at an earlier age when they felt more secure.
- **Intense.** Children often grieve in short but intense bursts — devastated one minute, and seemingly fine the next.
- **Postponed.** Children sometimes don't react to the death while the adults nearby are acutely grieving. They may wait weeks or months until their lives feel more stable before expressing their own grief.
- **Recurring.** Children often grieve in cycles. As they grow and their understanding of death increases, they may revisit feelings, questions, and behaviors they had previously gone through. Their grief reactions may come and go over a period of years.
- **Difficult to read.** Children may appear to be handling things well, but may still be confused and filled with fears they find difficult to address.



## RESPOND TO THE GRIEF, *not the behavior*

It may be unnerving to see your child react in these ways. Remember that grief is confusing for a child on many levels. When possible, try to address the grief rather than the behavior. The behavior is more likely to improve with your understanding.

## Common reactions in children

Children sometimes react to death in unexpected ways. Here is a list of reactions that are common in children of all ages:

- **Illness.** The child has stomachaches or headaches, doesn't sleep or eat well, is afraid of getting the same illness the person died of.
- **Hyperactivity.** The child suddenly becomes the class clown or bully.
- **Regression.** The child starts sucking their thumb or wetting the bed or doing things they grew out of long ago.
- **Disbelief.** The child does not believe that the person is really gone and talks of the person in the present tense, as if they're still there.
- **Anger.** The child is angry with the person who died for leaving or mad at the doctor for not being able to save the person. The child blames you for not warning them that the person might die.
- **Anxiety or panic.** The child is afraid that other family or friends will die. The child become anxious about who will provide care and how to survive.
- **Worry.** The child worries about how his parents are managing. The child is afraid of doing or saying something that will make it worse for them, or worries about things not related to this death.
- **Guilt.** The child takes responsibility for the death, or that the death is punishment for bad behavior.



- **Preoccupation with the dead person.** The child believes that the person who died was perfect, or was popular and imitates the person's way of walking and moving or dressing.
- **Inability to concentrate.** The child daydreams a lot, can't stay focused and has trouble in school.



### *An angry child* .....

Some children express their feelings through anger, yelling, hitting, or crying for no obvious reason. Creative and physical activities — such as using play dough or finger painting — can help a child express feelings and frustrations in other ways. Here are more ideas to help a preschool or school-age child release angry feelings:

- **Make a punching bag.** Allow the child to decorate or write on a paper bag, then stuff it with paper wads and tie it at the top. If the child wants to, you can list the reasons for the child's anger on the back of the bag. Help the child say what they might be feeling as they hit the bag: "I'm mad that my brother is dead."
- **Tear up an old phone book or pop some bubble wrap.** Twist it, jump on it, squeeze it.
- **Throw or kick a ball.** Do it with the child or let them play against a wall.

See pages 24 to 32 for more ideas for activities, games, and projects.

### *A quiet child* .....

Some children hold their feelings inside. They may withdraw from their favorite activity or special friends. Other children become very quiet and afraid to leave the house or their parents. Here are some ideas to help a quiet child work through and express feelings:

- **Painting and drawing.**
- **Using play dough.** Offer a small wooden hammer, rolling tools, or cookie cutters to shape the clay.
- **Playing in water.** Let the child play in a basin of water with toys, bubble wands, and cups. Let the child get their entire body into the water.

See pages 24 to 32 for more ideas for activities, games, and projects.

## SIGNS OF HEALING, SIGNS OF NEED

With time and support, most children will gradually work through grief without needing professional help. Although children may go back and forth, overall the grief-related behaviors will gradually decrease. While the child might be forever changed in some ways, they'll begin to act more like their old self and in more age-appropriate ways.

But what if the child's behaviors remain intense and inappropriate? Consider having the child join a support group. In a group, a child can see how other children are reacting to grief, and get ideas for coping.

Many facilities provide support groups for children at no cost. [See page 34](#) for more information.



## The role of play

Children express feelings, concerns, and questions through play, creative activities, and physical movement. They can also find release and familiar comfort in these activities. Here are some things you may notice now, after the death of a loved one:

- **Your child's play seems the same as before.** Children can participate enthusiastically and enjoy play just as they did before the death. This is normal and doesn't mean your child doesn't care or isn't affected.
- **Your child's play is focused on the death.** Sometimes a child will act out an accident scene or a hospital experience. This, too, is normal. It can help a child work through grief.
- **Your child's play or language is repetitive.** You may see your child going over and over the same event. Your child may want to act out scenes related to the death. Your child may ask the same questions over and over again. This repetition may be difficult for you to see or deal with, but try to be patient. Repetition may reflect your child's attempt to understand what's happened.

