

It is also very important to be clear with children. Young children are concrete thinkers and often euphemisms meant to comfort them can have the opposite effect. For example, saying something like “Grandma went to sleep and won’t wake up” can in fact be terrifying to a child, who will think that they might now go to sleep and not wake up.

Children will probably ask honest questions, too. If told that someone has gone to heaven, and if children understand heaven to be in the sky, they may well ask why the person has not fallen back down, or they may want God to send the person back.

Children may also blame themselves for someone’s death. “If only I had been better behaved, Grandpa wouldn’t have died.” Such logic may seem surprising to an adult, but can be very real to a child, and needs to be addressed carefully. Assure the child that they did not cause the person’s death, and explain frankly, in an age-appropriate manner, how the person died.

Carefully choosing one’s religious language regarding death is important. Stress that God is with us in life and in death, and that the deceased person is with God. Remind the child that God is with them in this time of hurt, and that they can talk to God and share their feelings with God. Words such as “God took her home” or “God said it was time” can seem harsh to children who will wonder if this same arbitrary God will suddenly call home someone else that they love. Try to avoid language that suggests that God was responsible for the person’s death.

Encourage children to ask questions and express their feelings. Allow them to participate in rituals as much as possible, such as sharing memories at the funeral or visiting time, drawing pictures or writing notes to place in the casket, or creating an arrangement of photos or memorabilia to display during visiting time. Respect children’s wishes about attending or not attending funeral services, burials, and other rituals.

Some suggestions for handling grief



- **Be patient.** There is no timeline for the grieving process. Everyone heals at a different pace. Give it time. And know that feelings will come and go and come back again.
- **Surround yourself with caring people.** This may sound obvious, but it cannot be stressed enough. Make sure that the friends and relatives around you are compassionate individuals who care about you and will be sensitive.
- **Grief is a healthy and natural response to death.** It is a necessary process. Let no one tell you that your grief is morbid, selfish, wrong, or a sign of mental illness.

- **Recognise that platitudes are usually not helpful**

Often people don't know what to say in the face of death. Most are well intended when they say things like, "It was the will of God", or 'You can have other children', or 'It was for the best', however they are not usually helpful statements.

- **Anger is a normal feeling experienced by those who grieve.**

Not every grieving person feels anger toward God, but many do – and it's okay. God can handle your anger! Join with the psalmists in crying out to God in your distress.

And do not be afraid, ashamed, or embarrassed to seek outside help if necessary. Ministers, therapists, counsellors, and doctors can help when grief becomes too heavy to bear alone.

- **Let others know how you are feeling** and what you are feeling.

Holding feelings inside is not healthy. Share your feelings, and allow others to carry them with you.

- **Take care of yourself.** Take time to rest. Get some fresh air and exercise. Eat healthy meals and drink plenty of water. Take some deep breaths, have a massage, or learn some relaxation techniques.

- **Remember that it's okay to laugh, and to cry,** even at the same time.

- **Remember that God is with you. Always!**

HELPING OTHERS GRIEVE

Here are some practical ways to help someone who is grieving the loss of a loved one:

- **Be present.** You do not need to say "the right thing", or even anything at all. Just be there. Listen. Let your friend talk. Let them repeat themselves if they have to. Let them cry. Let them get angry. Let them know that they are being heard.

- **Help in practical ways.**

An old saying goes "when someone dies, bring food." Offer to watch the children, arrange to run errands, help with some of the details of funeral arrangements, and do the other practical things that can help make life easier.

- **Continue to care.**

Often there is a rush of activity and adrenaline until the funeral, and a sudden void immediately after. Be there for your friend in the weeks and months to come. That may be when they need you the most.

- **Special days can be especially painful, especially during the first year.** *The first birthday, Christmas, or anniversary* without a loved one can be very difficult. Be sensitive to this, perhaps offering to do something special with your friend, or asking them if there is some special way they would like to observe a particular day or event.

HELPING CHILDREN GRIEVE

Our first instinct is to shield children from death, but that is unhelpful. Even small children are sensitive to how other members of the family are feeling and behaving. Greater problems may be caused by mystification and protection than by honesty and sharing. In the family a death is an important experience which the children should share in and be helped through. Just how they are told and what kind of help they will need will vary with their ages and temperament, but it is always wise to tell the truth simply. Fairy stories and half truths have to be 'unlearned' later, and may lead to distrust.

Many of the suggestions above apply to children as well, such as giving them time, letting them grieve at their own pace, listening, and encouraging them to be honest with their feelings.