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IQITTIAQHIMALUGU INUUHIQ KATIMAJIIT
EMBRACE LIFE COUNCIL
CONSEIL SAISIS LA VIE

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Supporting Children and Teens With Grief, Loss & Healing



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Section One:

Developmental Responses to Grief

Each child is different in how they understand and respond to grief. Their response will depend on age, maturity and developmental level, and their ability to understand death.

If we allow children to talk to us about death, not only do we give them information that they need to hear, but also these conversations will prepare them for any future crisis or difficult situations they may experience down the road. We can also make it easier for them to talk to us if we are open, honest, and at ease with our own feelings.

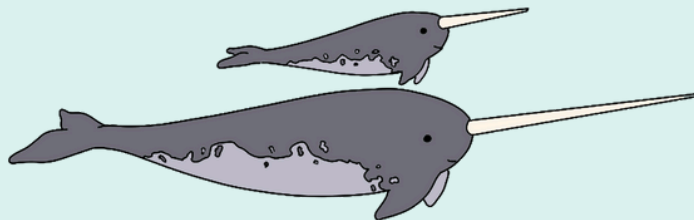
AGES 0–2

Very young children and babies are unable to conceptualize death as a permanent state.

At this age, grief will most likely come out as discomfort, crying, being less active, and changes in sleeping and eating. Lots of physical comfort is key, as well as keeping to a routine to make sure the child's life remains as predictable as possible.

AGES 2–4: Preschool

At this stage children do not understand fully that death is permanent. They often believe that people die when they are old. They do not understand that it cannot be "fixed" or "reversed." They may think of death as temporary or that it is like sleeping, and that the person who died might come back to life.



AGES 0–2 & AGES 2–4: Preschool

Possible Responses To Grief:

- General anxiety/heightened separation anxiety
- Crying
- Denial
- Withdrawal
- Irregular sleep/fear of sleep
- Clinginess/need to be held
- Irritability
- Temper tantrums
- Telling the story to anyone, including strangers
- Repetitive questions
- Behavior regression- may need help with tasks they've already learned



Ways To Provide Support:

- Adult protection and care
- Physical comforts: rest, holding, routine
- Consistent routine to re-establish safety and predictability, especially around starting and ending the day
- Provide a short, honest explanation of the death. "Mommy died, Her body stopped working." Use the words dead and died. Avoid euphemisms such as gone, passed on, or lost.
- Explain the physical reality of death
- Set limits but be flexible when needed
- Provide opportunities for play
- Give choices whenever possible. "Do you want hot or cold cereal"? - giving these small opportunities for control can be very helpful for children when the rest of their life feel out of control.
- Offer lots of physical and emotional nurturance
- Give repeated concrete explanations
- Encourage teacher/parent communication

AGES 5–8: Young School Aged Children

Most children at this age understand that death is permanent yet some still think that death is reversible. They may believe that they are to blame or feel guilty about the death of their loved one. Although their sense of independence is growing, their parents are still their main focus and they are still quite dependent on them. Therefore, it is not uncommon that the child might worry that they will be left alone, especially after the death of a parent.

Possible Responses to Grief:

- Disrupted sleep
- Changes in eating habits
- Repetitive questions – How? Why? Who else?
- Concerns about safety and abandonment
- Short periods of strong reaction, mixed with acting as though nothing happened
- Nightmares
- Regressive behaviors- may need help with tasks they've already learned (can't tie shoes, bedwetting)
- Behavior changes: high/low energy, kicking/hitting
- Physical Complaints: stomach aches, headaches, body pain
- Poor academic performance
- Peer problems



Ways To Provide Support:

- Provide realistic information; address magical thinking
- Encourage appropriate acting out
- Continue to enrich feelings vocabulary
- Encourage verbal and creative expression
- Provide opportunities for age-appropriate tasks
- Provide opportunities for physical activity
- Explain the death honestly using concrete language. "Daddy's heart stopped working." Use the words dead and died. Avoid euphemisms such as gone, passed on, lost
- Be prepared for repetitive questions
- Provide opportunities for big energy and creative play
- Allow children to talk about the experience and ask questions
- Offer lots of physical and emotional nurturance
- Give choices whenever possible. "Your room needs to be cleaned. Would you like to do it tonight or tomorrow morning?"
- Normalize feelings
- Reduce academic requirements
- Provide opportunities to help others in need

AGES 9–12: Older School Aged Children

Children at this age are starting to socialize more outside of the family. Friends are becoming a very important source of support. While they continue to think logically, they are beginning to understand more abstract ideas. Children at this age begin to understand that death is permanent and start thinking about how the loss will affect them over the long-term. Some children will focus on the details of what happened to the body of the person who died. Feelings of guilt and regret can lead to concern that their thoughts and actions made the death happen.

Possible Responses to Grief:

- Express big energy through behavior sometimes seen as acting out
- Anxiety and concern for safety of self and others– “The world is no longer safe.”
- Worries about something bad happening again
- Difficulty concentrating and focusing
- Nightmares and intrusive thoughts
- Physical complaints: headaches, stomach aches, body pain
- Using play and talk to recreate the event
- Detailed questions about death and dying
- Wide range of emotions: rage, revenge, guilt, sadness, relief, and worry
- Hypervigilance/increased sensitivity to noise, light, movement, and change
- Withdrawal from social situations

Ways to Provide Support:

