

Ten Things Grieving Children and Adolescents Should Know

Children and adolescents experience grief. Although their grief may look, sound, and feel different than adult grief, parents and other concerned adults are in the position to support the grieving child or adolescent by listening to his/her concerns, validating feelings, and answering questions about death and loss. Below are some things that children and adolescents want you to know about the grief they are experiencing:

1. **I want to be told the truth.** Provide facts and answers to questions as best you can, taking into consideration their age and maturity level.
2. **I need to know that there will always be someone in my life that will take care of me.** Dealing with the death of someone significant can lead to worrying about others in their lives that might die. Reassure them by letting them know what that plan is if their parents or guardians die.
3. **My grief is long lasting.** Just like adults, children and adolescents do not “Just get over it.” Allow them to move through grief at their own pace; remember, the process may change over time, but they may always feel the impact of the loss.
4. **I might try to mask my grief by keeping myself busy.** Children often cope with grief and loss through play while adolescents will find activities that take their mind off of their grief. Realize that this is normal: their brains need the break to be able to process the loss!
5. **I will always miss the person that has died.** Help them to understand that although people may die, the memories and love for that person can live on by acknowledging anniversaries, holidays or birthdays.
6. **I want to talk about the person that died, without having to worry that someone will get upset.** Give them opportunities to share their stories and talk about the person who has died. Or, make a memory album or show videos with friends and family as a way to help them remember.
7. **Sometimes I feel guilty because I’m not sad all the time.** Telling the child or adolescent that they shouldn’t feel guilty may not help; instead, make sure they have a safe person to talk to about these feelings.
8. **My feelings of anger, sadness, confusion, or fear may appear as temper tantrums, defiance, yelling, fighting, or other acting out behaviors.** Help them understand their feelings, and offer suggestions of words for intense emotions.
9. **I grieve differently than other children and adults, and that’s okay.** Honor their right to grieve, even if it is different than siblings, friends, or their peers.
10. **I want you to ask me how you can help.** Check in with them to see if they want to talk about the person that died. If you have a concern that your child or adolescent may need additional support, use the resources that are available in the community, (i.e., primary health care provider, counselor, or Grief Relief support group).