

# Here are our top tips for how to support your child after the death of their parent.



**Speak openly and honestly about the death.** Use easy-to-understand language, such as the words “dead” and “died.”



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



Provide routine, flexibility and choices. **Offering choices can help your child regain a sense of control.**



Initiate conversation about your loved one to **give your child permission to talk about them.**



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

## Take CARE as you heal

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

**A**ccept support in the ways you find most helpful.

**R**est often and keep normal routines as much as possible.

**E**xpress 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](http://jessicashouse.org)

[info@jessicashouse.org](mailto:info@jessicashouse.org)

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

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# Supporting Your Child after the death of their parent



**Jessica's  
House**

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

**Supporting your child who is grieving their parent's death may be one of the hardest experiences you have faced, especially if you are facing the unimaginable loss of your spouse or partner.**

You may have hoped that death would not affect your child until they grew older, and never imagined you would be grieving alongside your children. This guide offers practical ideas as you move toward healing, together.

**Speak openly and honestly about the death**

Inform your child of the death as soon as possible. They should hear the news from you rather than from others. Sit with your child in a relaxed place and have comfort items available, like their favorite blanket or stuffed animal. Use easy-to-understand language, such as the words "dead" and "died." You can say: *"Your dad was in a car accident. The accident hurt his body so badly that it stopped working, and he died."* When children lack information, they fill in the blanks with their imagination, causing confusion.

**Listen and reflect without judgment**

Allowing your child to express their honest emotions helps them heal. One of the best ways you can support your child is by reflection. For example, if they say, *"I miss playing with my dad,"* you can say, *"You miss your dad and wish you could play with him again."* When your child feels understood by you, they know they can come to you for support.



**Everyone has a different way of grieving**

Each person's grief is as unique as their fingerprint, and each person in your family will have their own way of grieving. Siblings will grieve differently, too. One person may want to talk about the death while another is naturally quieter. One person may have a strong grief reaction while another doesn't. Recognizing and respecting each person's way of grieving allows for honest expression.

**Provide routine, flexibility and choices**

When a death occurs, life significantly changes. Create routines in your home to foster predictability for your child. Consistency with mealtimes, before and after school routines, bedtimes and chores leads to stability. Offering choices can help your child regain a sense of control. A simple choice could be asking if they would like to do their homework before or after dinner.

**Provide opportunities for self-expression**

Children may express grief through pretend play, art or writing. Set up a place in your home where they can access art supplies such as crayons, colored pencils, markers and paper. Offer ideas such as drawing their favorite memory with their parent who died or writing a letter to them. Active outdoor play like running or sports can help release the energy of grief in their bodies.

**Children need to take a break from grief**

You may notice your child naturally takes a break from grief. When your child laughs and plays, it doesn't mean they don't

miss their parent. Grief can hold opposite emotions at the same time, and laughing is just as healing as crying.

**Honor the person who died**

Initiating conversations about your child's parent gives your child permission to talk about them. When you talk about your child's parent and express your emotions, you model healthy grieving for your child.

Offer items that belonged to their parent or keep photos around your home or in the child's room. As a family, decide how you wish to honor their parent on holidays or other significant days, such as their birthday or death anniversary. Allow the child to help plan activities such as lighting a candle in their parent's memory or cooking their favorite meal.

**Finding support**

Research shows that children benefit when their parent takes loving care of their own physical, emotional and mental health. The support of family and friends can positively impact you and your child's grief experience. Sometimes, additional resources are needed. Peer support groups for parent loss, like those offered at Jessica's House, are a way to surround you and your children with others living through a similar loss.