- Inform yourself about what happened. Answer questions clearly and accurately. Even though children this age are starting to grasp abstract thought, it’s still helpful to use the words dead and died and avoid euphemisms such as gone, passed on, lost, expired
- Provide a variety of activities for expression: talk, art, physical activity, play, writing
- Help children identify people and activities that help them feel supported
- Maintain routines and limits, but be flexible when needed
- Give children choices whenever possible, “Would you rather set the table or put away the dishes after we eat?”
- Work to re-establish safety and predictability in daily life
- Model expressing emotions and taking care of yourself
- Be a good listener. Avoid giving advice (unless they ask for it), analyzing, or dismissing their experiences.
- Seek professional help for any concerns around self-harm or suicidal thoughts
- Normalize feelings and fears
- Reduce academic requirements
- Provide opportunities to connect to larger community



AGES 13–18: Teens/Adolescents

Teens have a more grown-up understanding of the finality of death and what it means. It is normal that they experience many emotions after the death such as withdrawal, anger, guilt or fear. The teen needs to know that there's no right or wrong way to grieve. Some want to spend time alone yet others need to be around friends and talk. Some teens may want to talk to a trusted adult who can listen without judging them. They begin to see themselves as unique individuals, separate from their role in the family and may wrestle with identity and who they want to be in the world. Teens often rely on peers and significant others outside the family for support.

Common Responses To Death At This Age:

- Withdrawal from family or other support networks/focused on connections with peers
- Increased risk taking: drugs/alcohol, unsafe behaviors, reckless driving
- Inability to concentrate (school difficulties)/pushing themselves to succeed and be perfect
- Difficulty sleeping, exhaustion
- Lack of appetite/eating too much
- Unpredictable and at times intense emotional reactions: anger, sadness, guilt, relief, anxiety
- Uncomfortable discussing the death or their experiences with parents and caregivers
- Worry about safety of self and others
- Fear about death or violence happening again
- Confusion over role identity in the family
- Attempts to take on caregiving/parent role with younger siblings and other adults
- May have thoughts of suicide and self-harm
- Hypervigilance/increased sensitivity to noise, movement, light



AGES 13–18: Teens/Adolescents

Ways To Support Kids With Grief At This Age:

- Reinforce assurances of safety and security, even if teens don't express concerns
- Maintain routines and set clear expectations, but be flexible when needed
- Allow for expression of feelings without trying to change, fix, or take them away
- Answer questions honestly
- Provide choices whenever possible – "I'd like to do something to honor your dad's birthday, would you like to be part of that? What ideas do you have?"
- Adjust expectations for concentration and task completion when necessary
- Check in with teens in regards to their mental health first, don't wait for them to come to you
- Assist teens to connect with support systems, including other adults (family, family friends, teachers, coaches)
- Model appropriate expressions of grief and ways to take care of yourself
- Ask open ended questions ("What is it like for you?") and listen without judging, interpreting, advising
- Have patience with teens' wide range of reactions and questions
- Seek professional help for any concerns around self-harm or suicidal thoughts
- Encourage physical activity
- Normalize feelings and fears
- Reduce academic requirements
- Resume routine activities when possible
- Talk about relationship between acting out and the traumatic event
- Provide opportunities to connect to larger community



Section Two: Explaining Death & Grief

The death of a loved one is a life-changing experience. As adults, we have a lifetime's worth of experience handling grief, disappointment, and all of life's curveballs. Children, however, are mostly inexperienced when it comes to handling difficult situations and emotions – especially the reality of a loved one's death and the concept of death as a whole. It is important to remember that children, like adults, develop at their own rates and have their own ways of expressing and managing feelings. Some may ask questions about death, whereas others may appear to be unconcerned about the death of a family member.

Parents tend to want to protect their children from emotional pain and suffering. Children must be told as soon as possible when one of their loved ones dies. They should hear this from someone close to them before they hear it by accident from someone else. Whoever that trusted adult is, they need to offer non-judgmental support, reassurance, affection and guidance.

Without guidance from an understanding adult, death can be confusing, overwhelming, and even a terrifying concept for a child. It is the responsibility of parents, grandparents, guardians, and other significant adults/caretakers to try and understand how to explain death to children in order to provide them with a solid foundation wherein a healthy understanding of the death and dying process can be formed.

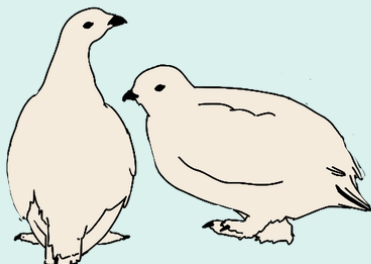


Important C's For Every Grieving Child

- **Care:** Assure the child that they will always be cared for
- **Changes:** Expect that there might be many changes including eating and sleeping patterns
- **Contagious:** Assure them that cancer is not contagious.
- **Cause of death:** Let the child know that they had nothing to do with the cause of death.
- **Communication:** Encourage questions and discussion at all times.
- **Celebrating:** Encouraging the child that they can still celebrate the life of the person who died
- **Cure:** Assure through discussion, as some children engage in magical thinking where they think that they are responsible for the death and therefore can also cure it..

What Kids Need To Know About Grief...

- They are not alone
- It's okay to ask for help
- Their world has been completely changed and will never go back to the way it was
- It's normal to be afraid, to cry, to feel lonely and to be angry
- It's okay if a caretaker cries
- It's okay to feel that life is unfair
- They are loved just as much as before the death.



What Adults Need To Know About Grief...

- You don't need to have all the answers
- You can't "fix it" and make it all better
- You can ask for help – from adults and children
- Children will grieve, play, ask questions, and grieve again in short spaces – be ready to respond when they're ready to share!
- Children are not just small adults
- Crying and questioning are healthy for all ages
- Children/teens need to be with friends, to attend school and be active
- Children need reassurance that they did not cause the death

Common Questions That Children Have About Death and How to Respond

During your explanation, your child will likely have questions about death, the dying process, and who and what will be affected by death in their life. Remember: it's okay to admit that you may not have an answer to a child's questions. The following questions are among the more commonly asked by children — particularly younger children — and some ideas as to how to best respond:

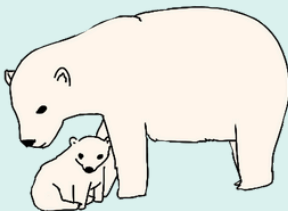
“Will I die?” - “All things that live will die — animals, plants, and even people — but children are normally very healthy and won't die for a very, very long time.”

