

Some Ideas to Try:

Memory Book

Paste pictures into a book or journal to help the child remember his/her loved one. Write stories to accompany the photos. This book can be helpful for children to look at any time.

Bear Hugs or Snuggle Time

Young children often like to give and get hugs. It can help to have extra cuddle time. Hugs can help make everyone feel a little better.

Special Comfort Place

It can help to make a special comfort corner with pillows, blankets, art supplies, music, and stuffed animals.

Reading

Grab a snuggle and a story whenever you get a chance. Stories can help children process difficult experiences.

Toys to have around your house:

- Stuffed animals, lovies, special blankets, and other items that bring comfort
- Play dough or clay (with hammers to pound)
- Soft balls, big balloons (can be thrown or kicked)
- Dollhouse with family figures
- Crayons, markers, paints



TODDLER



We are sorry that your family has experienced such a significant loss. This is likely a very sad time for all of you. Here we share some tips and activities to help support young children who have experienced the death of a loved one.

Please read this information recognizing all children are unique. Make adjustments according to your child's needs and understanding.

Your presence and loving hugs will be important to your child as they adjust to this loss. Always remember, it is important for kids to play and get lots of hugs.



Common Responses

Babies

Babies respond to the grief of the adults taking care of them. They will sense sadness and worry. Changes in their routine and schedule will affect them. Babies might be fussy, cry more, and have disturbed sleep patterns.

Toddlers & Young Children

Toddlers and young children do not understand that death is forever. They think the dead person will come back. The child might ask questions about death over and over. This is normal. Repeat your explanation and use the same words.

They will feel and know that something is very wrong. They will miss the loved one who has died and might ask, "Where is Grandma?" or "When is Uncle Bob coming back?"

Younger children might cry, be clingy, or act out when their caregiver leaves. They may sleep more or have interrupted sleep. If the child has been toilet trained, accidents are common.

For parents and caregivers: Some explanations of death are troubling to young children.

- She passed away. She went to sleep.
- She was too good and God took her to be with God.
- She is in a better place.

These phrases are confusing to children. Children may become scared to go to sleep or worried that someone will take them or another loved one away. Young children will understand heaven as a concrete place and might ask to go visit.

How to Help

What helps infants and toddlers when they grieve:

- Keep the daily schedule and routine the same as much as possible.
- Have the child stay in familiar surroundings (their own home or childcare during the day).
- Use a few consistent adults to help take care of the child. Make sure these people know the child well.
- Remember playtime and activity are important.
- Give lots of extra hugs.
- Tell the infant and toddler, "I love you," often.
- For children who aren't talking, keep talking to them. It can help.
- For children who are talking, keep explanations simple. Repeat them often.

Explain what dead means in very concrete terms.

It is important for children to know what happened in simple terms. "Grandpa's body isn't working anymore. His heart stopped beating. He isn't breathing anymore. He is not hungry. He can't feel, taste, hug, or sleep. He doesn't feel sad, scared, or happy. He is dead. I'm very sad, and I miss him. A lot of our family and friends are very sad. Sometimes we might cry. That is okay."

Remind children it isn't their fault.

Kids need to know they did not cause their loved one's death. Sometimes they need to be told this often. Young children can have "magical thinking." This means they believe – because they thought or did something – that they caused something else to happen. They might imagine they caused their loved one's death by being mean or not cleaning their room. They might think they can wish their loved one back to life.