[See pages 24 to 32](#) for ideas for activities that can help children understand and express feelings about their loved one's death. Keep in mind that often the value of an activity is sharing it with someone close to them.

## How schools and other caregivers can help

Talk to your child's teachers and other caregivers before returning your child to their care. Let them know what's going on. Help them understand your child's behavior and how they can help. Here are some suggestions:

- Provide stability by keeping the same routine, expectations, and rules your child had before in school.
- Try to schedule some physical or art activity to allow your child to express himself if he seems anxious.
- Offer extra help if grieving behavior interferes with learning.
- Communicate with the parents about the child's behavior in school.
- Recognize that the period of grief-related behavior may last much longer than the initial weeks after the death.



“When my son died, my daughter was in 3rd grade. Her teacher was right on top of it. She had the class read a couple of books in which someone died. Then they talked about them and wrote essays about how they would feel in different situations. My daughter not only had a lot to say, but she realized that a lot of kids in the class had lost pets or grandparents or other loved ones.”

— *Angie*



## Age by Age

.....

“When my husband died, my daughters were 5 and 2. The 2-year-old struggled the most. She knew something wasn’t right. She started wanting her pacifier again, and she panicked whenever I left the room. When she got older she wouldn’t sleep over at a friend’s house. She went away to college last year, though. I guess she eventually got over it.”

— *Amy*

Every child is unique and sees the world in their own way. But a child’s age does play a role in understanding and influences their reaction to grief. A very young child has a simple and concrete understanding of life and death. An older child can understand death and its consequences in a more complex way.

A child’s emotional and social maturity also affects their reactions. Remember that it’s normal during grief to behave like someone younger. You may see your child react with behavior that is expected for a much younger child.

Knowing what a child of a particular age is likely to understand will help you see what they may be experiencing. It may help you know how to talk to your child about grief and ask about their feelings.



## Infant to 2 years old

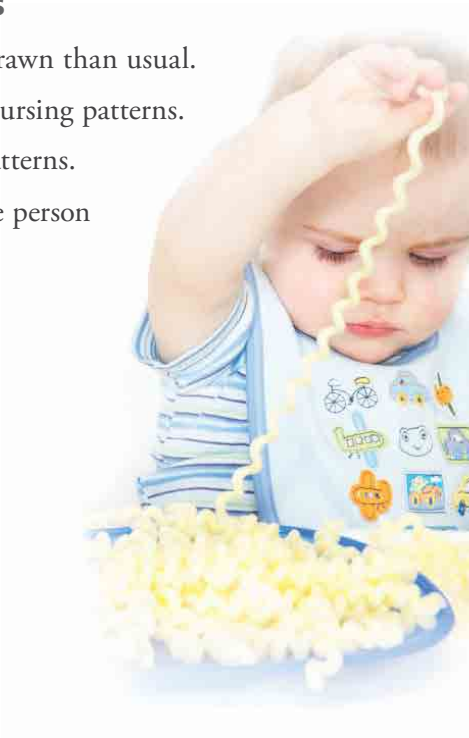
A very young child isn't old enough to understand death. But if a child is old enough to love, they are old enough to mourn the loss of a loved one. And children can be very sensitive to changes in the family environment. Watch for signs of how your child is feeling, and consider the following possibilities:

### Understanding of death

- Has no understanding of death.
- Feels a sense of separation or loss.
- Feels parents' emotions.

### Common reactions

- May be more withdrawn than usual.
- Changes eating or nursing patterns.
- Changes sleeping patterns.
- Won't remember the person who died.







“My children play house a lot now. And every single time they play, they have someone die. Sometimes it’s a violent death. I figure it’s the only way they can talk about it.”

— *Rosanne*

## 2 to 6 years old

Children this age usually don’t have the language skills or experience to express how they feel. They will often act out physically or emotionally, instead. Watch for signs of how your child is feeling, and consider the following possibilities:

### Understanding of death

- Thinks death is reversible — people can die and come back to life.
- Believes the dead can still think, feel, see, and hear.
- Believes in magic — that someone can be “wished” back to life.
- Takes words literally such as “passed away,” “lost,” “gone to sleep.”

### Common reactions

- Asks questions about when the dead person will return.
- Feels some responsibility for the death, or sees it as a punishment for their own bad thoughts or behavior.
- Feels left out.
- Is clingy and afraid to let you out of their sight.
- Remembers the appearance of the person who died, but not much about the personality.

