

How to support a young person who is grieving



Losing someone you love can be devastating at any age. Children may find it particularly difficult to process death and may have feelings they have not experienced before.

It can be difficult to know how to support a young person who is grieving, especially if you are also grieving, so we have put together some advice to help guide you.

Talk About Death

Although it can be challenging to talk about, especially with a child, it is important to talk to children about death to ensure they understand what has happened and what this means.

Avoid using euphemisms when talking about death as this can lead to misinterpretation, concern, or confusion as children tend to take things literally.

Saying “they have gone to sleep”, “they are in a better place”, or “we have lost them” can make it sound as though they can come back. Instead use phrases such as “their heart has stopped beating”, “their body no longer works”, or “they are no longer alive”.

Do not be afraid to use words such as died or dead. Using simple and direct language will help to ensure that your child understands the finality of death and that this means they will not see their loved one again.

Encourage Questions

When talking about death, encouraging children to ask questions will let them know it is okay to talk about it and to question what happened to the person or pet that has died. Death should be openly discussed and not be made to feel like a taboo subject.

This will help to make your child feel comfortable talking about and asking questions about death and to process their feelings and allow them to grieve. It will also give you an insight into how they are coping and what they are thinking and feeling.

Ask Them Questions

You should also check their understanding of what has happened, and what their thoughts and feelings are, by asking children questions too. Ask open-ended questions and listen to their answers.

However, if they do not feel like talking about it at that moment, make sure that you are understanding and give them space but let them know that you are there should they want to talk.

Invite Them to the Funeral

If they are of an appropriate age, you should ask children whether they want to attend the funeral. If they want to go, let them, but do not force them to go if they do not want to.

Allowing a child to go to a funeral may help to give them closure, but make sure you let them know what to expect beforehand. Explaining what they might see or hear at a funeral can help to prepare them.

Stick to Their Routine

Keep to your child's routine as best as you can as having structure and consistency can provide security for children, especially during worrisome times.

Although you may feel the need to be more lax in these situations, try to stick to the same rules and routines as this can help to make a child feel secure.

Express Your Emotions

It is okay to be upset and to cry when something upsetting happens, and your child should know this. Do not feel the need to disguise your feelings or to be strong for the sake of your children.

Expressing yourself and showing your emotions will show children that it is okay to be upset and to cry, and demonstrates healthy processing of feelings.

Keep Their Memory Alive

Doing something to commemorate a loved one can aid the healing process, and there are many things you can do to help keep the memory of a loved one alive for children.

Some ways you can do this include involving them in the funeral or memorial service by allowing them to write a letter or draw a picture to put in the coffin or casket, reading a poem, or helping with picking photos or flowers to display at the service.

You may want to have a plaque put on a bench or plant a tree in their honour later down the line, or continue to celebrate their birthday.

Simply ensuring there are photos of them around the house and regularly sharing stories about them will help to keep their memory alive and ensure your child remembers them and continues to feel comfortable talking about them.

Seek Professional Help

You should expect to see some changes in your child's mood or behaviour following the death of a loved one, and this is completely normal.

However, if there are extreme or persistent changes, you may need to seek professional help.

Child Bereavement UK supports children and young people who are facing bereavement. For confidential support, information, and guidance, speak to a Child Bereavement UK professional by calling their helpline on 0800 02 888 40