

Who else will die?

Who will die next? And who will take care of me?

Why did they die?

Why did this happen to me?

Is it my fault?

Is it my responsibility to take care of the family now?

Are they coming back?

Are they still breathing?

Do they remember me?

Why did they leave me? Were they mad at me?

Who am I now?

Resources for the Journey of Grief™

ABOUT THE CARING PLACE...

The Caring Place is dedicated to children and their families who have experienced the death of a family member.

The Caring Place is a safe place with safe people where children and families can know that they are not alone in their grief, share their feelings and experiences in an atmosphere of acceptance, see that what they are going through is normal, and know that hope and healing are possible.

This brochure is one of a three-part series on questions children ask.



is supported by



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Responding To Children In Grief *and* The Questions They Ask



"In times of stress, the best thing we can do for each other is to listen with our ears and our hearts and to be assured that our questions are just as important as our answers."

— FRED ROGERS

Connecting with a Child in Grief

Truly connecting with a child is always important, but it is especially so when the child is grieving.

When a grieving child asks a question, ultimately the conversation that results—the connection made with the child—is more important than the answer.

We need to remember that the child has had a loved one die, that their life has changed dramatically. At The Caring Place, we see grieving children who typically feel broken-hearted, afraid, alone and devastated.

What the child wants most—to have the person alive and with them again—can not be. To truly support a child in grief, it's important to allow a child be "not OK" without trying to "fix" them.

We can't make everything OK for the child, but we can support them, we can hear them, we can love them.

Responses to questions posed by a child in grief should deepen our connection with that child. The aim is to create a situation in which the child feels safe enough to ask further questions, now and in the future, and to have the child know that we are there for them to talk to.

Listening to a Child in Grief

All children need to feel listened to and heard. Being listened to—and feeling listened to—is one of the most important ways that we all feel cared for and valued.

A child experiencing the overwhelming feelings of grief especially needs to know that they are being listened to and heard.

It is important to listen with our hearts as well as our heads, in a non-judgmental, accepting way.

*we
need
to*

- Listen to the child's question.
- Listen to the feelings behind the child's question.
- Listen to the child.

The grieving child asking these hard questions needs our full attention. We need to stop whatever else it is we're doing, and be fully present, not allowing ourselves to be distracted by other things.

Truly listening means paying attention, without preparing our answers while the child is speaking, as well as being open to their feelings, their pain, their sorrow.

The goal of this listening is to have the child feel heard and understood and validated.

Validating a Child In Grief

When someone dies, a child often feels many things all at once. This can be confusing and overwhelming. Most of all, it is scary. In addition, often the feelings are new to them and this makes them even more frightened.

The child asking these questions needs to have her feelings validated—the child herself needs to be validated.

To validate and support the child, we can say to them:

- "What you are thinking (or feeling) is normal."
- "You are OK."
- "It's natural (or normal) to feel that way."

What we don't want is to minimize their feelings by saying things like:

- "You shouldn't feel like that."
- "Don't worry."
- "That's silly."

It's very common not to know what to say in answer to some of these questions. What we could say when we don't know what to say:

- "I don't know. I've often wondered about that myself. (Let's talk about it)."
- "Tell me more about how you are feeling (or what you are thinking)."
- We can also repeat back to the child what they said, in our own words.

— **Trust** —

When a child asks us these hard questions what they are telling us is that they trust us. That trust is a gift to be cherished and honored.