

Best Ways to Comfort a Grieving Child

Grieving the loss of a loved one is one of the most challenging human experiences. Grief can bring confusing and conflicting emotions, especially for children. Even very young children feel the loss a loved one. They often learn how to express grief by watching adults around them.

Understanding Children's Needs

Children need support and security after losing a loved one. They may need reassurance that they will be taken care of and are safe. You can help children to experience and process their grief by demonstrating that it's okay for them to feel emotions and ask questions about their loss.

Open communication helps a child express distressing feelings. Some children may act out confusing or painful feelings at school or at home. Children may express themselves through stories, games and artwork. Encourage this self-expression and look for clues about how they are coping.

Often, it may make sense to ask for help. Inform a child's teacher or guidance counselor about their loss. Ask medical professionals, social workers or trusted friends who have children to help you address the sensitive issues of loss and grief. Rely on friends or a support group for your own support.

Recommended Approaches

Consider these suggestions to help a child to experience and process their grief:

- Reassure them
Tell them that they are loved and that their safety, security and happiness are your top concern
- Reinforce structure
Keep your child's daily routine as normal as possible

- **Speak the truth**
Use sensitivity and make special considerations when talking to children about end of life. Children may worry that they did something to cause their loved one to pass away. The truth helps them see that they are not at fault.
- **Use simple terms**
Be clear and brief. Use simple terms to explain the loss of a loved one. Answer questions gently and truthfully and use words they'll understand. Saying "Grandma is sleeping now" may confuse or frighten them.
- **Value their feelings**
Tell them it's okay to be upset, angry or scared. Showing your feelings sends the message that it's healthy for them to express their own.
- **Encourage communication**
Tell them to talk with or ask questions of you or trusted adults anytime. Reassure them that you'll answer questions as honestly as you can. Talking about their deceased loved one will help them adapt and heal.
- **Offer comfort**
Provide a comforting toy or stuffed animal to reinforce comfort. Even older children and teens may benefit from something soft when talking about grief and loss.
- **Include them**
Share your spiritual or religious values and practices about end of life with your child. Allow them to attend final services if they choose. Including them in your grieving rituals helps them adapt and heal.
- **Help them remember**
Help your child find creative ways to honor and remember their deceased loved one throughout the year.

For more helpful information and resources on grief support, please visit:
<http://www.passare.com/learn-and-explore>