

Check Out

- What they already know about loss or death in general and this one in particular
- Their understanding of information and words used by adults
- Their fears and feelings—don't make any assumptions
- What they really mean by their comments and questions
- What would be helpful
- Any changes in behavior

Maintain Structure And Routine

- Provide firm, caring structure that allows some flexibility. Returning to pre-existing schedules and routines can help, but if the child feels unable to attend school or other activity they should be allowed more flexibility in their schedule.
- This would not be a good time to make major changes, such as moving to a new home, or changing schools or daycare arrangements. The death may fuel childhood insecurities and their only consolation may come from peer support.
- Maintain consistent rules and order—keep the usual limits set for their behavior

Offer Opportunities To Create Rituals

- Provide opportunities to say goodbye and let go. This is a concrete way to keep memories alive while making the loss or death real.
- Facilitate collecting of keepsakes.
- Allow and encourage expression such as journals or art
- Support the child's preference for public and private participation in memorial services, rituals, and donations of time and money.

Benefits of Counseling

Some of the benefits of seeking counseling are:

- Counseling can help develop coping skills and strategies—allowing for the continuance of school, play, and relationships.
- Establishment of a support network can help to decrease the negative physical, psychological and emotional effects that often result from grief.

Grief can be utilized as an opportunity to build confidence, and reduce isolation.

Who can help?

The Travis County Sheriff's Office Victim Services Unit can assist you with information regarding your case status, Victims' Rights, Crime Victim Compensation, navigation of the criminal justice system and referrals to the appropriate community helping professionals or organizations according to your specific needs.



Resources

The Christi Center

512-467-2600

www.christicenter.org

Austin Center for Grief and Loss

512-472-7878

www.austingrief.org

Austin Child Guidance Center

512.451.2242

www.austinchildguidance.org

Child Grief and Loss

Victim Services Unit

5555 Airport Blvd
Austin, TX 78751
512-854-9709



Name/ID Number:

Direct Number:

Mailing Address:

PO Box 1748
Austin, TX 78767

Common Responses

When a loved one dies, children often react differently from adults. Children may see death as temporary or reversible—a belief reinforced by cartoons. They often believe it will never happen to them or anyone they know.

It is common during the weeks following the death for some children to persist in the belief that the loved one is still alive. However, long-term denial of the death or avoidance of grief can be emotionally unhealthy and can later lead to more severe problems.

Adding to a child's shock and confusion at the death of a loved one is the unavailability of other family members, who may be so shaken by grief that they are not able to cope with the normal responsibility of childcare.

Once children accept the death, they are likely to display their feelings of sadness on and off and often at unexpected moments. Surviving relatives and loved ones should spend as much time as possible with the child, making it clear that the child has permission to show his or her feelings openly or freely.

The person who has died was essential to the stability of the child's world, and anger is a natural reaction. The anger may be revealed in boisterous play, nightmares, irritability, or a variety of other behaviors. Often the child will show anger towards surviving family members.

After a death, many children will act younger than they are. Children may temporarily regress by talking 'baby talk' and demanding food, attention and cuddling. Younger children frequently believe they are the cause of what happens around them. A young child may believe a loved one died because he or she had once wished the person dead when they were angry. The child feels guilty or blames him or herself because the wish came true.

Thoughts and Behavior

Common thoughts of surviving children:

- Did I cause the death?
- Will others in my family die too?
- Am I going to die?
- Why wasn't it me?
- When will mom and dad be happy again?
- When will brother/sister come home?

Common behavior of surviving children:

- Fear of paramedics or police investigators upon hearing the familiar sirens—a visit to the fire station, hospital or police department and meeting those that responded may help.
- Because children are not able to grieve for long periods of time and need frequent breaks from their sadness, inappropriate humor may be displayed. The expression of humor does not mean they are uncaring.
- Some children take on the parental role of caregiver in response to parents being "unavailable" due to their own grief.

Signs of Difficulty

Children who are having serious problems with grief may show one or more of the following:

- an extended period of depression including loss of interest in daily activities and events
- Sleep disturbances, appetite changes, fear of being alone
- excessively imitating the dead person
- repeated statements of wanting to join the dead person
- withdrawal from friends, or
- sharp drop in school performance or refusal to attend school

What May Help

Self Awareness

- Be aware of your feelings about loss/death
- Children learn to grieve from the attitudes, expressions and behaviors of the significant adults in their lives
- Calm adults encourage calmness in children

Acknowledge/Listen/Give Permission

- Communicate your support, caring, and availability in verbal and non verbal ways
- Give permission to grieve through sharing information, acknowledging reactions and encouraging opportunities for expression
- Acknowledge and allow their process—don't overprotect or try to hurry them through it
- Be gentle and reassuring
- Your behavior, attitude and comfort level is more important than anything you can say
- Often, sitting quietly and listening is the best form of support

Provide Information

- Give simple, honest and age appropriate explanations about loss or death
- Fantasy is often more frightening than facts
- Reassure children about normal grieving and individual responses
- Have more than one conversation. A child's understanding and questions about difficult situations change over time. Be available and look for teachable moments for further explorations
- Repeat information as often as needed
- Teachers and other important adults in the child's life need to be aware of the death.