



Frequently Asked Questions

What should I say when I first find out about a loss?

While words matter, what matters the most is acknowledgment. As soon as possible, ask the family what they've shared with the child. Children don't always want to talk about it, so also ask the family how their child feels about other adults bringing the loss up with them. While heartfelt, "I'm sorry for your loss," can start to feel automatic and inauthentic. Instead, try:

I'm so glad to see you. Welcome back — missed you.

I heard about what happened, I'm sorry you're going through this.

I was so sad when I read about...

I'm so glad you told me. I know there are no good words to say, but I'm here.

How do I talk with children over time about the loss?

Start with being honest, heartfelt, and open to whatever they are thinking and feeling. Try approaching any conversation about loss with the intention to listen and support rather than fix or change. If children have questions about loss, it's best to start by reflecting their questions and asking what they think. Then, you can fill in gaps or confusion with truthful and concrete information. See "The ARQ of Grief Support" for more information.

What's the right way to grieve?

There's no right or wrong way to grieve. Grief looks and feels different for everyone and can be shaped by their age, relationship with the person, animal, place, or circumstance they are grieving, race, culture, gender, support system, and other factors that make up who we are in the world. Work to make room for a variety of grief reactions, including what might look like no reaction at all. Even though there is no right or wrong way, if you have any concerns that someone's expression is putting them at risk for harm, be sure to seek additional support.

How long does grief last?

One of the most frustrating aspects of grief is that there's no timeline. Grief changes and evolves for both children and adults, but it's not something people have to "get over" or "move past." Children and adults learn to move forward and their lives can be happy and fulfilled, but it's also okay if they find themselves thinking about and missing the person, place, or circumstance they've lost 5, 10, or even 40 years later.

What should I do if a child is talking a lot about their loss and it seems to be upsetting other children?

This is a great time to notice and reflect the energy of the room while also offering the student who wants to talk about their loss a chance to connect with a supportive adult. Here's an example: "I hear that Daunte wants to talk about his dad and I also see that it's hard for other kids to listen right now. Daunte, let's check if Teacher Jasmian wants to have you help her out with getting snack ready and you two can have some time to talk."

When is it time to seek additional help?

Here are some indicators that a child may need additional, professional support:

- Prolonged depression or anxiety
- Significant difficulties at school
- Interference in their daily routines including significant changes in sleeping or eating
- Withdrawing from activities, including play
- Chronic digestive issues or complaints of physical pain
- Thoughts of harming themselves or others