## What may help .....

- Give your child the time and space to express himself. This can mean playing with toys, drawing, singing, or acting out stories. Encourage your child to record memories of the person who died, both the good times and the bad.
- Allow your child to express whatever feelings they have. Acting out violent scenes may be helping your child deal with anger. Replaying the death over and over may help your child understand it.
- Tell your child that they're not responsible for the death.
- Include your child in decisions that affect their life. Let your child sometimes decide when to participate, what to wear, and whom to be around.



## READING CORNER

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- *The Dead Bird* by Margaret Wise Brown. New York, NY: Harper Trophy.
- *Nana Upstairs and Nana Downstairs* by Tomie DePaola. New York, NY: Putnam.
- *The Tenth Good Thing about Barney* by Judith Viorst. New York, NY: Athenium.

See page 35 for book summaries.

### BE PLAIN

WHEN WILL GRANDMA GET UP AND PLAY WITH ME?

SHE WON'T. WHEN SHE DIED HER BODY STOPPED WORKING. HER BODY CAN'T START WORKING AGAIN.



## 6 to 12 years old

A child at this age is starting to understand death, but may not know how to act. The child may act silly or try to hide their feelings. Watch for signs of how your child is feeling, and consider the possibilities below.

### Understanding of death

- Begins to understand that death is final, though still may be confused about this.
- Doesn't always understand that death happens to everyone.
- May see death as a bogeyman or ghost that takes people away.



### Common reactions

- Feels guilt and responsibility. For example, your child may feel guilty for having once wished the person dead and may think that their thoughts made this happen.
- Fears for their own safety and that of other family members. Older children may worry about financial security.
- Swings between expressing feelings openly and hiding them. May have trouble expressing thoughts that seem “ugly,” such as anger or relief.

- Tries to hide what happened from classmates so they won't feel different. May cover painful feelings with loud behavior.
- Wants a more detailed explanation of why the person died.
- Doesn't want to go to school at all.
- Remembers more subtle personality traits of the person who died.



## READING CORNER

- *Cassie Binegar* by Patricia MacLachlan. New York, NY: Harper Trophy.
- *Healing Your Grieving Heart for Kids* by Alan Wolfelt. Fort Collins, CO: Companion Press.
- *Tear Soup* by Pat Schweibert. New York, NY: Grief Watch.

*See page 35 for book summaries.*



### **What may help** .....

- Help your child understand what they're feeling and what people around them are feeling. Explain that it's okay to feel unhappy or sad or angry. Share your own feelings.
- Make sure your child understands that they are not responsible for the death.
- Include your child in decisions that affect their life. Let them sometimes decide when to participate, what to wear, and whom to be around.



“My brother died two years ago. My parents thought they knew how I was doing. I guess I looked like I was doing okay. Sometimes they’d ask. But everyone was busy, and nobody ever really had the time to hang out with me. I wanted to tell them that I didn’t know how to be the oldest kid in the family. I was panicking about it.”

— *Christian, 14*

## 12 to 19 years old

Your teenager may appear to be handling grief like an adult. Or it may be difficult to distinguish grief from other adolescent behavior. But your teenager still needs the security and predictability that you provide. Consider the possibilities below.

### Understanding of death

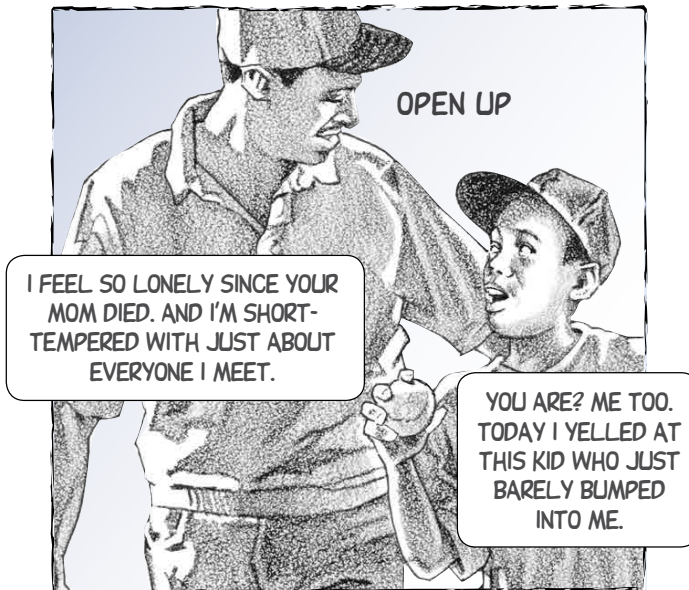
- Better understands the finality of death.
- Begins to feel his own vulnerability.
- Has more complex psychological understanding and religious beliefs concerning death.
- Recognizes the impact the death has on the family.

