

GRIEF SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES OF CHILDREN DURING COVID19

RESPONSES TO GRIEF IN CHILDREN & WAYS ADULTS CAN HELP

Preschool Age (3 – 5 Years)

Children's Understanding of Death:

Death is not seen as permanent, but temporary; Death may be confused with sleeping or being away; or Death may seem as caused by a wish or anger (magical thinking)

Possible Related Behaviors:

May show little concern; May go back to bedwetting, thumb sucking, baby talk, or fear of the dark; May show fear of separation; May need to talk about the death a lot, often at inappropriate times; Learns about death through asking questions and getting answers

What You Can Say or Do:

Tell them what they can expect; Use the terms death/dead to explain the death; Do not use phrases that give mixed messages like: passed away, sleeping, taken from us or resting; Explain feelings related to grief, "It's okay to be sad"; Keep explanations short, and simple

School-Aged Child (5 – 12 years)

Children's Understanding of Death:

Beginning to understand that death is final; Confusion over permanence of death may be an issue in early school aged children; May ask details or biological explanation of death; Understand that they can die too; May begin to fear death

Possible Related Behaviors:

May express grief as anger, frustration or irritability – "acting out"; Younger children tend to have "magical thinking"; May be tired, irritable because of sleeplessness, nightmares, staying up late; May not want to sleep alone; Plays "death" or "funeral"; May not be able to express complex and confusing thoughts and feelings

What You Can Say or Do:

Younger School-Aged Children

Ask what the child already understands; Work from the child's questions; Be honest; Explain what death is and use words such as "dead" and "died." Explain what feelings may occur and that others have similar feelings; Answer questions; Ensure the child knows they are not the cause of death; Talk about any fears the child may have

Older School-Aged Children

Be honest; Give details about the death as the child asks questions; Explain complicated feelings that may come; Provide a journal for writing down thoughts and feelings; Offer love, understanding and support; Avoid putting pressure on the child to "be strong"

ADDITIONAL WAYS TO HELP A GRIEVING CHILD

Giving the child choices whenever possible allows a child to grieve in a way that's right for them and regain a sense of control lost after the death

Encouraging consistency and routine helps rebuild a sense of stability

Talking about and remembering the person who died is part of the healing process

Exercise and physical play can help release energy and emotions and is a natural means of expression

Getting out the crayons, pencils, paint and chalk can be a creative outlet for emotions that are difficult to express

Plan family time together and be available for children when the need you

Take care of yourself and do your own grieving as children take cues from the adults around them

Information taken from "35 Ways to Help a Grieving Child" from the Dougy Center & Advocate Children's Hospital and Children Grieve, Too: Helping Children Cope with Grief by Joy & Dr. Marvin Johnson

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RESOURCES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN

Storybook Read-a-Louds

The Invisible String by Patrice Karst (reference heaven within the story)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cO2LBbBtAI>

The Goodbye Book by Toad Parr pre-k - 3rd grade

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efWdOol5g6o>

The Memory Box by Joanna Rowland

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mF-lzj1668I>

I Miss You (A First Look at Death) by Pat Thomas (12 minutes) (references to souls)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EyM97X4lhEo>

Videos

Elmo's Uncle Jack - died in Iraq 25 minutes (Transitions between Sesame Street and real people talking about grief)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2VpflpbOmk>