

Eight Ways to Help Your Grieving Child

- 1. Children need to know that they will be cared for if something happens to you.**
 - a. Create a plan with your child. Offer reassurance that they will be cared for.
 - b. This will help your child overcome their primal fear for their own safety, which was activated when their parent died.
 - c. Consistency in limit setting will aid in child's ability to feel safe again in the world.
- 2. Relieve your child of any feelings of guilt or responsibility that they might have about the death.**
 - a. Kids aged 4-6 and teens tend to engage in magical thinking and are egocentric so they often blame themselves.
 - b. Test out their thoughts with them to help them understand what caused the death so they won't blame themselves.
- 3. Provide Clear, Truthful Information**
 - a. Kids fear a contagion effect (that they can "catch" death)
 - b. May not be cognitively able to understand death related concepts.
 - c. Kids don't have the experience to help them understand what is happening to them.
 - d. Add additional details as developmentally appropriate or when they ask for information.
 - e. Remember that you are the best person for them to hear the facts from because they feel most safe with you.
- 4. Involve children in mourning and anniversary rituals.**
 - a. Prepare them for what will take place. Involve them in the decision making process.
 - b. Designate another adult to companion them during the ritual, allowing breaks as needed.
 - c. Never **force** them to view the body or visit the cemetery if they do not want to.
- 5. Continue routine activities**
 - a. Provide opportunities to engage in activities which will increase their self-esteem and give them a sense of control over their life.
 - b. These activities will give them the necessary breaks from their grief.
- 6. Encourage child to express fears, fantasies, and ask questions, assuring them that you can "handle it".**
 - a. Expressing emotions helps them move through their grief process.
 - b. If they ask the question then they are old enough to hear the answer.
- 7. Help child retain their memories and connection to their person who died.**
 - a. Greater the connectedness the more likely the child is to want to continue desired behaviors that would have pleased the deceased.
 - b. Children fear loss of memories including sound of voice and what the person looked like.
 - c. Minimize secondary losses, which threaten those memories. Ex: Allow them to keep possessions, pictures, and delay moves or changes in school as long as possible.
- 8. Serve as a Healthy Role Model for Grief**
 - a. Get grief support for yourself
 - b. Your child's adjustment is dependent on your own healthy adjustment to the death
 - c. Recognize you can't do it all and take care of yourself.