### Common reactions

- May become unreasonably upset about an unrelated problem.
- Hides emotions from their peers so as not to seem different.
- Feels pressure to respond in the same way an adult might respond.
- Takes on risky behavior such as fast driving, drug or alcohol use, sexual activity, or suicidal ideas.

## What may help .....

- Help your child understand their feelings and what others are feeling. Explain that it's okay to feel unhappy or sad or angry. Share your own feelings.
- Make sure your child understands that they are not responsible for the death.
- Include your child in decisions about their life. Give your child the freedom to sometimes make decisions on when to participate, what to wear, and whom to be around.



## READING CORNER

.....

- *Healing Your Grieving Heart for Teens* by Alan Wolfelt. Fort Collins, CO: Companion Press.
- *How It Feels When a Parent Dies* by Jill Krementz. New York, NY: Knopf.
- *Straight Talk about Death for Teenagers* by Earl A. Grollman. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

See page 35 for book summaries.

# Talking, Listening, and Being Together



When families talk openly about death, children have a greater chance of taking in the sadness without becoming overwhelmed by fear.

Being open doesn't reduce the pain. In fact, it may feel worse at first to express difficult feelings. Allow children to talk about their anger and sadness with the assurance that they'll still be comforted. This way, the healing will come faster and the child will become stronger.

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## Open up

If you share what you're feeling, your child will probably be more willing to share their feelings. Try to explain your tears, fatigue, and irritability. Tell your child it's okay if you cry and that your child is not the one making you sad. Show your child that it's natural to express emotions.

## Be plain

Use the words that most accurately describe what's happening. Don't say that the person has "gone to sleep" or "gone away for a while." Don't make up stories that will make the death seem less real. So much is confusing right now. If your child knows what's going on, they'll feel more included.



## Listen and watch

Let your child's own expression — questions, artwork, play — guide your conversations. Give your child your full attention and follow the cues on what they need help with. When you're explaining something, don't interpret a head nod as complete understanding.

## Share faith

Whether or not you follow a structured religion, you probably have basic beliefs that help you understand death. Share these beliefs with your child and talk about how this experience influences them.

## Be patient

A younger child may ask the same questions over and over and over. An older child may choose to open up to somebody besides you. In either case, your child may be slower to respond than you might want. Let your child work through it in their own way, and let them know that you're there to listen whenever they need you.

## Be together

Even when you're not talking, real understanding sometimes comes through just being together. A hug, a game of ball, or a sad movie may or may not lead to conversation. Give your child your full attention during these moments. This will help your child know that you're there for them.

**BE PATIENT**

I DON'T REALLY WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT RIGHT NOW.

THAT'S OKAY. LET'S DRIVE DOWN TO THAT NEW PLACE AND GET SOMETHING TO EAT.



WORKING TOGETHER:

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# Activities for Healing



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Role play scenes in which your child gets to tell the person who died something they want that person to know.

Activity and play can help the healing process by teaching children to express feelings, understand thoughts and experiences, and honor the memory of the person who died. They can bring comfort, color, and connection to this difficult time.

This section offers ideas for activities. Some activities are clearly about the loved one or the child's feelings about death, and others are not. Some focus on the child's expression, while others can be shared by the whole family. Several ideas suggest books as prompts for discussion and activity. Remember that for children, sometimes the value of an activity is just sharing it with someone close to them.

## ACTIVITY: *Tracing hands*

**Age level: 3 years and up**

*Materials needed:*

- Book — *Everett Anderson's Good-Bye* by Lucille Clifton
- Construction paper
- Pencils
- Scissors (round tip for younger ages)

*Discussion and directions:*

- Read the book with your child. For a child age 3 to 8, explain the difference between saying “goodbye” for a trip and saying “goodbye” when a person has died.
- Have your child trace their hands with fingers onto construction paper. (Trace between each finger with the fingers close together like in a mitten, not outstretched.)
- Have your child cut out the hand prints and carefully cut down along finger lines.
- Using two hand prints, weave the fingers in and out of each other to make a heart shape.
- Have your child write on the heart shape what they liked best about their loved one.

## ACTIVITY: *Wishes*

**Age level: 3 years and up**

*Materials needed:*

- Empty tin can (make sure the inner edge isn't sharp)
- Pencil, crayons, or markers
- Construction paper
- Tape or glue

*Directions:*

- Have your child make a decorative “wishing well” by taping or gluing construction paper shapes on the can. You could add pipe cleaner handles and punch holes in the sides to secure them.
- Ask your child to write down their wishes and drop them into the wishing well. As a follow-up, you can have your child hunt around the house for hidden pennies or other objects, then make a wish as each one is dropped into the wishing well.



