

Parents

Feelings of abandonment are most acute when a parent has died. One of the closest, most trusted persons in a child's life has left them. Family order has changed, roles, routines, responsibilities and supports have dramatically shifted in their family. The children are aware of the grief of the other parent.

Encourage children to keep pictures of their parent out in the open, if that is what they desire. Allow children to talk about that parent as much as they need to. Tell them it's okay to talk to other people as well. They may feel the need to be given permission to do so. The more children talk about the death of the parent the more real it becomes. Let them talk about it over and over and over "As children get older, an attachment develops to the parent of the same sex. This is just part of growing up and learning how to be a woman or a man. They can become confused while changing from childhood, trying to develop into a young adult without their role model to help them understand how to do certain things and respond to changes in their lives."

Even if a child has had a tumultuous relationship with the parent that has died, the parent's absence is felt.

The family structure and balance has changed. The death has created a void that can never fully be eliminated.

Don't expect children/siblings to grieve the same way. Don't rush or hurry your children through their grief. Give them lots of time and space to express their feelings and grief. Tell them it's okay to grieve differently. Provide opportunities for them to communicate their grief other than through talking. Encourage painting, journaling, singing, drawing, crafts, scrapbooks, listening to music, writing letters, memory boxes, making Christmas ornaments in memory of the person who died, balloon releases, making special meals, or planting trees. Ask them how they would like to remember the person who has died.

Additional Resources

Katie's Story of Grief Griefworks SD—
YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WK-YTG2A13Y>

Griefworks.bc.com

24/7 Crisis Line

780-743-HELP (4357)



REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY
OF WOOD BUFFALO



Alberta Health
Services



United Way
Fort McMurray
and Wood Buffalo



When a child experiences the death of a loved one

It's important to understand, that, people of all ages grieve. It doesn't matter how young or how old a person is, they still grieve. Children may not yet have the language skills to articulate their feelings, but they 'feel' the loss and the feelings of that loss will stay as part of them for life

Parents, grandparents, relatives or any kind adult can be a helpful support during a loss in a child's life. Key factors in helping children are to be honest and gentle. Even though the sting of death is difficult the experience can be useful in teaching children that, "grief is the price of love." Children will learn that pain and joy are both part of being alive and loving people.

Possible emotional and physical responses to loss

Crying, withdrawing, difficulty concentrating

Dreams/nightmares

Restless/anxious

More fearful

Possessive of parents or siblings/clingy/not wanting to sleep alone, separation anxiety

Separation anxiety

Bed wetting, thumb sucking, stuttering, reverting to younger behaviour, attached to blankets or other items

Acting out

Dreams of the deceased

Wanting to call home during the school day

Health concerns/worries

Resisting bedtime

Class clown

Excessive gaming, listening to music, addicted to electronics

Negative attitude/who gives a rip attitude

Let children talk about the death

We, as adults, may have a difficult time talking about death. It's alright to show children that we struggle, we're sad, that we cry and that we, too, are learning to face fears and difficulties in life. The popular author C.S. Lewis said, "I never knew grief looked so much like fear." If we are open with children and let them ask questions, maybe the same questions over and over and if we provide a warm, open, safe environment for them they will form a healthier attitude toward living and dying

Be direct but loving when answering children's questions about death. Try to speak in a way that children can understand. Use words that they know, get on their level both physically and verbally. Sit beside them or lay on the floor with them. Get eye to eye with them, don't tower over them. Be mindful of the tone of your voice. Children pick up on attitude as well as adults. Show an open, loving, caring, attitude towards the loss.

You don't have to have all the answers, just show you love them and that you care.

Content taken in part from:

Elva Mertick and Dr. Alan Wolfelt

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Let children participate with the funeral/memorial arrangements

Be mindful to ensure that children know their concerns, feelings and wishes are respected. This happens by allowing them to be part of the planning and arranging.

Children don't understand everything surrounding the sequence of events surrounding a death but being able to help plan the funeral or memorial provides comfort and a greater understanding that life happens after the death of a loved one

It's important that children know

they are **allowed** to attend the funeral service, but they are not **forced** to attend. Let children know that a funeral is a place where we honor the person that has died. Explain to them that it's a place where family and friends show that they care about each other and the person that has died. A funeral is a place where people cry, laugh, support and care for one another.

Viewing the body of someone that has died can be a helpful and positive experience for children. It helps children to say, "goodbye" and better understand the reality of death. They better grasp that death is final. The same way we encourage and include children with the service but don't insist they attend, children should not be forced to see the body.

"A little help goes a long way and a little is better than none"

By: A. Weisman