

Helping Parents Guide Children Through the Grief Process

The main objective is to bring HOPE to your child who is confused, scared, and sad.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Your job is not to take away the child's sadness and make everything "happy again."
- The child needs the opportunity to talk, not just be talked to.
- Use age appropriate language.
- Don't over-answer the child's questions. Answer just what is asked.
- Realize that death issues are NOT too complicated for children to grasp.
- Try to get ahead of their questions:
 - Why do bad things happen to good people?
 - Why is God not fair?
 - What happens now to my sister who died?
 - Is this a punishment for bad things we do?

PROXIMITY

- Sit face to face with the child.
- Sit close enough to give a hug or appropriate touch, if needed.

POINTS TO MAKE CLEAR

- There is no way to live without sometimes getting hurt, but we must keep loving and doing good things.
- It may seem like we will never smile or laugh again, but in time, we will find our joy again.
- They are not going through this alone.
- Let the child feel what they feel. Feelings aren't right or wrong; they just are.
- Correct any wrong thoughts. Example: "It is my fault my sister died."

REMEMBER

- Your presence is more important than your words.
- Being there for a child doesn't make sadness go away, but it can make it less painful.
- There are times when words are good, but hugs are better.
- If the child says they are afraid, you should not say "don't be afraid." Instead, ask them what they are afraid of.
- Never force the child to talk, but reassure them you are ready when they are and you will check in with them from time to time to see if they want to talk with you.



Dave Opalewski is President of Grief Recovery Inc., in Saginaw, Michigan, a certified Death and Dying and Suicide Prevention Instructor for Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant, Michigan. He is also a certified support group facilitator and child trauma specialist, along with being a 33 year veteran of K-12 education. Mr. Opalewski has published several books and is a highly sought after speaker.

A helpful resource for guiding children through grief

