



How Can I Help My Child Deal With Loss and Grief?

The following tasks help the child in adjusting to a loss. Each child will complete these tasks in his or her own way and on his/her own time schedule. The below suggestions may help you.

Task	Activities to Assist Child
Understanding: facing the reality of death	• Offer the child time to talk about death and loss as he/she experiences it in everyday life. Allow the child to tell his or her "story" of the death of the loved one. • Be there to listen, including long after you think the child should be moving on, as he or she will revisit this grief throughout his/her life. • Answer questions about death and loss as honestly as possible.
Identifying and expressing feelings	• Show the child how you talk about feelings and help the child identify and express feelings. • Tell the child that his/her feelings are normal and that others feel the same way. • Offer age-appropriate expressions of feelings such as: writing about feelings; talking to someone about feelings; crying; laughing; snuggling; singing; arts and crafts; walking or other physical activity like dance and martial arts. • Read age-appropriate books with the child and discuss his/her understanding of the story.
Commemorating/ honoring the person who died	• Assist your child with creating an ongoing list and put it on the refrigerator: "Things I remember about ____" and have family members contribute to it when they want. • Help your child write a story, poem, prayer, or song for the loved one. • Assist your child in creating a memory book or box with photographs and/or items. • Take your child to the cemetery. Take flowers or a balloon. • Plant a tree or some flowers with your child in honor of the loved one.
Going on - not "getting over"	• Create a ritual to say good-bye to the loved one. • Ask your child to create a collage of the things that make him/her happy to be alive. • Express and validate the child's mixed feelings about "going on." • Develop rituals around anniversary dates for remembering the loved one.

Adapted from: Nussbaum, K. (1998). Preparing the Children: Information and Ideas for Families Facing Terminal Illness and Death. Burnsville, North Carolina: Compassion Books.

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