

PARENT FAQs ABOUT CHILDREN AND GRIEF

1. How do I explain death to a young child?

Tell your child the truth and answer your child's questions. Go to the library and check out your children's books on death and read them to your child. "Grandma was sick and her body couldn't work anymore" or "John's dad was killed in a car crash."

2. What words should I use to describe death to my child?

Use language they can understand. Be careful not to use the words "went away," "passed," "lost," etc. Young children will take you very literally and want to know why the loved one has not returned or will want to go look for them.

3. How much information should I share with my child?

Use common sense for how much information you need to share based on the developmental stage of your child. Keep it simple; for example, "Grandpa got sick and his heart stopped working. When someone is very old, their heart isn't as strong."

4. Should I bring my child to the funeral or service?

If your child can sit through a service without you having to entertain him/her or having to get up and take him or her out, s/he can go to the funeral. Being with family members is natural. Seeing people cry at a service is normal, too. It is okay for your child to see this. "Everyone is very sad, and they will miss Grandpa very much, that is why they are crying."

5. Should I let my child see me cry?

Grieve in front of your child. Do not hide your sadness; instead, show it is okay to cry when someone dies. Also demonstrate how you can deal with your sadness. Look at pictures of happier times together with your child. Ask your child to draw a picture of a favorite time with the loved one that has died.

6. What should I say when my child sees me sad?

Your child will ask you if you are sad. Answer simple, “Yes, I am sad because I loved Grandpa very much and I will miss him.”

7. How do I keep the memories alive of the loved one who has died?

Talk with your child about the experiences that they had with the loved one. Look at photos together and make it okay to bring up the loved one’s name.

8. What if my child thinks that I will also die?

Explain to your child that it is not likely-but be careful. “We all will die. We just don’t know when. Most people live a long life.”

9. How do I know if my child is grieving in the “right way”?

There is no right way to grieve. Every child will grieve differently. And there is no length of time when your child should be “done” or “over it.” It is a process and grief needs to run its course. Sometimes parents are so overwhelmed themselves in grieving that they would benefit from some help and guidance from a therapist or support group.