## MORE ACTIVITIES FOR *saying goodbye...*

### *Hand wreath*

- Have every person in the family create hand prints using the “Tracing hands” directions at left.
- Form a heart-shaped wreath using all family member’s hands.
- Display the wreath in a common area.

### *Balloon messages*

- Using a marker, have your child write her feelings on a Mylar® helium balloon, then send her balloon up into the sky.
- Explain that even though we can't see where our loved one goes, we know our love goes with them — and that we also keep some of the love with us.



## ACTIVITY: *Falling leaves*

**Age level: 4 years and up**

*Materials needed:*

- Book — *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf* by L. Buscaglia
- Leaves
- Paint brushes and tempera paint
- Paper or poster board
- Construction paper
- Newspaper
- Wax paper
- Clothes iron

*Discussion and directions:*

- Read the book with your child. Discuss the life cycle, explaining that we all die someday.
- Take a trip outside to collect leaves.
- Make leaf prints by painting leaves with paint, then pressing them down onto paper or poster board.  
Alternatives: Make a leaf collage (glue leaves onto poster boards) or placemats (lay leaves between two layers of wax paper, lay newspaper on top and iron on medium-heat setting, remove iron and newspaper and add a construction paper border to complete the placemat).

## ACTIVITY: *Ten good things*

**Age level: 3 years and up**

*Materials needed:*

- Book — *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney* by J. Viorst
- Paper, magazines
- Crayons, markers
- Glue

*Directions:*

- Read the book with your child.
- Together, list ten good things about your loved one.
- Make a book about the things you loved most. You can draw pictures, cut things out of the magazines — anything you like.
- Think of other things you can do to show your love. For example, the character in the book plants a tree.



## ACTIVITY: *Lifetimes*

Age level: 3 years and up

Materials needed:

- Book — *Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children* by Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen
- Play dough ingredients (see recipe)
- Electric frying pan or fondue pot

Directions:

- Read the book with your child. Discuss things that change, such as the seasons, plants, caterpillars, clouds, etc. Talk about how all living things reach the end of their own special lifetimes — and discuss how life has changed since the death of your loved one.
- Make play dough with your children, talking about how it changes from a liquid to a solid.
- Shape the play dough with hands or with a wooden hammer, rolling tools, or other objects.

### *Play dough recipe* .....

Working with play dough is great for nonverbal expression. *Note that this activity requires constant supervision while the dough is being cooked.*

*Ingredients and instructions:*

2 cups water	2 Tbsp. vegetable oil/ margarine
Food coloring	
2 cups flour	1 Tbsp. powdered alum (a pickling spice)
1 cup salt	
½ cup cornstarch	Flavoring/scent (optional)

Add food coloring to water, then mix in the other ingredients. Cook over medium heat in a frying pan until thick. **Caution: Hot!** Remove from pan. Knead on aluminum foil until smooth. Yield: 3 cups. Refrigerate after use.

## MORE ACTIVITIES FOR *saying goodbye*

### *Sharing stories*

Have children share their stories about their loved one.

### *Making a quilt*

Make a quilt from the person's clothes.





## ACTIVITY: *Treasure boxes*

**Age level: 4 years and up**

*Materials needed:*

- Book — *Tough Boris* by M. Fox
- Shoe box, school box, lunch box
- Collage materials: ribbons, lace, glitter, sequins, buttons, magazine pictures, beads, jewels, yarn.
- Glue

*Discussion and directions:*

- Read the book with your child.
- Discuss the events of the story. Discuss the pirate's feelings.
- Make a treasure box where your child can store mementos and treasured items. *Options:* Your child might like to choose items from their loved one's belongings to keep in their treasure box, or choose pictures from magazines that remind them of your loved one (either to keep in the box or decorate another box with).
- Have your child choose items and glue them onto a box. Younger children may need more assistance. Older children may want to decorate with more intricate items.

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## ACTIVITY: *Dream catcher*

**Age level: School age to adult**

*Materials needed:*

- Dream catcher kit (available from most craft supply stores)

*Discussion and directions:*

- Say or list dreams for the person who has died. What are some good dreams? What are the bad dreams like?
- Hang the dream catcher in your child's bedroom to catch the good dreams and let the nightmares go away.