“Will you die?” - “Yes. I'm a living thing and I will die one day. Adults normally live for a long time and watch their children grow up to be adults. There will always be someone to take care of you.”

“Why do people die?” - “There are a lot of reasons why people die. People can die from growing very old, an accident, or getting very sick with a very serious disease. A wish or a thought can never kill a person.”

“What happens after a person dies?” - “After a person dies, we say goodbye to them. They cannot say goodbye back to us after they have died; instead, a person's family and friends gather together to say goodbye at a funeral.”

“Where do people go when they die?” - “When a person dies, their body stops working and can never work again, but there are a lot of people who believe that a special part of us — a part of us that's not a part of our body — exists after our body dies. This part lives on in our memories of that person and lets us always have them with us to love and remember them after they have died.”



Common Questions That Children Have About Death and How to Respond

3 Things To Remember When Explaining Death To Your Child

While your child's age and personality will play a large role in dictating what information is appropriate and useful when discussing death, incorporating the following into your explanation will help you inform your child and promote an environment of open communication:

1. Be honest and encourage questions. During your explanation, let your child know that it's okay to ask any questions that might come to mind. You may not feel that you have all of the answers as an adult, but that's okay — you can respond to a question with an honest "I'm not quite sure about that."

2. Let them know that any feeling that they have is okay. Let your child know that this conversation is a safe place where they are free to feel whatever they feel. The death of a loved one is among the most painful and difficult experiences that people face; expressing and working through emotion doesn't equate to weakness — it shows strength and demonstrates the ability to understand and cope with difficult experiences.

3. Let the child know how you feel. In the same spirit, you must allow yourself to feel emotion and to show that emotion to your child. Children are very aware of how the significant adults in their life respond to different situations. By allowing yourself to truly feel your emotions while in the presence of your child, you demonstrate that healthy, happy, strong adults aren't afraid to express emotions and that it's perfectly normal to feel sad during such sad times.



Why is Explaining Death To Kids So Difficult?

We're afraid that we might not have all of the answers.

As parents and caregivers, we aim to provide our children with security and instill within them the knowledge that we will always be there to care for them.

When confronted with the subject matter of death, however, we can find ourselves worrying whether or not we'll be able to provide our children with an answer that offers peace and assurance.

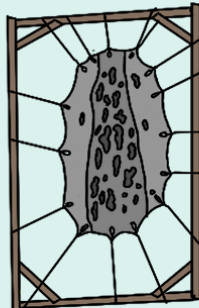
You may not have all of the answers to all of your child's questions, and that's okay! You can be assured, however, that you will provide them a comforting, loving presence during this difficult period.

It can be difficult to talk to children

Especially younger children. When talking about a matter as complex as death, it can be difficult to know that we're being heard by the child, and equally difficult to understand a child's questions and responses.

Focusing on honest, short answers throughout your explanation, as well as in your responses to questions can help simplify matters for the child and ensure they gain an understanding of the concept and permanence of death.

When dealing with younger children, it is important to favor explanations of death as the inability to perform life functions-like breathing, eating, and moving.



Why is Explaining Death To Kids So Difficult?

We're afraid that we won't be able to comfort them or provide them the help that they need.

After receiving the news of a loved one's death and when beginning to understand the realities of death, children can display a wide range of reactions — with some emotions seeming numb and disconnected, while other children can display large outbursts of emotion.

Understand that, during this time, your child needs to feel whatever he or she feels. Regardless of their initial reaction to the concepts of death, you will be able to be their comforter and stable foundation during this difficult period.

We may be dealing with our own grief at the time.

We may be coping with our own grief around the same time we're attempting to explain death to our children.

When coping with grief, many shy away from potentially showing sadness and emotional vulnerability in front of their children, for fear of showing weakness or making the children feel afraid or insecure.

Know that it's okay to be processing your grief at this time, and it's important for your child to see that you're processing your emotions and sharing them honestly — not bottling them up and ignoring them.

Letting your child see you work through your emotions will let them know that it's okay to feel sad, angry, or feel any other emotion that may come as a result of a loved one's death.





Families and children who have experienced the death of someone important in their lives due to substance use, have a unique set of needs.

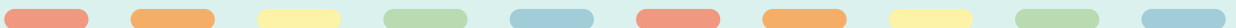
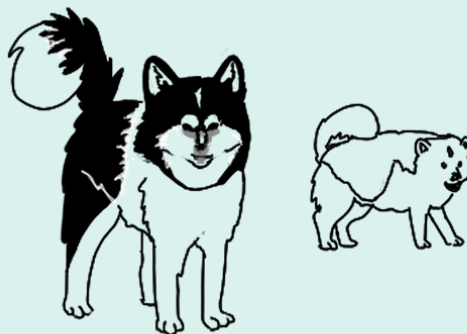
Along with the trauma of the death itself, the stigma surrounding both grief and the disease of addiction adds layers of complication to this life-changing event.

RESPECT: Experiencing a death from addiction issues can be a very confusing and difficult experience for you and your children.

Even if kids don't have all of the information, they are most likely picking up on changes in routines, family interactions, and different displays of emotion.

