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## TIPS FOR SUPPORTING GRIEVING KIDS

### 1 GRIEF IS NORMAL

Grief is a normal part of the human experience. There is no right or wrong way to grieve, but there are healthy and unhealthy ways to express that pain. Grief for kids is both emotional and physical. Kids benefit from physical outlets since they often don't have all the words to talk about it.

### 2 GRIEVING KIDS CAN FEEL ALONE

Grief can be very isolating and many kids feel alone or misunderstood. Peer groups are highly effective because knowing someone going through something similar helps a child know they are not alone.

### 3 DON'T ASSUME

Kids will work hard to have their needs met. Don't assume what they are feeling or think you have all the answers. Just because a kid looks fine doesn't mean all is well and just because a child is having a hard time does not mean something is wrong or that they need to be fixed.

### 4 YOU DON'T HAVE TO FIX IT

Kids benefit from open, honest, and understanding adults who don't assume and validate their experience. Listening to a child and being a consistent presence in their lives matters. Kids need consistency.

### 5 TRY TO UNDERSTAND

It is more important that you understand a child's perspective than try to fix their pain.

### 6 BE WILLING NOT TO KNOW

It's okay if you do not have all the answers to a child's questions or if you don't know their every thought. Every grief experience is unique and sometimes there's a lot of uncertainty or confusion.

### 7 CHILDREN NEED THE TRUTH

Children understand their feelings, death, and the future through facts and the truth. Lies never help. Use facts and not euphemisms or clichés to talk about death. With the truth, kids can learn and develop healthy coping skills.

### 8 MODIFY YOUR EXPECTATIONS

A child or teen's grief does not look like an adult's grief. Don't expect a child to think or feel like an adult. Kids grieve in spurts, their questions vary as they try to understand death and their feelings, and they emote differently from adults.



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### **9** EVERYONE'S GRIEF IS UNIQUE

No two kids or adults grieve the same. Everyone experiences grief differently depending on where they are developmentally, their support systems, the nature of their relationship to the deceased, and many other factors. Everyone is different and it is important that everyone's feelings are affirmed and supported even if a child's truth differs from yours.

### **10** BE PREPARED

Knowledge is power. Use teachable moments to educate a child about death. Learn how to talk openly about this subject matter, using honest language and creating a safe space for present and future needs.