

10 Things Grieving Kids Want You to Know

- 1. Children want to be told the truth about the death
 - a. Tell them in age-appropriate and direct language
 - b. Ask them if they have any questions and clear up misconceptions
 - c. As they grow, they will revisit their grief and will have new questions and new feelings
- 2. Children look to you as a role model for how people grieve
 - a. Share your feelings with them without the expectation that they take care of you
 - b. Model how you cope with your grief
 - c. You can't do it alone! Build your team to support you as you parent your grieving family
- 3. There is no right or wrong way to grief and no time frame for grief
 - a. Each child will grieve in their own unique way
 - b. They will grieve privately to shield you from their pain
- 4. Your child needs you to help them maintain their connection with their person who died
 - a. Children want to talk about their person who died
 - b. They need you to tolerate listening when they tell their story
 - c. They fear that they will forget their special person
 - d. Give them access to family photos/videos and other family members who can tell them stories about their person who died
- 5. Children express their emotions physically through play, art and/or behaviors which may be problematic for you
 - a. They can't always tolerate intense emotions or know how to talk about them. So, they need to take breaks to play and watch their shows
 - b. They might make decisions to cope that you may not understand or that might be dangerous
- 6. Children need to know who would take care of them if you could not
 - a. They may fear for your safety especially when you are apart
 - b. Knowing who would care for them offers some sense that they will be safe in a world that may feel chaotic and unpredictable
- 7. Children benefit from being included in mourning rituals
 - a. Your child needs the opportunity to participate in ongoing rituals
 - b. Rituals aid in their understanding of death and aid in their mourning process

- c. Rituals help them maintain the connection to the person who died
- 8. Grieving children need you to help them feel the world is a safe place
 - a. Provide clear and consistent boundaries, limits, and expectations
 - b. Give them space and time to safely interact with peers and adults outside of the family
- 9. Your children need to be taught coping strategies
 - a. Teach ways to comfort themselves in your absence
 - b. Use these to help de-escalate family tensions
- 10. Children need to be included when making decisions:
 - a. About how to celebrate holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries
 - b. Offer some age-appropriate opportunities for decision making, but remember some decisions are still grown-up decisions. These may include going to therapy or joining a grief support group.

Most Importantly: Children need you to take care of yourself; the better you adapt to life without the person who died, the better your child will adjust.