

Supporting Grieving Children

When a child faces the loss of a loved one, their grief is as complex and legitimate as any adult's. Here are a few key things to keep in mind as you navigate the grief journey with your child.

Take Care of You



In order to care for your grieving child, you first have to take care of yourself. Exercising, eating well, and maintaining a routine are all ways you can stay healthy to support your child!

Be Honest with Your Child



Be honest by sharing clear and accurate information with you child about the tragic event. Hearing the truth from a trusted adult is very important for children going through grief.

Listen



It is important to make sure that your child feels heard and that you validate their emotions and experiences. Allow them to be curious and answer their questions the best you can.

Acknowledge Their Grief



Allow your child to grieve in their own way. Many emotions can be present in grief including sadness, anger, frustration, and fear. Your child may not know how to express that they need help with their emotions, so be aware of their cues.

Share About Yourself



Tell your child stories of times in your own life when you had to overcome grief and what you did to get through those tough times. Sharing stories helps normalize their experience and helps your child to understand that they will be able to do the same.

Encourage Creativity



Creative activities such as drawing, coloring, writing, doing crafts, listening to music, or playing games can all help your child to have an outlet for their big emotions!

Have Clear Expectations



With this big life change, it is important to keep your child's routines and boundaries consistent to help them feel secure. This can also help your child understand that they are responsible for their actions even when they are facing negative feelings.

Reassure Your Child



Following the death of a loved one, a child's sense of safety can be shaken, so it's important to remind your child that they are loved and supported.

Create Remembrance Rituals



Rituals can be tangible ways to help your family acknowledge grief and honor the memory of your loved ones. Lighting candles, recognizing special occasions, or doing volunteer work are all examples of new family traditions that can aid in grief.

Have Patience



Grieving takes time and can change your child in many ways. Be patient as you and your child go through this process and as your child continues to grow and construct their own life story.

Grieving & Development

What your child's age can tell you about how they experience grief and ways you can respond as a helper.

INFANT - 2 YEARS

Possible Grief Reactions

- General Distress and Confusion
- Insecurity and Withdrawal
- Protesting and Resisting
- Sleeplessness or Agitation
- Ignorance of the Finality of Death
- Acting Out
- Regressive Behaviors (Baby-like)

Helpful Adult Reactions

- Consistency and Nurturing
- Security and Assistance
- Boundaries for Safety
- Physical Comforting
- Listening (Without Correcting)
- Offer Safe Ways to Express Grief
- Nurture

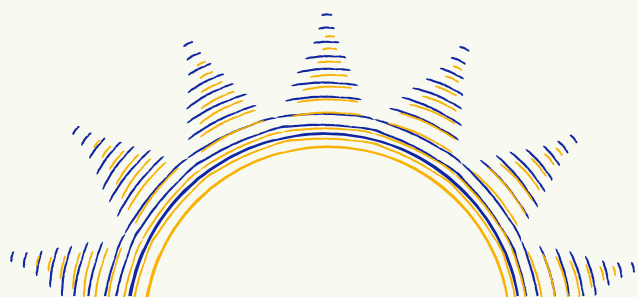
2 - 5 YEARS

Possible Grief Reactions

- Confusion
- Repeated Questions
- Agitations and Nightmares
- Regressive Behaviors (Thumb-sucking)
- Insecurity, Fear, and Anxiety
- Traumatized by Profound Event
- May Seem Unaffected
- Misconceptions of Death
- Believe Death is Reversible
- Aggression

Helpful Adult Reactions

- Simple, Repeated Explanations
- Truth and "I Don't Know"
- Nurturing Assurances
- Acceptance
- Physical Comforting
- Acknowledge Feelings and Events
- Provide Toys, Books, and Engage in Play
- Listening (Without Correcting)
- Explain that Body Functions Cease at Death
- Offer Safe Ways to Express Grief



Adapted from Mourning Hope Grief Center

For More Information Visit <https://www.mourninghope.org/>

Grieving & Development

5 - 8 YEARS

Possible Grief Reactions

- Curiosity About Death
- Regressive Behaviors (Bed-wetting)
- Recognize Finality of Death
- Confused Thinking
- Interest in Death Rituals
- Child Grieves Through Play
- Act As If No Death Occurred
- Increased Physical Activity
- Verbal Expressions of Emotions
- Aggression

Helpful Adult Reactions

- Truth About Cause and Circumstances of the Death
 - Acceptance and Assurance
 - Reassurance of Your Love for Them
 - Give Choices to Participate in Rituals or Events
 - Maintain Safe Boundaries
 - Listen and Acknowledge Their Thoughts and Feelings
 - Offer Safe Ways to Express Grief
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8 - 12 YEARS

Possible Grief Reactions

- Putting up a Facade as if Unaffected
- Shock, Denial, Anxiety Insecurity, or Distress
- Anger and Frustration at the Deceased
- Curious About Biology of Death
- Conformity to Peers
- Child Grieves Through Play
- Argumentative and Combative
- Aggression and More Activity
- Regressive Behaviors (Clinging)
- Sleep Disturbances

Helpful Adult Reactions

- Listen, Accept, and Reassure
 - Acknowledge Their Feelings, Reflect with them, and Accept Where They are with Their Grief
 - Seek Information With the Child
 - Build Self-Esteem
 - Avoid Power-Struggles
 - Offer Safe Ways to Express Grief
 - Seek Help For Child if Grief is Prolonged
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13 YEARS - ADULT

