



\_\_\_\_\_ A GUIDE TO \_\_\_\_\_

# Helping Your Child Survive GRIEF AND PROSPER





## Hey There,

I witnessed my mother’s death when I was eight years old, and it has taken me decades to come to terms with how her death affected me and my immediate family. In my book, **Do You Think I Cried Too Long?** I tell the story of my mother’s apparent suicide, how I survived her death, and the feelings of not being loved by the close relatives who were left to care for me.

Death, mental illness, prison, spousal abuse, and other life-changing events can place children in a situation where they are confronted with surviving without the parental nurturing and love they deserve. The absence of a loved one is a profound experience, whether that experience is from death or parents or caregivers not being present for any reason.

When I think back to my childhood, my survival was aided by many and hampered by just as many. How well a child survives is not only about resilience. It can also be positively influenced by the many adults who come into contact with that child and are equipped with the right tools and strategies to help.

According to the Washington Post, more than 10.5 million children lost one or both parents or caregivers during the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, their research shows that every day in America, more than 40 children lose a parent to gun violence.

Mental health advocates know, and studies have shown, that children raised without loving parent(s) or caregiver(s) are much more likely to develop mental health issues, chronic illnesses, and experience emotional traumas.

I believe it is incumbent on all of us to take an active role in knowing what we can do to help these children lead meaningful, love-filled lives.

In this Guide to Helping Your Grieving Child Survive and Prosper, I detail:

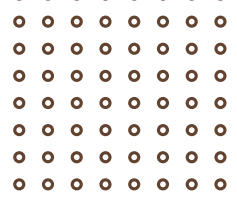
- ▣ **What Grieving Children Experience**
- ▣ **How to Help a Grieving Child**
- ▣ **What Not to Do When a Child is Grieving**

I hope this guide brings a child you care about some peace and comfort.

With Love,

*Elaine*





# What Grieving Children Experience



## Anxiety

At eight, I witnessed my mother's death, which of course, led me to be on "high alert" for any other untoward events that might take place in my life.



## Crying

I thought I could cry my way back to the time before her death. My relatives looked on with sympathy but were helpless in trying to relieve my pain.



## Nightmares

The nightmares began with her death and continued throughout my entire childhood. In the dreams, she was just beyond my reach, and I would awaken to no mother.



## Withdrawals

I intentionally spent a lot of time alone. During that time, I would fantasize about my mother, talk to her, try to remember her smell, voice, and what she looked like. It was a world that only she and I shared.



## Questions

I constantly asked my relatives, especially my grandmother, about my mother. In most cases, my questions were not answered and I was reprimanded for bringing up "the dead".



# How To Help a **Grieving Child**

## What To Do . . .

### ▣ **Talk with the child about the parent’s death.**

It is not a secret that the parent has died. If possible, find a place to talk that is familiar and private. Let the child know that it is okay to cry and feel sad. Remind them that the death is not their fault and you will be with them throughout the grieving process.



### ▣ **Smother the grieving child with sympathy, love, and hugs.**

Let the child know that you recognize their loss. It comforts children to hear that you recognize the pain they are suffering as an adult.

There are many occasions when children want to be held and told that even though they are grieving the loss of a parent, they are going to be all right.

### ▣ **Help children keep the memory of their loved ones alive.**

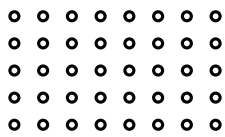
Honor the child’s memory by sharing funny stories, talking about the loved one’s hobbies or interests, or by placing a photograph or beloved keepsake in a prominent place.

### ▣ **Keep up daily routines.**

Encourage your child to resume their daily activities, such as school and extra-curricular events, as soon as is appropriate. Be sure to tell the parents of your child’s close friends and your child’s teacher about the death. They can also support your child in the grieving process.

### ▣ **Get professional help**

Ask your child’s doctor about a referral to a mental health specialist, psychologist, or social worker. They are trained to offer appropriate bereavement counseling services and can be a God-send for children navigating the loss of a parent or significant caregiver.



## What Not To Do . . .

### ❑ Don't pretend that nothing has happened.

One of the most painful memories after losing my mother was my family's insistence that I call my grandmother my mother. It felt like they were trying to "erase" my mother's memory, which had the opposite effect.

### ❑ Don't tell children not to cry.

After my mother's death, I cried a lot. I later learned that it was normal. I missed her, my siblings, and our family that was torn apart after her death.

### ❑ Don't avoid talking to the child

I can remember a "hush" coming over a room that I had just entered and everyone looking uncomfortable, eyes downcast, avoiding eye contact with me. I felt ostracized, as if I had done something wrong.



### ❑ Don't speak negatively about the child's deceased parent.

Nothing is more hurtful than hearing a relative speak negatively about your dead parent. It can sow doubt about whether or not your parent was worthy of love.

### ❑ Don't immediately discuss what changes must happen due to the parent's death.

It's scary enough to know that your life has changed forever, but to immediately hear that you'll be moving or leaving what you're accustomed to can produce undue anxiety.





# AUTHOR BIO

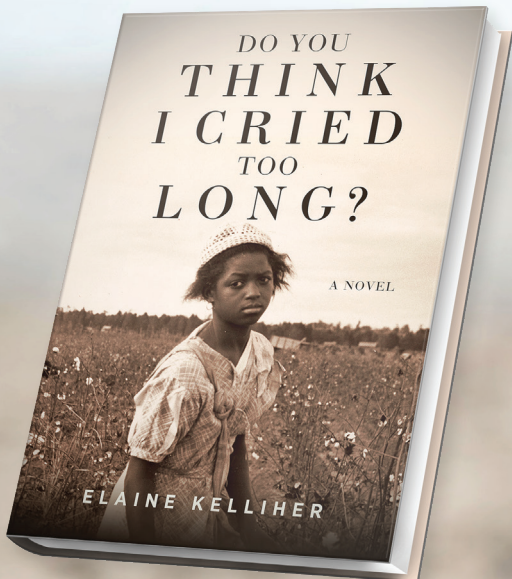
**Elaine Kelliher** is an award-winning first-time author of the new novel *Do You Think I Cried Too Long?* She was born in Tulare, California, to a teen mom, Ellen, who tragically died by supposed suicide, leaving Elaine and her siblings to cope with life without her.

Growing up, reading library books was Elaine's escape. As an adult, she learned to use the magic of stories to recall the colorful characters of her youth and resurrect the interesting people from the wrong side of the tracks in the small towns that she inhabited with her gypsy grandmother.

Elaine loves to travel and has lived in different parts of the country, including Puerto Rico and New England. She's married, has three adult children, and currently resides in her beloved California.



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