## ACTIVITY: *Butterflies*

Age level: 3 to 12 years

Materials needed:

- Book — *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle
- A nonfiction book describing the butterfly life cycle (a good option: *From Caterpillar to Butterfly* by Gerald Legg)
- Construction paper
- Pipe cleaners

Discussion and directions:

- Read the book with your child. Discuss how the caterpillar changes.
- Twist pipe cleaners into a caterpillar shape.
- Make butterfly wings out of construction paper.
- Attach the pipe cleaner body to the wings with glue. (As the butterfly takes shape, talk about how the butterfly is changing.)
- Have the child cut out different shapes with the construction paper and glue them onto the wings. If possible, look at a book that shows the natural process of the caterpillar changing into a different form and going to another place.
- Visit the cemetery and take gifts or balloons.



## MORE ACTIVITIES FOR *saying goodbye*

### *Writing thoughts*

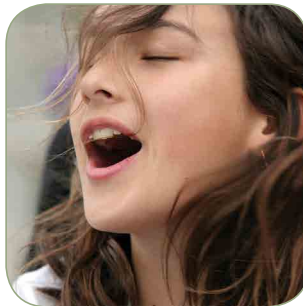
Using pencil and paper, have children write their feelings then have them put the notes at the cemetery.

### *Set aside an hour*

Schedule an hour once a week for an activity that will help you remember the person who died, such as doing the person's favorite activities, or eating the person's favorite foods.

### *Sing out*

Whenever you or your child find yourselves thinking of the loved one who has died, sing or hum that person's favorite song.







“Our grandmother was hit by a car at 3:00 on a Friday afternoon. She lived about an hour before she died. So every Friday afternoon we lit a candle and let it burn for an hour. We did that until the candle was all gone.”

—*Jake, 14*

### **ACTIVITY: *I remember***

**Age level: School age to adult**

*Materials needed:*

- Paper
- Glue
- Magazines
- Family pictures
- Scissors

*Discussion and directions:*

- Discuss your memories of your loved one.
- Talk about how our memories keep us close to our loved one.
- Talk about how some memories can make us sad but some memories can make us happy when we think of the good times we shared with our loved one.
- Make collages from magazine pictures of things that remind us of your loved one.

### **ACTIVITY: *Shadow boxes***

**Age level: Teen to adult**

*Materials needed:*

- A large shadow-box picture frame
- Glue
- Mat for framing
- Items that remind the child of the loved one and the relationship with that person, for example: photos, pictures, booties or shoes, small toys, notes, locks of hair, handprints or hand molds, special rocks or feathers, or jewelry.

*Discussion and directions:*

Fill the frame with the keepsakes, and hang the box in a special place for all to see.

## ACTIVITY: *Feelings*

Age level: School age to adult

Materials needed:

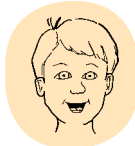
- Camera
- Photo album
- Paper
- Markers
- Glue
- Books about feelings

Discussion and directions:

- Read a book about feelings to your children. Discuss how everyone has feelings. Sometimes we show them by the way we act or look, sometimes we keep them inside.
- Have your child choose a feeling to act out from the faces below. Take a photo of your child acting out each feeling.
- Label the photos, print them out or use a computer application to and make your own feelings book.
- Create some pages for your children to complete face drawings (as in the middle drawing, below) that express their feelings today.



angry



happy



sick



*This is how I feel today!*



lonely



scared



sad

## MORE ACTIVITIES FOR *sharing feelings and memories*

Make a notebook for your child to write or draw about how they're feeling. When your family talks about the person who died, get it out and make lists. These might be titled:

- What I'd like to say to the person who died
- Things that make me sad (or angry, scared, confused)
- People I can talk to about my grief
- Questions I have about how the person died
- Where I go to feel safe
- Things I worry about
- What I do to have fun



## AN ACTIVITY FOR PARENTS

You might find it useful to keep your own notebook of thoughts on your child's grief. Write down your child's questions, the things they say and do. It will be easier to keep track of issues that come up or ideas that you might not be able to deal with at the moment.

Don't use a calendar that's cluttered with other information. Use a special notebook where you'll be able to see how your child progresses through grief. You can also use it to remind yourself of discussions or activities you need to follow up on. If you're grieving too, you probably won't remember otherwise.

## ACTIVITY: *Journals and other chronicles*

**Age level:** Teens to adult

*Directions:*

- Make a timeline of the person who has died. Start with the person's birth and include fun memories from that day or week, or any notes about the special people that were part of the experience. Then go through each year adding trips, events, and holidays special to your family.
- Make a movie from pictures or videos of the person who has died. Many websites can help with your project.
- Make your own journal for the person who has died using a book, blog, or web application. Write things the person said or might have said and would want their family and friends to remember about them. If the person who died is older and made a journal for themselves, you may want to choose pages from it to include.
- Make a wish book for family and friends to write message to the person who has died and share what they will miss most, loved most, etc.