Here are some ideas for acknowledging these changes with respect:

- Practice patience and compassion and develop routines: Keep in mind that all children need limits, structure and boundaries, even in the most challenging of times.
- Understand their development: Children's concept of death and response to grief changes as their brain develops.
- Understand their response to grief and ways to support them based on their age.
- Funerals: There are many age-appropriate ways to involve children in a funeral. Some families want to "shield" their children from the pain of a funeral, but many will benefit from being included. Perhaps they could write something to be read or draw something to be shared. Maybe they could help select the music.
- Respect the memory: Be open to talking about the person who has died and to keeping the memory of that person strong in your hearts.



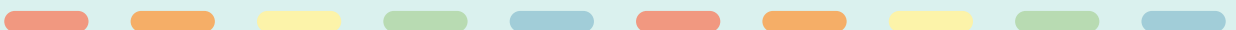


INFORM: Many families struggle with how to inform their children about a substance use death. Again, there is no right or wrong way to do this, but the following guidelines may be helpful:

- **Prepare:** Take a moment for yourself before you talk with your child. Take a couple of deep breaths. Think about what you are going to say.
- **Practice patience and compassion:** Be prepared to repeat things several times. The concepts of death, addiction and substance use are challenging for all of us to comprehend.
Most children will not “get it” the first time it is discussed. Think of these “repetitions” as opportunities to remind the child that he/she is loved, safe, brave and kind.
- **The Truth:** Always speak the truth, in an age-appropriate way. Remember that, often what a child has imagined or heard from others can almost be almost worse than the reality. Given the amount of information that is available from social media, they may know more than you think they do and/or they may be misinformed.
- **Talk about addiction as a disease,** just like cancer or heart disease. Blame the illness of addiction, and not the person, for the death.
- **Use facts:** “Daddy died from an illness. That illness is called addiction.”
- **Answer questions:** Children may ask about medicine and alcohol.

What you can do:

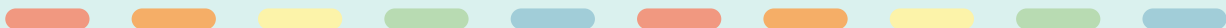
- Teach children how to take medicine properly, how to follow directions and how to read the label. – Do not tell children that vitamins or medicine are candy, to get them to take it.
- Make sure children know only to take medicine or vitamins from a parent or another trusted grownup.





CONNECT: Above all, children need to feel that they are loved, that they are safe and that they are important. Perhaps taking the time to sit with a child will give you comfort as well.

- **Lead with Love:** Always reassure the child that they are loved, that the person loved them and that the illness and death isn't their fault.
- **Emotions are high:** Tell your child that they may notice adults acting differently. You may say, "You may see me crying sometimes. I know you aren't used to seeing me cry. I want you to know that everybody cries. I am OK, though, and crying helps us to release emotions."
- **Continue to connect:** Begin and end each conversation by emphasizing that the child is loved and safe. This can't be said enough! Check in with the child to see how they are doing after the conversation. "That was a really hard thing to talk about. I wonder how you are now? What might help you? Shall we take a walk, or just sit quietly for a few minutes?"
- **Seek Support:** Look for local support resources. Ask for help. Seek connections within your community. Support can also come from unexpected places such as school, clubs or teams.





EMPOWER: You can give children and yourself the tools that you need in order to survive this situation. Here are some ways to empower yourself and your family:

- Mindfulness: Practice taking some deep breaths, or mindfulness exercises.
- The Seven C's: Post the Seven C's in your home or office. Children are not responsible for the family member's substance use and they can focus on healthy coping skills.
 - The Seven C's are: I didn't cause it, I can't control it, I can't cure it, but I can take care of myself by communicating my feelings, making good choices, and celebrating myself.
- Model Self-Care: It is important that you are kind and patient with yourself and get support. Children will notice and learn from this! They will be encouraged to know that you are taking care of yourself. This will help them to feel safe. Try getting some fresh air everyday. Stay hydrated. Practice some deep breathing exercises.
- "You are safe": So much of the work with kids that have lost a loved one to addiction, is to make them feel safe. Reassure them that you are healthy and safe and that you will be there for them if they need you.
- Provide Tools: Children will be asked some tough questions. Give the child "scripts" so that they can be prepared in different situations when asked questions. Perhaps you can write some scripts yourself.



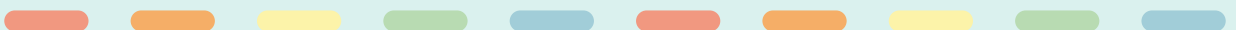
The Seven C's:

I didn't cause it

I can't control it

I can't cure it

but I can take care of myself
by communicating my
feelings, making good
choices, and celebrating
myself.



Parents: Talking To Kids About Death From Suicide



Talking to Children About Suicide

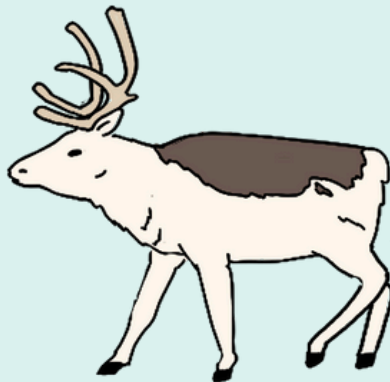
Adults often want to protect children from the harsh realities of life and find it difficult to talk about suicide with children. However, protecting them may take away opportunities to heal.

As children hear adults talking about the death of their loved one, they will create their own versions of events.

Age-appropriate, truthful information provides opportunities to address any concerns or misconceptions children have about the person's death.

Many caregivers and parents also hesitate to discuss suicide out of embarrassment, confusion, or fear.

Talking about depression, mental illness, and suicide takes away the stigma and opens up lines of communication that are essential as families support one another after a death.