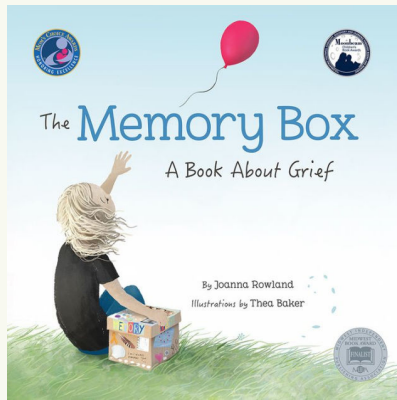
Possible Grief Reactions

- Conformity to Peers
- Non-Communicative
- Conflict with Adults
- Questioning Life's Meaning
- Insecurity About the Future
- Questioning Belief System
- Criticize or Idealize the Deceased
- Sleep Disturbances
- Regressive Behavior (Immature/Childish)
- Academic Difficulties

Helpful Adult Reactions

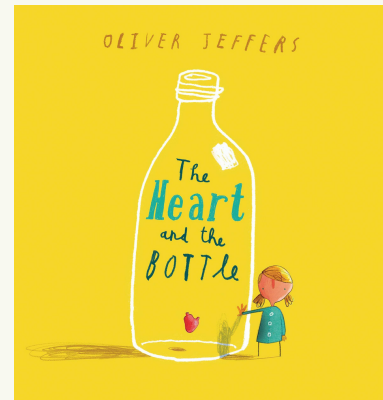
- Build Self-Esteem
 - Share Grief and Respect Their Privacy
 - Listen and Avoid Power-Struggles
 - Be Attentive and Support Any Searching
 - Set Short-Term Goals
 - Avoid Arguments
 - Acknowledge, Accept, and Reassure
 - If Grief is Prolonged, Seek Help
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Children's Books About Grief



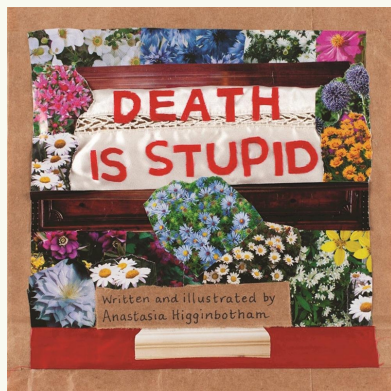
The Memory Box by Joanna Rowland

Click [HERE](#) for Read-Aloud Video



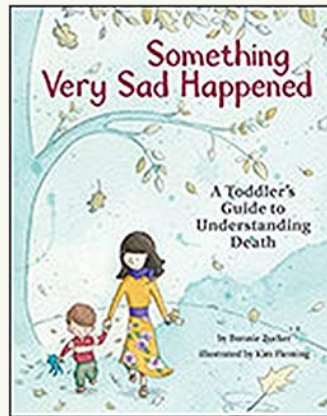
The Heart and the Bottle by Oliver Jeffers

Click [HERE](#) for Read-Aloud Video



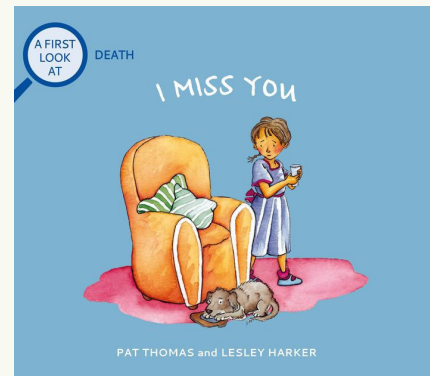
***Death is Stupid
by Anastasia Higginbotham***

Click [HERE](#) for Read-Aloud Video



***Something Very Sad Happened
by Bonnie Zucker***

Click [HERE](#) for Read-Aloud Video



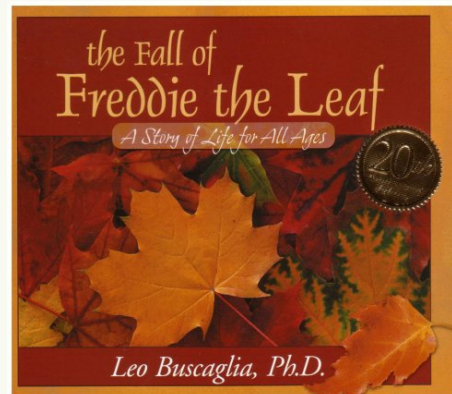
***I Miss You
by Pat Thomas***

Click [HERE](#) for Read-Aloud Video



The Invisible String by Patrice Karst

Click [HERE](#) for Read-Aloud Video



The Fall of Freddie the Leaf by Leo Buscaglia

Click [HERE](#) for Read-Aloud Video

Helpful Child Grief Resources

Facing the loss of a loved one is a difficult experience for all people. Having to help a child through the grieving process can be an added stressor for parents or guardians, so here is a list of resources that may provide some assistance to those finding themselves in the position of helping a grieving child or teen.

TODDLERS & PRE-K



Activities and crafts are a great way to help out a young child with understanding their feelings and regulating those big emotions that are a part of grieving. Here are a couple from the Dougy Center to get you started!

- [10 for 10 Activity Sheet](#)
- [Support Chain](#)
- [Finish the Sentences](#)

KINDERGARTEN & ELEMENTARY

It can be tough for kids to find the words to express how they are feeling after the loss of a loved one.

Watch along with this [Sesame Street](#) episode to see how Elmo and Jesse are able to navigate their grief and learn how to share their feelings and rely on their family and friends during those tough times!



For Families: When Families Grieve

TEENS & YOUNG ADULTS

Grief can look different for kids once they reach their teen years. They may want to take a more independent approach, such as listening to a helpful podcast or joining a supportive online community like [Teenage Grief Sucks](#).



Grief Out Loud Podcast

1. [Who Am I Now ? How Grief Changes Us](#)
2. [The Relentless Nature Of Grief](#)
3. [What I Needed - Tips From A Grieving Teen](#)

