

Allow children to be the teachers about their grief experiences.

All the child needs is for you, as a caring adult, to help them find ways to tell you how they feel and for you to really listen to them.

Don't assume every child in a certain age group understands death the same way or has the same feelings.

Healing in grief is a process, not an event.

The child needs for you to understand that it will take a long time for them to grieve and that they must face the pain in order to heal.

Don't lie or tell half-truths to children.

Children can almost always cope with what they know; it's trying to handle what they don't know that's the big problem. Children make up stories to fill in the blanks, stories that are much worse than the truth. Hiding things from children makes them feel like they have been bad or done something wrong.

Don't wait for one big tell-all to help children understand death.

Death is a part of life and children are curious about it. Children go through losses all the time. They would rather have adults they love and trust walk through these experiences with them rather than feeling like they must go through them alone.

Encourage children to ask questions about death.

Don't worry if you don't have all the answers. It's more important for you to treat their questions with the same respect as you would another adult's questions, than it is for you to know all the right answers.

Don't assume that children always grieve in some orderly and predictable way.

Don't try to get the child to some other stage. Just let them be where they are.

Let children know that you really want to understand.

Children need to share their grief without fear of being criticized or abandoned.

Don't misunderstand what may be a lack of feelings on the child's part when a loved one dies.

This doesn't mean the child didn't love the person, it just means they can't absorb all the pain at once.

Allow children to participate in the funeral.

Tell them what to expect at the funeral. Explain to them that the funeral is a time to honor and remember the life of the person who died. Even though children may not understand everything about the funeral, they will always remember that you thought enough of them to include them.

Don't forget the concept of magical thinking.

Sometimes children think that their thoughts cause things to happen. Explain to the child how the person died. Assure them nothing they did caused the person to die.

Remember that when the child feels relief, it doesn't mean a lack of love on their part.

Let children know it is okay to feel relieved when a sick person dies.

Realize that children's bodies react when they experience grief. Don't tell children the sickness is all in their heads. They may really feel sick. They need support and understanding, not judgment.

Don't feel badly that you can't give children total understanding about religion and death.

Just do your best to explain religious beliefs in words they can understand.

Keep in mind that grief is complicated.

Remind the child that grief is a normal expression of love for the person who has died.