Parents: Talking To Kids About Death From Suicide



Suggestions to Assist With Important Conversations:

- Depending on the age of the children, the information they seek and need will vary. Provide basic facts and allow their questions to guide the conversation.
- Here are some examples to explain suicide and answer their questions:
 - Many adults feel that children are too young to hear the truth about a death and are nervous to use the terms “died” or “suicide”. Using the phrase “died by suicide” will help you discuss the manner in which the person died.
The term “committed suicide” can suggest a crime was committed and “completed suicide” can suggest an accomplishment was achieved, so that is why we try not to use these phrases.
 - “Dead means the body has stopped working and it cannot be fixed”
 - “Our thoughts and feelings come from our brain and sometimes a person’s brain can get very sick – just like a body can. This is sometimes referred to as mental illness. This sickness can cause a person to feel really, really sad and hopeless. Some people feel like the only way their hurting and sadness will go away is to make their own body stop working.”
- Encourage children to talk to adults about their questions and feelings:
 - “You probably have a lots of questions about what happened. You can always ask me and let’s brainstorm some other adults you can talk to.”
 - If they ask how it happened, provide truthful but simple information. “She took too many pills.” “He hurt himself and his body stopped working.”
- To help your child through their grief, be present and actively listen without trying to make it better or by taking away their pain. Allow them to share what they are thinking and feeling and discuss the memories they have of the person who died. Share stories, use the person’s name, and show them that it’s okay to cry or laugh– help them see they are not alone on this journey.

Parents: Talking To Kids About Death From Suicide

Magical Thinking and Regrets

Some children believe they played a direct role in the death — a concept called magical thinking. They may think back on things they could have done or should or shouldn't have said to the person who died.

Regrets are a common part of grief, but sometimes these thoughts make them feel like they had a part in the person's death. They feel their words or actions had enough power to influence someone to suicide.

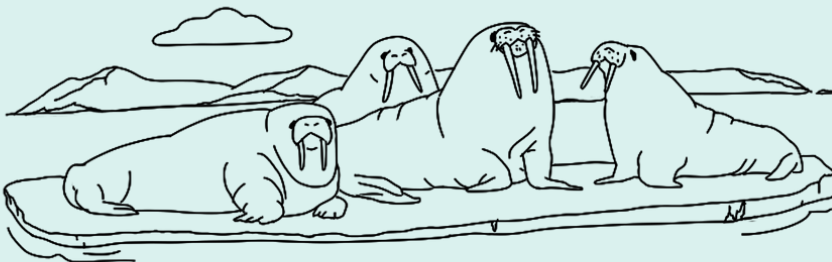
Remind children that their loved one died because their brain was sick and not thinking clearly. Many factors play into why someone would die by suicide and no single factor caused the death.

How Children Grieve

Children grieving a death by suicide will experience a wide range of feelings and all of these feelings are normal. Children may express their feelings through behaviours rather than words.

Help them find appropriate ways to express and release what is inside through art, activity, and play. Younger children may also regress in their behaviors, such as bed-wetting or needing an old comfort item.

Usually these behaviors will diminish as the child adjusts to this time in their life. As long as the child isn't hurting themselves or others, any expression of grief is normal and okay.



Parents: Talking To Kids About Death From Suicide

How Children Grieve

When a death happens, children worry about how it will affect their life and who will be there to take care of them. They may worry about another death occurring or about who will take them to school. Providing information about their schedule and who will meet their needs can decrease their anxiety.

Grief comes in waves. It is not unusual for children to be very emotional or ask a lot of questions and then suddenly appear not to be impacted by the death. This is their way of taking in only as much as they can handle at that time. They may return with many emotions or questions along with the need to retell their story over and over.

Support for the Grief Journey

As children grow, their grief will evolve. This experience is a part of who they are and things will never go back to the way they were. They may re-experience their grief as they reach various milestones. It's important to check-in with them and support healthy ways for them to re-process their grief.

Resources, like a peer grief-support group can provide opportunities to learn from others and feel less isolated. Groups help to normalize their grief and create a helpful support system. The most important way for you to support your child is to model healthy grief responses. Children learn about grief from watching the adults in their lives. Reach out to other family, friends, or professionals for care and support. Find activities that acknowledge your grief and allow you to remember the person who died. Be patient and give yourself time.



Section Three:

Providing Grief Support



How Do We Support KIDS When They Are Grieving?



Kids learn by asking questions about death. It's usually a sign that they're curious about something they don't understand. As an adult, a couple of the most important things you can do for children is to let them know that all questions are okay to ask, and to answer questions truthfully – even the hard ones.

Be sensitive to their age and the language they use. No child wants to hear a clinical, adult-sounding answer to their question, but they don't want to be lied to either. Often the hardest time to be direct is right after a death.

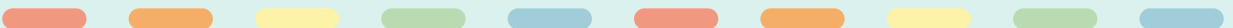
Give the Child Choices Whenever Possible.

Children appreciate having choices as much as adults do. They have opinions, and feel valued when allowed to choose. And they don't like to be left out.

For example, it is meaningful and important experience for children to have the opportunity to say goodbye to the person who died in a way that feels right to them.

They can be included in the selection of a casket, clothing, flowers and the service itself. Some children may also want to speak or write something to be included in the service, or participate in some other way.

After a death, having choices allows children to grieve a death in the way that is right for them. Sometimes children in the same family will choose differently. If you are a parent, ask your child what feels right to them. Don't assume that what holds true for one child will be the same for another.



How Do We Support KIDS When They Are Grieving?

Listen Without Judgement.

One of the most helpful and healing things we can do for a child is to listen to his or her experiences without jumping into judge, evaluate or fix. Well meaning adults often try to comfort a child with phrases such as, "I know just how you feel," or, worse, advices such as "get over it" or "move on."

