



## **Eight Ways to Help Your Grieving Child**

### **1. Children need to know that they will be cared for if something happens to you**

- Create a plan with your child. Offer reassurance that they will be cared for.
- This will help your child overcome their primal fear for their own safety, which was activated when their parent died.
- 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**

- Kids aged 4-6 and teens tend to engage in magical thinking and are egocentric so they often blame themselves.
- 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**

- Kids fear a contagion effect (that they can "catch" death)
- May not be cognitively able to understand death related concepts.
- Kids don't have the experience to help them understand what is happening to them.
- Add additional details as developmentally appropriate or when they ask for information.
- 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**

- Prepare them for what will take place. Involve them in the decision making process.
- Designate another adult to companion them during the ritual, allowing breaks as needed.
- Never **force** them to view the body or visit the cemetery if they do not want to.

### **5. Continue routine activities**

- Provide opportunities to engage in activities which will increase their self-esteem and give them a sense of control over their life.
- 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"**

- Expressing emotions helps them move through their grief process.
- If they ask the question then they are old enough to hear the answer.

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### **7. Help child retain their memories and connection to their person who died**

- Greater the connectedness the more likely the child is to want to continue desired behaviors that would have pleased the deceased.
- Children fear loss of memories including sound of voice and what the person looked like.
- 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**

- Get grief support for yourself
- Your child's adjustment is dependent on your own healthy adjustment to the death
- Recognize you can't do it all and take care of yourself.

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