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"Providing Comfort To Families"

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Chapters

turning the pages through grief

Supporting Children

DURING GRIEF



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Helping children grieve can be difficult because how they show their grief depends on their level of maturity and the relationship they had with the person who died. They may express what they are feeling in a number of ways; humor, behavioral issues, or sleep problems are common. Their grief may come and go and the intensity of their feelings vary.

Each child's reaction to losing someone is unique. This can present particular challenges when helping children grieve but it is normal. How you react can make a difference, but what should you say or do?

The following are a few suggestions for what not to do and what not to do. Of course, you should use your best judgment and use the child's maturity level as a guide.

WHAT NOT TO DO...

Don't avoid the child: You may feel uncomfortable

around the child since you aren't quite sure what to say. Be present and open. If he or she has questions, answer as honestly as you can. If you are not the child's parent, it is a good idea to discuss with them how they are handling information so that you can follow their lead.

Don't pretend that everything is normal: The child knows that something has changed. How much he or she understands will depend on the age and relationship with the deceased. Depending on the child and the parents' philosophy, you can explain how and why the person died. You don't want to try to hide the death by telling a child the deceased is only sleeping.



"I think my imaginary friend and the monster under my bed might be the same person."

Don't over share: Avoid discussions about moving or other practical matters. Speculative conversations may be misinterpreted and cause the child even more worry.

Don't push your beliefs: If you have spoken with the parents then you should be aware of their approach to talking about the death. If they have particular religious or spiritual

continued...

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"Children are mirrors, they reflect back to us all we say and do."
—Pam Leo

beliefs you should abide by them, or simply say nothing in that regard.

Don't shut children out: Engaging children in the planning of activities can help them feel connected to what is happening around them. Talk about funerals and rituals, keep them informed on what will take place, and explain what comes after the service.

Don't say...

"Now you have to be the big boy/girl."

"Remember, now he/she is in heaven."

"It's a blessing that God took your mother because she's not suffering anymore."

"Don't cry. Your family needs you to be strong now."

WHAT TO DO...

Be available: One of the best things you can do is provide the child with a non-judgemental and open outlet for talking, playing, and expressing their feelings. You can behave as you normally would. For example, if the child wants to play, sing, or dance, by all means, encourage them and participate as appropriate.

Be patient: Each child deals with grief in his or her own way. Specific reactions will depend on the child's level of maturity and the relationship he or she had with the deceased. If you see behavior that you think might be destructive alert the parents or caregivers.

Be honest and open: Children have remarkable insight into what is happening around them. You should avoid trying to protect them, and be as honest as is reasonable. If the child wants to talk, consider sharing a special story about the deceased that he or she can relate to.

Be aware of warning signs: Older children, particularly teens, can be at risk of trying to mask their grief with dangerous behaviors. They may also have difficulty talking with friends about their loss. If you are concerned, alert the parents or seek professional help for the child.

Be respectful: If you don't know the child well introduce yourself, and refer to the deceased by name. Remember that the child may be meeting a lot of new people all at once. This can make them uncomfortable.

Express your sympathy: Use your own words to let the child know that you recognize their loss. Some appropriate sentiments might be:

"It's hard to imagine someone we love has died."

"I am so sorry your friend/parent/sibling died. I know you will miss him/her."

"When someone dies, it's OK to talk about how you feel."

Remember that grief is a process that takes place over time. The child will have ups and downs and will likely need ongoing support. Offering activities that will take your child's mind off the sadness may help. With patience, understanding, and empathy you can help children work through their grief.

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Sometimes the best advice is a break from advice. Enjoy your favorite beverage and these tidbits of this & that.



- The first full moon after the **Harvest Moon** quite often falls in October and is known as the Hunter's Moon.

- If you live in the northern hemisphere, you'll be rewarded for keeping your eyes to the skies in October, as the

Draconid meteor shower can be seen. It contains a single comet that is visible exclusively in that area between October 6th and 10th.

- One of October's birth stones is the opal. Opals come in myriad striking colors that often seem to swirl together and are a symbol of **faithfulness, purity, and hope.**

- October has two strikingly different birth flowers, the pastel-hued cosmos, and the **radiant marigold flowers.** The cosmos flower is representative of the joy one finds in peace and love, as well as representing peace. The marigold, otherwise known as the calendula, is said to be a symbol of tranquility, grace, and grief.



What Grief Has Taught Me...

I have learned that grief takes time and everyone is on their own time frame.

The hardest lesson to learn is how to put up with people saying stupid or hurtful things.

It can be difficult to think about cooking, or even eating sometimes, when we are grieving. Good nutrition is especially important now, and these quick and easy ideas may help.

FAST FOOD

GO FOR YOGURT

There are so many flavors and brands of yogurt, you are bound to find many you like. A quick and soothing snack, yogurt comes in handy any time of day. Opt for regular yogurt vs. "lite" which typically has artificial sugars.