While our intentions to soothe a grieving child are correct, using such responses negate the child's own experiences and feelings.

If a child says, "I miss my Dad who died." Simply reflect back what you've heard, using their words, so they know that they're being listened to. Use open-ended questions such as "What's that been like?" or "How is that?"

Children are more likely to share their feelings without pressure to respond in a certain way. This is just one way we can validate their experiences and emotions.

Take a Break.

Children grieve in cycles. For example, they may be more inclined to play and divert their focus from the death when the death is recent and parents are grieving intensely.

More than adults, children need time to take a break from grief. It is important to know that it's okay to take a break. Having fun or laughing is not disrespectful to the person who died; this is a vital part of grieving, too.



Thoughts that kids might have..

Everyone wants me to talk about my feelings and I don't want to talk

I just want to be alone

I don't know what I feel

I am mad. I am sad. I hurt

I can't talk to my parent(s) because they get too upset

I hate it when people tell me "move on"

When is this "grief" going to go away

I wish I didn't feel so different

I can't talk to my friends about this

Talk About and Remember the Person Who Died.

Remembering the person who died is part of the healing process. One way to remember is simply to talk about the person who died. It's okay to use his/her name and to share what you remember.

Respect Differences in Grieving Styles.

Children often grieve differently from their parents and siblings. Some children want to talk about the death, while others want to be left alone. Some like to stay busy and others withdraw from all activities and stay home.

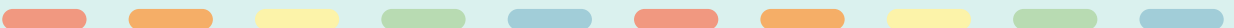
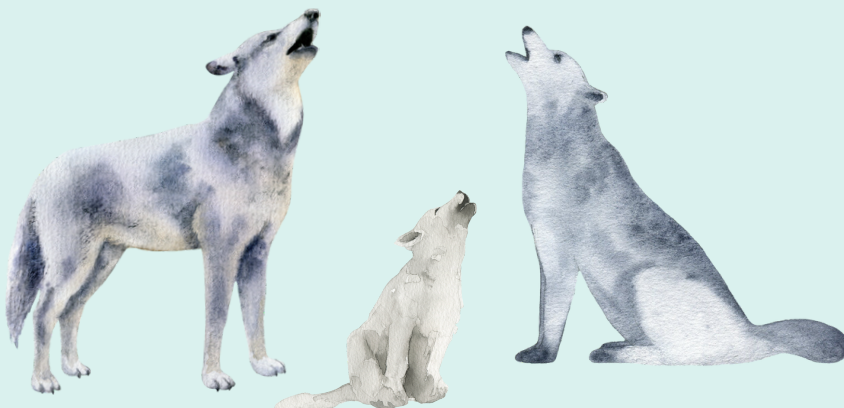
Younger children may be clingy, whereas teens may prefer to spend time on their own or with peers. Recognizing and respecting that each child grieves in his or her own way is essential to the healing process for a family.

Listen to children, talk about their feelings, watch their behavior and reaffirm that their differences are okay.

Hold a Memorial Service and Allow for Saying Goodbye.

Allowing children and teens to say goodbye to the person who died is important in beginning the grieving process. A service enables children and teens to see how valued and important the person was to others and know that grieving the loss is okay.

Before the service, let the children know what is going to happen, who will be there, where and when it takes place and why it's important. Children who are prepared with this information are able to make the choice about attending the funeral. If they choose not to participate; invite them to create their own commemorative ritual or activity for saying goodbye.



How Do We Support TEENS When They Are Grieving?

Teens respond better to adults who choose to be companions on the grief journey rather than direct it. Adult companions need to be aware of their own grief issues and journeys because their experiences and beliefs impact the way they relate to teens.

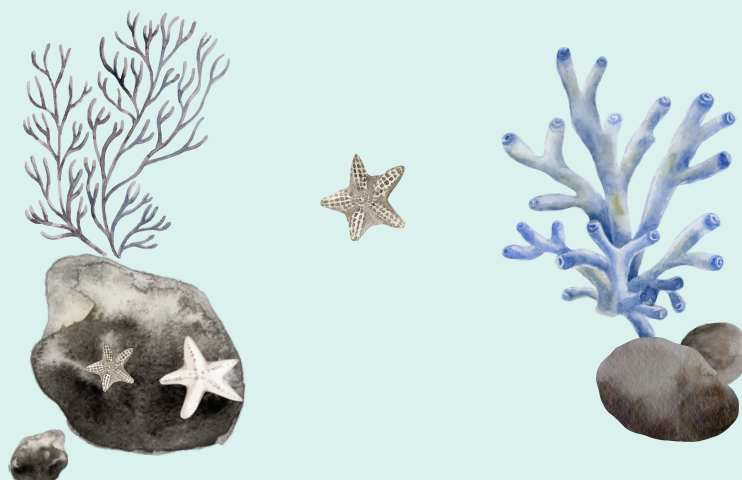
Acknowledge that each teen's grieving experience is unique.

Grieving is a different experience for each person. Teens grieve for different lengths of time and express a wide spectrum of emotions.

Grief is best understood as a process in which bodily sensations, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors surface in response to the death, its circumstances, the past relationship with the deceased, and the realization of the future without the person.

For example, sadness and crying may be an expression of grief for one teen, while another may respond with humor and laughter. While many theories and models of the grieving process provide a helpful framework, the path itself is an individual one, and often lonely.

No book or grief therapist can predict or prescribe exactly what a teen will or should go through on the journey. Adults can assist grieving teenagers by accompanying them on their journey in the role of listener and learner, and by allowing the teen to function as a teacher.



How Do We Support TEENS When They Are Grieving?

Respect differences in grieving styles.

