

Children and Grief

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“Weep with those who weep.” Romans 12:15

- The shortest clue on how to help people grieve
- Remember Job’s friends before they started talking

Children grieve...Period

Living with the pain of loving someone that is gone= Grief

1. Various responses are to be expected
 - a. Denial
 - b. Shock
 - c. Numbness
 - d. Sadness
 - e. Anger
 - f. Fear
 - g. Anxiety
2. Pain is unavoidable
 - a. Love and pain are intertwined
3. Age makes a difference

A baby’s grief (Birth to 2 years)

1. Talk soothing to babies
2. Stick to a normal schedule
3. Pay attention to their unusual behavior
4. Reactions to grief might include being very clingy, irritable, quit potty training, etc.

A preschooler’s grief (3-5 years)

1. Their fears will intensify
2. Imagined guilt; sometimes they may think they caused the death
3. Accept the child’s feelings as normal
4. Talk about prayer after the loved one has passed
5. They will have a myriad of emotions
6. They can regress
7. They will ask questions
8. It is hard for preschoolers to understand the concept of death and time

A child’s grief (6-12 years)

1. They start to understand death is a final thing
2. They may not understand death can happen to them
3. They need honest and accurate information
4. **Grief comes in phases** and they can re-visit them
5. Remind them there are no tears in Heaven
6. They may be looking for someone to blame
7. After the death has occurred make sure the school knows about the child’s loss
 - a. School adds problems
 - b. Coach them on what to say once they return to school “My ___ died”. They don’t have to say anything else.
 - c. Give them permission to say, “I don’t want to talk about it”.
 - d. Do something loving every day after school

8. You can accept their feelings and struggle with them.
9. Keep routines
10. Anger will show up

Grief Activities for Children

- Plant flowers or a tree in honor of their loved one
- Write a letter to their loved one that has passed
- *Healing Your Grieving Heart for Kids: 100 Practical Ideas* by Alan D. Wolfelt PhD
- Make a memory box

What to say and what not to say to a grieving child (or adult)

- **Avoid these clichés:**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Time heals all wounds ○ You have to move on ○ Grief happens in stages ○ I hope you find closure ○ Be strong ○ Count your blessings ○ It's important to stay busy ○ He wouldn't want you to be sad ○ Others have it worse ○ This will make you stronger ○ You seem to be holding up well ○ I know just how you feel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ You have your whole life ahead of you ○ At least you're young enough to... (get another dad, have another baby, remarry) ○ God's doesn't give you more than you can handle ○ God has a plan ○ Everything happens for a reason ○ He/she is in a better place ○ It was her/his time to go |
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- **Encourage:**

- Just need to say "I'm just so sad"
- The process of grieving heals not time
- Just be brave enough to do the next thing
- Rely on God to carry you
- Grief never ends because love never ends
- Don't minimize the loss
- Don't forget to check-in on your feelings
- Be real and feel your feelings
- Let them discover, it will make them stronger
- Let them "fall apart" with you
- Let them be honest with you
- Listen, encourage, & normalize their grief
- Some statements are true but not helpful
- Let her/him know you care
- Be as normal as possible
- Offer your opinion, only when asked
- Answer their questions
- Time is different in Heaven
- Tell them their loved one loved them and wanted to stay but couldn't
- Weave truth into the conversation
 - Truth & Grace (Like Chips & Queso)
- Reassure them you will not leave them

- Pray for them
- Let them know it's okay to cry
- Remind them that God cries too
- Their cries and pain are not background noise to God. God hears them.
- Grief takes a lot of energy
- Encourage them to talk to other trusted grown-ups
- Keep checking back in with them
- Give them hope
 - God will find a way when there seems to be no way
- Encourage them to talk about the person that died

Grief is too big for us, but God is the specialist in healing broken hearts. Trust God to help them grieve and to love them though it.

Helping Children Deal with Tragedy

Ann Miller, Ph.D.

1. Caring for children who have a **BRUSH** with Tragedy:

Sometimes our children are saddened and disturbed by a news report on a natural disaster or human tragedy. When they have a brush with trauma, they bring their questions to you, the adults they trust for information and protection. As you are quickly collecting your thoughts and emotions to help that child, remember the acronym "Brush". Please, be:

- **Brief:** Children are not swayed by our much speaking
- **Respectful:** The only dumb question is the one we never ask.
- **Undivided:** Give all your attention, energy, & focus, for that moment.
- **Simple:** Answer only what the child is asking, in words a child can grasp.
- **Honest:** Children deserve (and will usually accept) nothing less.

2. Preparing children for a world where joy and tragedy happen:

Every day brings joy and challenges to the life of a child. Children depend on the loving adults in their lives to help them learn skills they will need for successful living. Here are two important ways we can assist them. We can teach our children to:

- **Reach In:** Develop a meaningful prayer life, not just a discipline
- **Reach Out:** Develop relationships with caring adults in congregation and home

Book List

For Grieving Children:

Tear Soup Pat Schwiebert

Water Bugs and Dragonflies: Explaining Death to Young Children Doris Stickney

When Someone Very Special Dies Marge Heegaard

God Gave Us Heaven Lisa T. Bergren

Each Little Bird That Sings Deborah Wiles

Someday Heaven Larry Libby

Badger's Parting Gifts Susan Varley

Healing Your Grieving Heart for Kids: 100 Practical Ideas Alan D. Wolfert

Fires in My Heart, Ice in My Veins: A Journal for Teen-agers Experiencing A Loss Enid Samuel Traisman

Happiness is a Warm Blanket, Charlie Brown Charles Schulz

And God Cried, Too: A Kid's Book of Healing and Hope Mark Gellman

The Memory Box Joanna Rowland

Angel Catchers for Kids Amy Eldon

Grief Is Like a Snowflake Julia Cook

The Invisible String Patrice Karst

The Dandelion's Tale Kevin Sheehan and Rob Dunlavy

Healing Activities for Children in Grief: Activities Suitable for Support Groups with Grieving Children, Pre-Teens, and Teens Compiled by Gay McWhorter

For Grieving Families:

Comfort Us Lord, Our Baby Died Norman Hagley

Single Parent Grief Sherokee Ilse

Good Grief Granger E. Westberg

Children Die, Too Joy Johnson and Dr. Marvin Johnson

Children Grieve, Too Joy Johnson and Dr. Marvin Johnson

For Bereaved Grandparents Margaret H. Gerner

Never Too Old for a Lullaby: Death of an Adult Child Juanita White

Suicide of a Child: For Parents Whose Child Has Completed Suicide Adina Wroblewski

Angel Catcher: A Journal for Loss and Remembrance Kathy Eldon & Amy Eldon Turteltaub