## ACTIVITY: *Yearly remembrance days*

**Age level:** all ages

*Directions:*

On the loved one's birthday, the anniversary of the death, or a special holiday, plan time to celebrate the person's life. Some ideas:

- Throw a party with presents to give the loved one. Donate the presents to homeless shelters, hospitals, or other charities.
- Release balloons that contain thoughts and messages to the loved one. Sing the person's favorite song.
- Visit the grave site, mountains, beach, or wherever you feel close to that person. Bring messages, letters about the last year's events, photographs, and colored pictures from younger children. Share thoughts and wishes about that person.
- Go to the person's favorite spot and share their favorite activity.
- Watch family videos.
- Plan a gathering to talk about the person and share favorite memories, eat their favorite foods, watch their favorite movie, and play their favorite game.

BACK TO YOU:

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## Helping When You're Hurting



Helping a child grieve is a difficult task, and it's an important one. But it's not more important than taking care of yourself. As you manage your own grief, you'll have more energy and stability to offer your child. And you'll be a better model for your child of how to grieve. Try to do these things:

- **Mourn in the same ways you're helping your child mourn.** Try to learn about grief, find ways to remember the person who died, and give yourself time to heal.
- **Stay healthy.** Eat as well as you can, and get some exercise. Make time to be alone.
- **Ask for help.** Enlist the support of friends, family, and even professionals when necessary. Let them help you with your routine tasks, your children, or your understanding of your own grief process.

As you and your child grieve the same loss, you can share your love for the person who died. You can share your understanding of how difficult grief is. And you can strengthen your love for each other.

# Resources and Readings

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## RESOURCES

*The resources listed below offer information, support, and the chance to connect with others.*

### Intermountain Healthcare

#### Homecare Bereavement Support

(385) 887-6043

Intermountain Homecare provides support services to bereaved individuals for 13 months after the death of a loved one. Bereavement support groups and other bereavement programs are offered throughout Utah and part of Idaho. They are free and open to anyone who has experienced the death of a loved one.

#### Primary Children's Hospital

(801) 662-3774

Primary Children's Hospital offers periodic grief groups and a yearly memorial tribute to help grieving parents and siblings. There is no charge for participation.

Other Intermountain hospitals offer bereavement support groups or can connect you to local resources. Call your hospital and ask for Social Work Services.

### National Organizations

#### Dougy Center, National Center for Grieving Children and Families

Website: [dougy.org](http://dougy.org)

The Dougy Center provides support and training locally, nationally and internationally to individuals and organizations seeking to help children in grief.

#### KIDSAID

Website: [kidsaid.com](http://kidsaid.com)

KIDSAID is a site for kids, by kids. It offers grief support and peer support and a chance for kids to express themselves through artwork, stories, and poetry. Kids can ask questions and get answers from other kids. Monitored by adults, this site is an approved safe site for all kids.

## READINGS

*Books for parents and other caregivers to help you help your child*

*Bereaved Children and Teens: A Support Guide for Parents and Professionals* by Earl A. Grollman. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

*A Child's View of Grief* by Alan Wolfelt. Fort Collins, CO: Center for Loss and Life Transition.

*Grief in Children* by Atle Dyregrov. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co.

*The Grieving Child: A Parent's Guide* by Helen Fitzgerald. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

*Guiding Your Child Through Grief* by James Emswiler. New York, NY: Bantam

*Helping Teens Work Through Grief* by Mary Kelly Perschy. New York, NY: Brunner-Routledge.

*How Do We Tell the Children? Helping Children Understand and Cope When Someone Dies* by Dan Schaefer Christine Lyons. New York, NY: New Market Press.

*Life and Loss: A Guide to Help Grieving Children* by Linda Goldman. Muncie, IN: Accelerated Development Inc.

*Talking About Death: A Dialogue Between Parent and Child* by Earl A. Grollman. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

## Books for children and teens (to share or read alone)

*The Accident* by Carol Carrick. New York, NY: Seabury Press. When Christopher's dog is hit by a truck and killed, Christopher feels guilty and sad.

*Cassie Binigar* by Patricia MacLachlan. New York, NY: Harper Trophy. In this novel, Cassie longs for structure and 'a pattern' after her grandfather's death. Eventually she accepts that some things do not stay the same forever.

*Changes, Changes* by Pat Hutchins. New York, NY: Aladdin Paperbacks. In this wordless picture book, a little wooden couple are happy in their building block house until it catches on fire. They must learn to adapt — and they do.

