

Grief Education Series



Tips for Supporting Children & Teens in Grief

The support of children in their grief is important in their future mental health. When children feel supported, they are more likely to develop healthy coping skills that will assist them into adulthood. Sometimes adults find it difficult to figure out how to support children; “What should I say?”, “What should I do?”, “How do I tell them this information?”, “What if I say something that hurts them?” These are all questions that have been asked as we have worked with adults who care for children. It is helpful to have some knowledge about children’s grief as well as understanding their developmental process when looking to help care for them in their grief.

Helpful information on children’s grief:

- ✦ Children often grieve in spurts - laughing one moment and tearful the next
- ✦ Generally, boys tend to express feelings other than sadness, ie. anger. If they are having increased outbursts or changes in behavior, talk to them about sadness and be open about sharing grief.
- ✦ Answer questions about the death directly without using phrases that are confusing (“grandma went to sleep”...“she is in a better place”)
- ✦ Validate emotions
- ✦ Share memories or experiences. Make a favorite dessert or dish and allow kids to create new memories while honoring the life of the person they lost.
- ✦ Developmentally, children and adolescents have vastly different understandings of illness and death.

Children of a certain age don’t always realize, or understand, that death is final. They may be curious about the physical or biological aspects of death, asking questions related to how the body works, and what the word “dead” means. They may emotionally distance themselves from friends, family, or others. You may notice that they have an increase in physical symptoms, ie. headaches, stomach aches, etc. Additionally, children and adolescents may have a change in their ability to remember, concentrate, make decisions, or pay attention in certain situations. These are all normal reactions but can be alarming for caregivers. For a parent or guardian, watching for signs of an abnormal grief response is important.

If you see any of these symptoms, it may be an indicator that your child needs additional support. Contact your pediatrician, counselor or Ancora Hospice to discuss appropriate support.

increased isolation
loss of appetite
significant changes in sleep patterns
statements or actions of self harm

Resources

There are grief resources available to assist parents, guardians, teachers, counselors, and other individuals who are working to help children and adolescents.

- ✦ **Ancora Hospice** bereavement providers have written information and activities to help children and adolescents in learning about feelings, understanding the loss, and working on coping skills.
- ✦ **The Dougy Center** (dougy.org) has resources online to help kids and parents, including ideas for activities.
- ✦ **The National Alliance for Grieving Children** (nacg.org) has resources online to help support children, parents, professionals, and others in their support of grieving children.

Additionally, we have found that books are helpful in explaining certain topics to children. We have provided a list here that includes books on death, grief, remembering, connection, and feelings. Many of these can be found online with an individual reading the book and showing the pictures. This is a great option in hearing the story before purchasing the book.

- ✦ Ida, Always by Caron Levis and Charles Santoso
- ✦ The Invisible String by Patrice Karst
- ✦ Life Is Like the Wind by Shona Innes and Irisz Agocs
- ✦ Why Do I Feel So Sad? A Grief Book for Children by Tracy Lambert
- ✦ Where Are You? A Child's Book about Loss by Laura Olivieri
- ✦ What Happens When A Loved One Dies? Our First Talk About Death by Jillian Roberts
- ✦ When Someone Dies by Andrea Dorn
- ✦ When Dinosaurs Die, A Guide to Understanding Death by Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown
- ✦ Something Very Sad Happened by Bonnie Zucker
- ✦ The Rabbit Listened by Cori Doerrfeld
- ✦ Lost in the Clouds by Tom Tinn-Disbury
- ✦ That's Me Loving You by Amy Krouse Rosenthal
- ✦ A Terrible Thing Happened by Margaret Holmes
- ✦ My Yellow Balloon by Tiffany Papageorge
- ✦ SPOTS, A Children's Book about Enduring Connection - available through your Ancora Bereavement Provider

Often, using art or journalling activities are ways that children and adolescents can process their feelings and thoughts. The following is a list of activity books that we have found helpful.

- ✦ My Heart Hurts, A Grief Workbook for Children by Karen Jaggers
- ✦ Help Me Say Goodbye by Janis Silverman
- ✦ How I Feel, a Grief Journal for Kids (Ages 8 - 12) by Mia Roldan
- ✦ Reconstruction, a Grief Journal (teens) by The Dougy Center
- ✦ Grief Hurts by Sharla Phelps and Ancora Hospice

The reminder to those helping children is that Ancora Hospice has trained bereavement providers who can assist children and adolescents in processing their grief. You don't have to do it alone.

Your ANCORA Social Services/Bereavement Team is available to support you in your grief process. Please reach out to them with any questions or concerns at 208-452-2672.