

WAYS TO SUPPORT A CHILD WHO IS GRIEVING



TAKE CARE OF YOU -- Exercise, eat well-balanced meals, stick to regular routines, and reach out to others for support. These activities might be difficult when you are grieving, but taking care of yourself is still important. Children who are grieving do better when they have a healthy adult providing support and understanding to them.



BE HONEST WITH THE CHILD -- Discuss the death with the child in a simple, direct, and age-appropriate manner. Be honest and share clear, accurate information about what happened. Children need to hear the truth from a trusted adult in their life.



LISTEN -- Listen to the child share their story about what happened. Let them ask you questions and answer their questions as best as you can. Do not be afraid to say, "I don't know."



ACKNOWLEDGE THE CHILD'S GRIEF -- Recognize the child is grieving. Be careful not to impose your grief on the child but allow them to grieve in their own way. It is normal for children to feel an array of emotions. It is also normal for children to move in and out of grief reactions, at times being very upset or getting angry easily and at other times playing as if nothing has happened. If you are not sure how grief is impacting your child, spend time with them playing, coloring, drawing, or sharing stories. Children often will give you clues to their grief through these activities.



SHARE -- Tell the child stories about your own life. Times you were afraid, sad or angry. Tell them how you managed these situations and what you learned. Children may enjoy hearing stories about the adults in their lives and when those adults were children. Sharing stories helps a child normalize what they are experiencing.



BE CREATIVE -- Give the child a creative outlet to express feelings. This can be done through drawing, writing, doing crafts, listening to music, or playing games.



MAINTAIN CLEAR EXPECTATIONS -- Keep rules and boundaries consistent. Children gain security when they know what is expected from them. Children will often use their grief as an excuse for inappropriate behavior. While you should always acknowledge the grief the child is experiencing, you should also teach them to be accountable for their choices, no matter how they feel.



REASSURE THE CHILD -- Remind the child they are loved, and you are there for them. Following the death of a person in their life, a child's sense of safety can be shaken. Children often fear you or other people in their life might die. While you cannot promise you or others will not die, you can let the child know the plan if such an event occurs.

CREATE RITUALS AND NEW TRADITIONS -- Rituals can give your family tangible ways to acknowledge your grief and honor the memory of those who have died. Lighting candles, recognizing special occasions, sharing stories about those who have died or volunteering with a local charity are some of the ways you can incorporate new traditions or rituals.

BE PATIENT -- You and the child are grieving, and the most intense parts of grief can often take longer than we may want. Grief also changes us in many ways. So, be patient as you and the child experience your grief. Be patient with the child's repetition. A child often must come back to the same details and questions. Patiently spend time with the child as they (and you) grow, change and continue to construct their (your) life story.



NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR
CHILDREN'S GRIEF

nacg.org