

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

SUPPORTING KIDS AND TEENS AFTER LOSS

Grief can be overwhelming for kids and adults, and might leave you with questions about how to handle new behaviors and emotional responses. Here are some things to consider and try with your child...

- **Provide accurate information about the death**

Give information at a level that the child or teen can understand, offering age-appropriate explanations of what happened and what death means. Allow for questions and recognize that more questions may come up over time.

- **Reassure them of their own and others' safety**

Let kids know that they will be cared for and that others recognize their needs, particularly if the person who died was a caregiver. Talk with them about things that their person did and how these needs can be met by others, allowing for their ideas and feedback. If children or teens are concerned about specific causes of death, discuss how you and others care for yourselves, such as wearing seatbelts, going to doctor's appointments, etc. Older children and teens may benefit from reviewing their support network and who is available for them if they need help or want to talk.

- **Support routines**

Children and teens thrive on routines, and find them comforting, especially when they are experiencing changes. Try to create and maintain a regular routine, especially around the beginning and end of the day. Older children and teens may benefit from being involved in planning routines, especially if their daily routines have to change because of the death.

- **Offer choices**

When many changes are occurring at once, children and teens may feel that they don't have much control over their lives. Offering even small choices can help increase their sense of control.

- **Remain flexible**

Children and teens often demonstrate decreased capacity when they are sad, scared or unsettled. They may demonstrate developmental regression, having a hard



time with skills they recently acquired, or requiring more reassurance than usual. Make space for them to need additional help and support within their routines, and offer flexibility around nonessential tasks.

- **Expect and support intense emotions**

Grief brings up a wide variety of emotions such as sadness, anger, fear, numbness, and desire for reassurance. Model using words for feelings and let your child or teen know that these feelings are normal and can be managed, even if they are intense.

- **Make space for big energy, play, and other means of self-expression**

Remember that grief can come with intense physical energy as well as fatigue. Create opportunities for kids and teens to be active, make noise, and be messy.

- **Engage outside support**

Be aware that there may be others who are important in your child's or teen's life and can be present with them differently during this time. Consider and talk about who might be helpful to spend time with.

- **Remember the person together**

Talk about the person who died, look at pictures, create art, and consider other ways to express memories of the person. Remembering together can make you feel more connected with one another as well as the person who died.

