

## Supporting Children Through Loss And Grief- A guide for Parents



### Look After Ourselves

As with the oxygen mask in a plane, we need to take care of ourselves in order to be there for our children. Acknowledge our own pain. Seek support from another adult, such as a partner, trusted friend, or counsellor. Understand the process of grieving for both our self, and our children.

### Empathise With Active Listening and Avoid 'Roadblocks To Communication'.

Active Listening (emotion coaching) means we tentatively guess what our children are feeling, and why. We then empathically state back our understanding of their experience. When they are upset, Active Listening helps us to be there with them, to hold their emotional hand.

For example- 'You're feeling sad about \_\_\_\_\_ dying. You're really going to miss them.'

Teen's may feel a myriad of new or painful emotions, such as loss, helplessness, sadness, guilt, or fear. Naming those emotions helps feelings to pass. Your teen will learn that they can get through the challenging times – they won't stay sad forever.

Try to avoid roadblocks, such as minimising what your child is feeling.

### Understand That Their Behaviour May Change Because They Are Grieving

Remember that as we grieve, our teen's will also grieve. They have not only lost a special person, but also possibly (for a time) the 'normal' Mum or Dad they've known for their entire lives.

Our children may not have the words to express their grief, so may behave in a way that indicates their distress. They may begin to act out of character. They may become clingy, silent, angry or aggressive.

They may experience changes in eating habits or have trouble falling asleep. They are not 'getting at you', and it's important not to take their behaviour personally. They are simply letting you know that their needs, such as certainty or security, have been threatened, and they require help to cope.

***Punishing children at times like this can increase your child's distress. This is a time they most need your support. They need to be connected to you and not isolated from you.***

### Be Honest – Our Children Need To Know

We might want to protect our children, by keeping them out of conversations. However, our children will hear the whispers, wonder about the closed doors. If we don't share the facts, then they may imagine things – which could be far worse than reality. They may feel hurt and confused that they've been left out. Try sharing relevant details in age-appropriate discussion.



**Use I-Messages When Talking About Your Own Feelings**

When someone close to us is ill, or dies, we will grieve. We will slosh through emotion after emotion. Sadness, fear, devastation, anger. Unless we tell them, our teen's will not know what we are feeling, or why we are reacting. They will just see our tears, feel our silence, or hear us yell at them for no apparent reason. They won't know the aching pain behind our actions. Let your children see that you are 'owning' your own feelings, and it is helping you to cope. This will **model coping strategies for them.**

Try telling them what is happening for you in I-Messages (again, age appropriate). Avoid the third person ('Mummy/Daddy is feeling . . .') *'I'm sorry sweetheart. I'm just finding it difficult to concentrate right now, because I'm thinking of how much I'm missing Grandpa'*.

**Seek professional help**

You may wish to seek professional help if you are concerned about your own, or your child's, wellbeing.

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 (phone and online crisis support).

Lifeline: 13 11 14 (phone and online crisis support).

Headspace: 1800 650 890 (phone and online crisis support).

Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467 (phone and online crisis support).

**Resources and further reading**

[Children and Grief](#). *beyondblue*.

[Children and Grief](#). *Kidsmatter*.

[Understanding Grief and Loss- Tips for Parents](#). *Kidshelpline*

[Grief and Loss](#). *Lifeline*

[Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement](#). *Home page*.

[How Young People Cope with Grief Differently to Adults](#)

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