

WHAT SHOULD I SAY?

Words that can help kids:

Offering support to a grieving child can begin with a simple statement or open-ended question. Here are some conversation starters:

- I'm sorry your mom/dad/sister died.
- What was your dad/mom/brother like?
- Tell me about your _____.
- What was his favorite food?
- What do you miss the most?
- What is the hardest part for you?
- What is the hardest time of day for you?
- I cannot know how you feel, but I remember how I felt when my _____ died.
- I care about you.
- I care about how you are feeling.
- Is there anything I can do in the classroom to help?
- Is there anything in the classroom you would like to change to feel more comfortable?
- Would you like to talk about it?
- I'm available at this time, if you would like to come by to talk.
- Whenever you want to talk about it, I'm here for you.
- I'm thinking about you especially today because I'm aware that today is your mother's birthday (anniversary of the death, your birthday, etc).
- I'm here to listen if you want to talk, or just spend time together if you don't want to talk.
- When is your recital (game, rehearsal, etc.)? Would it be okay if I stop by?

Words that don't help kids:

The following are a few of the potentially harmful comments that are often offered to children grieving the loss of a parent:

- I know just how you feel.
- I know just how you feel... my dog died last year.
- Lick your wounds and move on.
- You'll get over it.
- It will be okay.
- Don't think about it.
- You are better off without him.
- Don't cry.
- It's your fault.
- You drove your father to drink.
- If only you had _____.
- Tears won't bring her back.
- Be strong.
- Forget about it.
- You are the man/woman of the house now.
- You should feel... (proud, relieved, happy, sad, etc.)

Words that can help grown ups:

- I am so sorry for your loss.
- I wish I had the right words, just know I care.
- I don't know how you feel, but I am here to help in anyway I can.
- You and your loved one will be in my thoughts and prayers.
- My favorite memory of your loved one is...
- I am always just a phone call away.
- Give a hug instead of saying something.
- We all need help at times like this, I am here for you.
- I am usually up early or late, if you need anything.
- Saying nothing, just be with the person.

Words that don't help grown ups:

- At least she lived a long life, many people die young.
- He is in a better place.
- She brought this on herself.
- There is a reason for everything.
- Aren't you over him yet, he has been dead for awhile now.
- You can still have another child.
- You are doing so well. I could never be as strong as you if I were in your position.
- She was such a good person God wanted her to be with him.
- I know how you feel.
- She did what she came here to do and it was her time to go.
- Be strong.



Amy Olshever
COUNSELING & PSYCHOTHERAPY | PH.D., LCSW