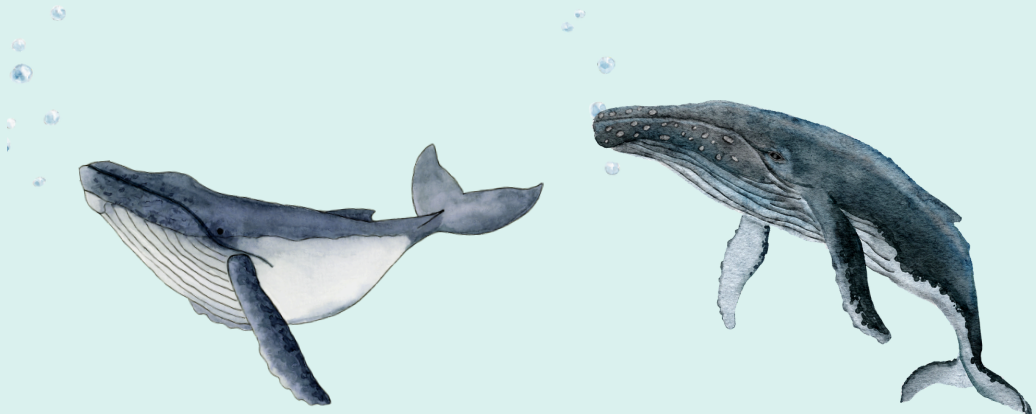
There are no “right” and “wrong” ways to grieve. Sometimes adults express strong opinions about “right” or “wrong” ways to grieve. But there is no correct way to grieve. Coping with a death does not follow a simple pattern or set of rules nor is it a course to be evaluated or graded.

There are, however, “helpful” and “unhelpful” choices and behaviors associated with the grieving process. Some behaviors are constructive and encourage facing grief, such as talking with trusted friends, journaling, creating art, and expressing emotion rather than holding it inside.

Other grief responses are destructive and may cause long-term complications and consequences. For example, some teens attempt to escape their pain through many of the same escape routes adults choose: alcohol and substances abuse, reckless sexual activity, antisocial behaviors, withdrawal from social activities, excessive sleeping, high risk taking behaviors, and other methods that temporarily numb the pain of their loss.

Know that the grieving process is influenced by many issues.

The impact of a death on a teen relates to a combination of factors including: Social support systems available for the teen (family, friends, and/or community), circumstances of the death – how, where and when the person died, whether or not the young person unexpectedly found the body, the nature of the relationship with the person who died – harmonious, abusive, conflictual, unfinished, communicative, the teen’s involvement in the dying process, the emotional and developmental age of the teen, the teen’s previous experiences with death.



How Do We Support TEENS When They Are Grieving?

Recognize that grieving is the teen's natural reaction to death.

However, grieving does not feel natural because it may be difficult to control the emotions, thoughts, or physical feelings associated with a death.

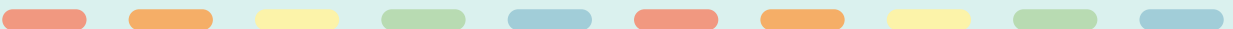
The sense of being out of control that is often a part of grief may overwhelm or frighten some teens. Grieving is normal and healthy, yet may be an experience teens resist and reject.

Helping teens accept the reality that they are griever allows them to do their grief work and to progress in their grief journey.

Listen.

Grief is ongoing. Grief never ends, but it does change in character and intensity.

Many griever have compared their grieving to the constantly shifting tides of the ocean; ranging from calm, low tides to raging high tides that change with the seasons and the years.



Parents: Supporting Kids and Teens After A Suicide



Explaining suicide death to a child or teen can feel overwhelming. As adults, we often want to protect them from the shame that can accompany such a death.

Here are some tips for talking with children and teens about a suicide death and ways to support them in their grief.

Talking About Suicide: How Do I Tell My Child or Teen?

Start with a short, simple explanation of what happened in language children can understand. Let their questions guide what else to share. You do not have to describe in detail what happened (unless they ask, and then you should answer honestly). You might say, "I have very sad news, Mommy died of something called suicide. She shot herself." or "Your dad died last night, he took too many pills." Avoid euphemisms such as passed away, went to sleep, crossed over, or lost (as is "we lost her"), as they can confuse children.

Even though these discussions can be hard to have, being honest and open is an important first step in helping grieving children. It minimizes the confusion that comes from misinformation, and also keeps children from using their limited energy and inner resources to figure out what happened. Children who are not told the truth often fill in the blanks themselves, sometimes with a story that is worse than what actually happened. In fact, many children and teens come to believe that they somehow caused the death, especially if no one will tell them what happened. News also travels fast, and it is important for children to hear about death from a caring adult rather than through social media or gossip.

"Why?"

is often the first question everyone asks after someone dies of suicide. You can support children and teens by explaining there are many factors that can lead someone to die by suicide. A suicide death is not the result of a single event such as a break up, loss of a job, a death, and a major disappointment, even though it may seem like that event was the cause of the death. Suicide death is a result of someone experiencing unbearable emotional pain, feeling hopeless about it ever getting better, and thinking death is the only way to stop the pain.

Parents: Supporting Kids and Teens After A Suicide

Reactions and Behaviors

Children may experience many different emotions, including sadness, anger, frustration, fear, confusion, powerlessness, loneliness, shame, guilt, numbness, and relief.

Their reactions may depend on their age, personality, experiences with death, and developmental level. Sometimes children don't show any visible reaction at all. There are no right or wrong feelings in grief, just individual experiences.

It is not uncommon for a child or teen to feel relief after the death, especially if mental health issues created turmoil. Some may feel the parent abandoned them, or that they were unlovable.

Children tend to move quickly from one emotion to another, crying one minute and asking for a snack the next. With powerful emotions like anger and fear, consider finding ways for children to safely express them.

