

Tips on Talking to Children about Loss

Be supportive and allow your child to share feelings with you. Taking the time to talk about the loss helps your child feel safe and supported. Don't worry about knowing just the right thing to say; listening and sharing your own feelings is very effective.

Ask your child what his/her understanding and feelings are about the loss. As a parent, it is important for you to understand and listen to your child's concerns. Let your child know that it is OK for him or her to have lots of different feelings and that you have many of them, too. Anger, sadness, guilt, fear, confusion, and even frustration are all normal responses to a loss.

Answer questions as clearly and accurately as possible. Discussing loss with a child can be difficult, especially when there are so many questions that adults or doctors cannot answer. It is best for you to be as honest as you can be with your child, and not be afraid to say, "I don't know. For children, the amount of information you give them is usually less important than making them feel comfortable talking about the loss.

Explain to children that the cause of death is not contagious. Children might be afraid that their own health or safety are at risk, and may need reassurance that this is not the case.

Be patient. It may take a long time for your child to understand and accept that a classmate has passed away suddenly and unexpectedly. You may need to have more than one conversation with your child about their grief.

If your child does not want to talk about his or her loss, there are multiple ways to help children express their thoughts and feelings. Play, art, dance, music, or physical activities are also effective ways to express grief and adapt to loss.

Recognize that grief not only affects the ways children feel, but the ways they think and behave. The familiarity of a routine can provide comfort during the potentially chaotic aftermath of a loss. However, sometimes the need for emotional support to cope with grief and loss may supersede your child's normal activities.

You may fear that your child is not coping with his or her grief in a healthy way. Significant and ongoing changes in behavior may signal the need for additional support. Some signs to look for include excessive anxiety, fear, or dread, ongoing physical complaints, separation anxieties, and expressions of wishes to harm one's self or others. If you have any concerns about the way your child is coping with his or her grief, please contact your medical health or mental health

provider. Counseling services and information about accessing community mental health resources are also available at school.

If you have any additional questions or concerns, please contact the School Social Workers, Pam Katz at x158 or Hilary Harvey at x156 or Sarah Prouty, School Psychologist at x155.

www.nationalallianceforgrievingchildren.org

www.griefcounselor.org

www.willowhouse.org

Guiding your Child Through Grief, by James P. Emswiler