

"MAKE SURE YOU TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOURSELF AND GET YOUR OWN SUPPORT. IT MAKES ME FEEL LESS OVERWHELMED WHEN I CAN SEE YOU ARE COPING."

- Your well being as the caregiver provides them with the stability to cope, too.
- Remember the airplane analogy: if there is an emergency and the oxygen masks drop down, adults accompanying children are always told to place the oxygen on themselves first, before their child.
- Your needs matter and self-care also ensures you are available to your child.



"TELL ME WHAT IS REALLY GOING ON. I GET CONFUSED AND STRESSED WHEN ADULTS AVOID THE TRUTH OR USE LANGUAGE THAT IS NOT CLEAR."

- Be honest and use clear language when talking about the death. For example, say "Daddy died because he had a heart attack", instead of "We lost Daddy".
- Lean towards these difficult conversations and then support them emotionally.



"ACCEPT ALL MY FEELINGS, EVEN WHEN THEY SEEM VERY DIFFERENT THAN YOURS OR WHAT YOU WOULD EXPECT ME TO BE FEELING".

- Each person's grief journey is unique and grief provokes a wide range of emotions.
- Often, kids and teens are in shock right after the death, and may seem like they are not upset. Others may be very distressed and crying a lot.
- Children tend to move through emotions more quickly than adults, so they can seem happy for an hour, and then intensely sad, angry or anxious right after, then fine again.
- Pay attention to the instinct to take away pain, and instead be present and listen, then validate their feelings. Example, "I get why you feel so angry today, it's not fair."



"KEEP UP THE ROUTINES AND SET SOME EXPECTATIONS FOR ME THAT MAKE ME FEEL SECURE."

- Provide consistent routines, to create security at a time when everything may feel different, scary and overwhelming.
- It typically helps kids to stick to familiar bedtime routines, or sit at the table to eat meals with you and gradually return to school and extra-curricular activities.
- With grief, it's like the whole world has been turned upside down, but having some familiar and comforting aspects of life stay the same can provide some stability.



"WE TEND TO SHOW OUR FEELINGS THROUGH OUR BEHAVIOUR MORE THAN WITH OUR WORDS. IF YOU NOTICE ANY BEHAVIOURAL CHANGES, ASSUME IT COULD BE CONNECTED TO GRIEF."

- Young children may engage in behaviours that look like regression, such as asking to sleep in a parent's bed, or waking up at night.
- Older children and teens may act out in an angry way or withdraw from doing activities they usually enjoy.
- Be attuned to the possibility any behaviour could be their way of showing that they are feeling grief inside, even months after their loss.
- Remind yourself of this during the hard times, so you can stay compassionate and provide emotional support for the feelings that underly the behaviour.



"PLEASE KEEP TALKING ABOUT THE PERSON WHO DIED. I DON'T WANT TO FORGET AND IT COMFORTS ME TO KNOW OTHERS ARE THINKING ABOUT THEM, TOO."

- Even if the child is not starting those conversations, look for opportunities to tell a story about the person who died or share your own feelings, to model that it is always safe to express grief with you.
- For example, you might be driving in the car together and a song comes on, bringing up emotions related to your grief. It's a wonderful opportunity to say, "Wow, this song makes me think of your Mom, because she would sing it to me years ago."



"KEEP SHOWING UP WITH LOTS OF COMFORT AND REASSURANCE AND UNCONDITIONAL LOVE FOR ME. MY CONNECTION TO YOU MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE IN MY LIFE."

- Losing a family member is one of the most stressful life events a child can experience.
- Having at least one adult who is emotionally connected to that child and consistently available can create powerful resilience for them.
- You don't need to be perfect, you just need to keep showing up for your child with love and support.