*The Dead Bird* by Margaret Wise Brown. New York, NY: Harper Trophy. Finding a dead bird, a group of children give it a fitting burial and honor its life.

*The Empty Window* by Eve Bunting. New York, NY: F. Warne. Two boys want to give a gift to a friend who is terminally ill. This story explores the confusing emotions surrounding the death of a friend.

*Everett Anderson's Goodbye* by Lucille Clifton. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston. After his father's death, Everett eventually realizes it's okay to love and his father's love will last forever.

*The Fall of Freddie the Leaf: A Story Of Life For All Ages* by Leo Buscaglia. Thorofare, NJ: Slack Incorporated. Freddie and his fellow leaves change with each passing season, finally falling to the ground with winter's snow.

*Healing Your Grieving Heart for Kids: 100 Practical Ideas* by Alan D. Wolfelt. Fort Collins, CO: Companion Press. Practical ideas to help children move through grief.

*How It Feels When a Parent Dies* by Jill Krementz. New York, NY: Knopf. Children age 7 to 17 speak openly of their experiences and feelings.

*Jasper's Day* by Marjorie Blain Parker. Kids Can Press. A terminally ill dog has been part of a loving family. As the dog's pain gets worse, the family makes a difficult decision and plans how they will spend Jasper's last day before bringing him to the vet.

*Lifetimes: A Beautiful Way to Explain Life and Death to Children* by Bryan Mellonie. Bantam Books. Everything has a beginning and an end. All living things reach the end of their own special lifetimes.

*Mick Harte Was Here* by Barbara Park. New York, NY: Scholastic Inc. When her brother, Mick, is killed on his bicycle, Phoebe tries to understand her feelings and those of her family.

*Nana* by Lyn Littlefield Hoopes. New York, NY: Harper & Row. It is the little girl's first morning without Nana. The girl watches and listens to the morning, calling to the chickadee, the way Nana taught her.

*Nana Upstairs and Nana Downstairs* by Tomie dePaola. New York, NY: Putnam. One day, when Tommy runs upstairs to see his grandmother, her bedroom is empty. This story explores the special relationship between the very young and the very old and the moment they must part.

*A Place to Come Back To* by Nancy Bond. New York, NY: Atheneum. Charlotte struggles to meet a friend's needs as he copes with the death of a loved one.

*A Quilt for Elizabeth* by Benette Tiffault. Omaha, NE: Elizabeth's father is ill and then dies. Elizabeth and her grandmother make a quilt from pieces of Daddy's clothing.

*Ronnie and Rosey* by Judie Angell. Scarsdale, NY: Bradbury. Thirteen-year-old Ronnie's father dies. Both Ronnie and her mother have difficulty filling the void.

*The Saddest Time* by Norma Simon. Chicago, IL: A. Whitman. Various stories discuss death in a variety of contexts and situations, including illness and accidents.

*Straight Talk about Death for Teenagers: How to Cope with Losing Someone You Love* by Earl A. Grollman. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. This book answers questions that teens are likely to have after the death of someone close.

*Tear Soup: A Recipe for Healing After Loss* by Pat Schwiebert. New York, NY: Grief Watch. A recipe for healing for children and adults.

*The Tenth Good Thing About Barney* by Judith Viorst. New York, NY: Aladdin Paperbacks. A small boy's cat, Barney, has died. As the boy tries to list ten good things about Barney for his talk at the funeral, he begins to understand the life cycle.

*Tough Boris* by Mem Fox. San Diego, CA: Hartcourt Brace & Company. Boris Von der Broch is a mean, greedy old pirate — though as nails, through and through, like all pirates — or is he?

*The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle. A caterpillar transforms into a beautiful butterfly.

*We Remember Philip* by Norma Simon. Chicago, IL: A. Whitman. Sam and his classmates try to find a way to comfort their teacher, whose son died in an accident.

*When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death* by Laurie Krasny Brown & Marc Brown. Little, Brown Books. For younger children, this book explains the concepts of "alive" and "dead" and gives ideas for saying goodbye and keeping customs.

*Where the Balloons Go* by Paul W. Coleman. Omaha, NE: Centering Corporation. Together, a little boy and his grandmother send balloons into the sky and wonder what happens to them. When the grandmother dies, the boy continues this activity alone.

*You Shouldn't Have to Say Goodbye* by Patricia Hermes. San Diego, CA: Hartcourt Brace Jovanovich. Thirteen-year-old Sarah must come to terms with the fact that her mother is dying of cancer.

To find these and other resources, go to:  
[intermountainhealthcare.org](http://intermountainhealthcare.org)



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