

Here are our top tips for healing as a family after a death by accidental overdose.



Use clear and concrete language, such as “dead” and “died.” Avoid phrases such as “passed away” or “she is gone.”



Share age-appropriate details with your children, so they understand what they hear.



Respect each person's way of grieving. This allows for honest expression and healing.



Gather for a **ceremony in memory of the person who died**. This gives an opportunity for friends and family to heal by mourning together.



Model healthy grieving by sharing how you feel with your child and allowing your child to share their feelings with you.



Support from family and friends can positively impact you and your child's grief experience.

Take CARE as you heal

Care for your body with healthy food, water and movement like stretching or walks outdoors.

Accept support in the ways you find most helpful.

Rest often and keep normal routines as much as possible.

Express your emotions with others as they arise.



Jessica's House offers free peer support groups for children, teens, young adults and their adult caregivers grieving a death. Each group combines therapeutic talk, play and creative expression to promote healing and hope for the future.

For additional support and resources:

jessicashouse.org

info@jessicashouse.org

or we welcome your call at **(209) 250-5395**

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Healing as a Family after a death by accidental overdose



**Jessica's
House**

Grief Support for Children, Teens,
Young Adults and Their Families

When your loved one dies of an accidental overdose, you are facing a loss that can leave you with disbelief and confusion.

You are now left as a survivor, mourning a complicated loss alongside supporting your family. You may wonder if you have the energy to rebuild your life. This guide provides ways to help you move toward your healing.

Talking to your children about the death

You may find it difficult to know what to say to your children following an accidental overdose death, but it is important to be honest about how your loved one died. When your child hears the truth from their trusted adult, it helps them begin their healing process. Inform your child of the death as soon as possible. Your child should hear the news from you, their caregiver, rather than from others. When sharing the news, sit with your child in a relaxed place and have comfort items available, such as their favorite blanket or stuffed animal. Use age-appropriate, easy-to-understand language, such as the words “dead” and “died.” When telling your child about the death, you can:

- Reassure them that nothing they did or said caused their person to die.
- Provide age-appropriate information like, *“I have sad news. Daddy died last night. He took too much medicine, and it made his body stop working. This is called an accidental overdose.”* Simple explanations prevent your child from filling in the blanks with their imagination.



- Children may ask questions they are ready to hear answered. Their questions can guide you in how much to tell them. Be honest if you don't know the answer, and continue to provide reassurance that they can come to you anytime with their thoughts or questions.

Everyone grieves differently

Grief is like a fingerprint, and everyone in the family will have a unique way of grieving. One person may want to talk about the death while another is quieter. Respecting each other's way of grieving allows for honest expression and healing.

Memorial services

Gathering for a ceremony in memory of your loved one gives an opportunity for friends and family to heal by mourning together. Memorial services allow you to honor your loved one with others who support you and your family in your healing.

Physical, emotional and mental health

Losing your loved one by accidental overdose affects your physical, emotional and mental health. You may notice that your thoughts feel muddled and find it difficult to make decisions. Your energy level and capacity for family and friends may be low. Honor the wisdom of your body. When you feel tired, rest. Eat healthy meals, drink water and walk outdoors to help you to your next moment. Breathe. Don't expect to have the strength to do the daily activities you once did. You are experiencing a profound time of loss, and you are surviving.



How do we heal as a family?

The death of a loved one has a profound impact on children. Predictability helps children feel secure by knowing what to expect next. Consistency with mealtimes, before and after school routines, bedtimes and chores helps foster stability. Research shows that children benefit when their parents take loving care of their own physical and mental health. Model healthy grieving by expressing how you feel with your child and invite your child to share their feelings with you.

Loss as a spiritual wound

If faith is part of your life, losing your loved one to an accidental overdose may feel like a wound to your soul. Your physical bonds with them have been severed, and you may question your belief structure. Anger at God or “why” questions are expected in the grief process. You may wonder where God was when they died or why your prayers for their safety weren't answered. Or you may find your faith stronger than ever and lean into your beliefs in deeper and more meaningful ways. Even if you believe you will see your loved one again someday, it is still vital for your healing to honor and express your grief.

Finding support

Family and friends may want to comfort you during this time. Surrounding yourself with those who are good listeners and help in practical ways can bring relief. Connecting with others going through a similar loss through support groups like the Hope after Accidental Overdose group at Jessica's House can help you move toward your healing.