



How Can We Help a Grieving Child or Teen?

Be present. Give them opportunities to share their grief.

Share your grief. Modeling effective coping strategies is monumental.

Keep communication open!

Explain the grief rituals that will occur - what they will see, hear and experience in an amount of detail that matches their age. Be aware of fears. Let them decide how much they want to participate in the rituals. Do not force but support. You may want to ask a trusted family friend or a more removed relative to assist you in watching the child or supporting the teen.

Maintain as much routine as possible.

If at all possible, **hold off making major changes** after the death.

Hold only fair expectations. The younger the child, the shorter time period they can sit still and pay attention at rituals. Allow them space and activities for healthy outlets of energy.

Be aware of the outward signs of grief.

Answer their questions honestly and completely. Do not undermine their trust.

Use words and explanations that are appropriate for the child's/teen's level of understanding. Young children think very literally and concretely. Many words have double meanings.

If you don't know the answer to a question, say so, but if possible, gather information from resources so it can be answered. Realize, some questions do not have definite answers.

Meet with the teacher and principal of your child's/teen's school. Provide explanation of the circumstances of the illness or accident and expectations of an impending death. Share with the staff the many ways your child/teen may react and how they can support them. If this is painful to do yourself, share what you would like them to know with a trusted friend or family member. Have them meet with the school for you.

Try to balance the teen’s need for privacy and their need for support.

Watch for and utilize “teachable moments” – death of a pet or neighbor, seeing a funeral procession, learning of a death on TV, attending a funeral where this is little or no emotional attachment.

Be patient with repeated questions, comments or stories.

If the death is expected, prepare the kids ahead of time for what to expect. Include them in the caretaking and the planning of the grief rituals, as they desire. Recognize your needs vs. their needs.

Tell family and friends how they can help you (grocery shopping, laundry, meals, child care, transportation, etc.) **Accept it!** This applies before and after the death.

Facilitate the sharing of stories (reminisce), unfinished business, and the building of memories (sharing time and energy together in a memorable way).

Facilitate a “goodbye”.

Utilize books and videos to initiate conversation.

Provide tools for creative expression of grief.

Utilize grief support programs in your area.

Reach out for help from professionals as needed. Especially if you have concerns about your child’s/teen’s safety, the safety of others or the destruction of property.

Annie’s Hope – The Center for Grieving Kids
1333 W. Lockwood, Suite 104 • Glendale, MO 63122
(314) 965-5015 • kidsgriefmatters@annieshope.org
www.annieshope.org