



youth service bureau

Supporting Your Child Through Grief

By: Rochelle Kruszka, M.A., YSB Youth & Family Therapist

When kids lose someone important in their lives, it is often a challenging time for parents. What should we do? What should (or shouldn't) we say? How can I help my child that is hurting? Here are some tips for helping your child through a significant loss:

1) Tell the truth.

Children need to know the truth from the caring adults in their lives. The sooner they can understand that their loved one is gone and is not coming back, the sooner they are able to start the mourning process. Using terms such as "dead" may be difficult, but talking to children openly about death helps to build trust. They will know they can come to you with questions and trust you to give them the information they need.

2) Grief is a natural reaction to a significant loss.

Children often struggle in response to death. They are searching for a way to make meaning of life and accept the loss of a person that was once an important part of their lives. Grief is a lifelong process of adapting to a life without someone. It can be especially confusing for children that had an ambivalent relationship with the deceased.

3) Do not try to "fix" your child's grief.

Grief is a process that does not have a defined end date. It can come and go in waves, and it is an experience that they need to go through to process the loss in their lives. It is also an experience that can come and go intensely and surprisingly. Kids may be surprised by their own reactions and feel the loss more acutely at different times throughout their lives.

4) Children can grieve very differently.

There are many ways that children display grief. They may seek out people to talk to or they may shut down. They may talk continually about the deceased person or they may not mention them at all. They may express grief through play, art, or music. They may do all or none of the above. We should not assume that we know how a child is feeling. We should listen and support kids on their terms.

5) Help your child connect with other kids that have been through similar experiences.

Children feel more understood when they are with kids who "get it." Encourage your child to attend a grief camp, join a group, or connect with others that have had similar losses. They may find solace that they are not alone in this experience and find there is hope they will not always grieve so intensely.