Remind children that while it's okay to have big feelings. "You are really, really angry right now, and that's okay," it's not okay to hurt anyone or anything. "You can be really angry, but you can't kick me or throw your toys at the dog. You can punch the punching bag or stomp on the bubble wrap."



A Higher Risk of Suicide for Depressed Teens

Adolescents and young adults are still developing in the limbic system of the brain, which regulates their emotions, as well as their prefrontal cortex, which is in charge of impulse control.

Add depression into the mix, and the combination of intense emotional triggers with impulsive thoughts of escape puts adolescents and young adults at higher risk of making a potentially fatal decision.

Depression is the greatest risk factor in suicide, but it's treatable with help.

Even if a teen isn't showing signs of depression, the most important thing parents can do to prevent suicide is to talk to their kids about it. Like sex, drugs, bullying or any other topics that impact teens, suicide is fraught with discomfort and stigma.

An honest conversation about suicide lets teens know they can come to you with issues if they need to.

Of course, suicide isn't the easiest subject to broach. Here are few tips for getting the conversation started (and keeping it positive):

- Bring it up naturally - Leverage TV shows and media coverage of the topic to start a conversation. An indirect approach can be helpful: "Something like, 'Hey, I read an article about this. What do you think?'"
- Don't worry about "putting ideas in their heads" - A conversation is not going to make a kid depressed or suicidal.





What Helps?



- What's most helpful is to listen without judging, interpreting, advising, or evaluating. It can be tempting to minimize their feelings, or convince them to think or feel differently than they do.
- You don't have to have all of the answers. There are many questions surrounding a suicide death that do not have answers. It's okay to say you don't know.
- Life is often in upheaval after a suicide death, so it's helpful to find ways to create predictability. Examples include: routines around breakfast, getting to school, after-school, chores, and bedtime.
- Giving children choices can help them regain a sense of power and control in their world and trust that they can have a say in their lives. Provide day to day choices that are in line with their developmental level. For example: "Would you like hot or cold cereal for breakfast?"
 - It's also important to let children and teens make choices about issues directly related to the death and their grief. Examples include asking children and teens if they want to help with sorting the belongings of the person who died (and which items they would like to keep) and how they want to acknowledge significant days such as holidays, birthdays, and the anniversary of the death.
- Children and teens often turn to play, movement, and creativity to express themselves and make sense of their situation. Big energy play like running, punching a bag, shooting hoops, pounding on a drum, and sports can be safe ways to express strong emotions, as can playing an instrument, writing songs, or simply listening to music.
- Remember and talk about how the person lived rather than just about how they died. Their life was unique and important. After a suicide death, people often avoid talking about the person who died because they don't know what to say. You can help by sharing pictures, stories, and details about the person's life: "Your daddy really liked going fishing with you," or "Your mom was a great cook, I know you loved her pancakes." Sometimes just remembering to say the person's name can be very meaningful to children and teens.

Section Four:

Tools & Resources

Grief Activities

- Draw pictures. For example, have the child draw what their feelings look like to them. Ask, "What would your thoughts look like if you could see them? What color or shape are your feelings?" You can also encourage them to draw a picture of themselves and their loved one doing something they enjoyed together.
- Writing a letter to their loved one
- Creating a memory box. This could contain items that held special significance to them and their loved one, like photos, small gifts, event tickets, and so on. If the child doesn't have access to these things, they could draw pictures of them to put in the box instead
- Creating a grief plan. You and your child can make a chart of things they can do and people they can turn to when their feelings overwhelm them. Try doing this on a big sheet of paper that they can decorate themselves.

For other helpful examples of grief-specific activities for kids, visit the Dougy Centre for Grieving Children and Families at www.dougy.org.

Suggested Books for Grieving Children

- The Invisible String by Patrice Karst
- I Miss You by Pat Thomas
- Why Do I Feel So Sad? by Tracy Lambert
- Wherever You Are: My Love Will Find You by Nancy Tillman
- What Happens When a Loved One Dies? by Dr. Jillian Roberts
- Someone I Love Died by Suicide: A Story for Child Survivors and Those Who Care for Them by Doreen T Cammarata
- The Grief Bubble by Kerry DeBay
- Till We Meet Again by Julie Muller



Get Extra Help if Needed

While most children and teens will ultimately return to their prior level of functioning following a death, some are potentially at risk for developing challenges such as depression, difficulties at school, or anxiety.

Some families find it helpful to attend a support group where they can connect with others who are also grieving a suicide death. While friends, family, or a support group may be enough for most children, others may require additional assistance.

If you notice ongoing behaviors that interfere with a child's daily life, seek the advice of a qualified mental health professional. Don't be afraid to ask about their experience and training in supporting children and teens after a suicide death.

If you or a child you know is struggling with thoughts of suicide, please call The National Suicide Prevention Hotline 1-800-273-TALK (8255). They are available 24/7.

Here are some other supports:

- The mental health nurse in your community
- Your local Innniarvimmi Inuusilirijiit (school community counsellors)
- Wellness centres:
 - Kitikmeot—Department of Healthy Living: 867-943-4670
 - Kivalliq—Pulaarvik Kablu Friendship Centre: 867-645-2600
 - Qikiqtani—Illisaqsivik: 867-924-6565
 - Iqaluit—Tukisigiarvik: 867-979-2400
- Kamatsiaqtut Helpline: Call 867-979-3333 or toll-free 1-800-265-3333
- Healing by Talking: Call 1-888-648-0070 or email healing@gov.nu.ca
- Kids Help Phone: Use the online chat at kidshelpphone.ca, call 1-800-668-6868, or text CONNECT to 686868

