

Here are our top tips for how to support a child after a death.



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



Answer your child's questions to **reassure them they can talk to you.**



As much as possible, **keep your regular routines**, such as mealtimes and bedtimes.



Ensure your child can access **comfort items** to create a sensory feeling of safety.



Include your child in the funeral planning and discuss the details so they know what to expect.

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

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

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Supporting a Child After a Death

the first few days



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

After a child experiences the death of someone, it's important they receive the support they need.

You may have hoped that death would not affect your child until they grew older, and never imagined you would find yourself in a place of grieving alongside your children. Here are some ideas for supporting a child in the first few days and weeks following a death.



- Use clear and concrete language, such as “dead” and “died.” To prevent confusion, avoid phrases such as “passed away,” or “she is gone.”
- Young children don’t fully understand what “dead” means, so explain that something physically happened to cause the death. An example of concrete language: *“I have some sad news. Your mom was in an accident. The accident hurt her body so badly that it stopped working, and she died.”*
- Share age-appropriate details so they can understand what they are hearing. For example, a child may not understand terms like “cardiac arrest” or “fatality.” They would better understand: *“Her heart stopped working, which made her body stop working.”*
- If the death is by overdose, suicide or homicide, as difficult as it can be, it’s still essential for them to hear the truth of how the person died from you. Because death is a public record, someone else may tell

them what happened, or they might read it on social media. This approach may seem harsh or feel scary, but honesty builds trust between you and your child during critical life events. This will also prevent your child from spending unnecessary energy trying to find answers to what happened. You might say:

“I have sad news. Your dad made his own body stop working with a gun. It’s called suicide.”

“I have sad news. Your uncle died from a gun. Someone else made his body stop working. It’s called homicide or murder.”

“I have sad news. Your mom took too much medicine, and her body stopped working. It’s called an overdose.”

- Answer your child’s questions about the death so they know you are safe to talk to and you are there to help them process their feelings. It’s okay to say, *“I don’t know”* or *“I will try to find out.”* Before answering, ask your child what they think to give them a chance to share their thoughts and ideas.
- As much as possible, keep your regular routines, such as mealtimes and bedtimes.
- Create opportunities to be together, and offer comfort with your physical closeness and hugs.

- Model healthy grieving by expressing how you are feeling with your child and allowing your child to share their feelings with you.
- Each person’s grief is as unique as their fingerprint, and each person in your family will have their own way of grieving. There is no right or wrong way to grieve.
- Provide reassurance about safety while avoiding promises you can’t keep. You can say, *“I am taking good care of my body and will do all I can to stay healthy,”* or *“What happened is unusual, and we are doing everything we can to keep you safe.”*
- Ensure your child can access comfort items, such as their favorite stuffed animal or blanket, to create a sensory feeling of safety.
- Allow for the expression of movement, as grief is often noticed as energy in the body, not only in thoughts and feelings. Releasing this energy through physical play like running, jumping or throwing can bring relief.
- Include your child in the funeral planning and discuss the details so they know what to expect.
- Inform your child’s teacher of the death so they can be aware and provide extra support once your child returns to school.

