



Helping Your Grieving Child Through a Holiday



Adults play an important role in helping children grieve, especially over the holidays when new emotions and memories are felt a bit more. The following are tips that a parent or other adult can use to help grieving children through the holidays.

Talk with them about their loved one

Be specific with good memories. Let children share their feelings and stories. Take advantage of simple moments at bedtime, car rides and at meals.

Explain death in age-appropriate, simple terms

Use the words “death” and “died” with children. Avoid phrases such as “went to sleep.” Since children are literal thinkers, they may be afraid to go to sleep.

Show appropriate affection

Hugs and kisses are a great way to stay in contact. Ask them how they would like to be greeted. Respect their right to not be touched as well.

Allow children to take breaks in their grieving

They will not grieve all of the time. Let them laugh and play.

Be creative

Allow them to draw, color, paint. Encourage them to make an ornament or a collage in remembrance of their loved one.

Let them have a photo or small memento to carry with them

This can help them feel close to their loved one. Allow children to have a loved one’s shirt or other clothing to sleep in.

Encourage journaling

This could be in the form of a letter, a daily meditation or as a book with either words or pictures.

Permit them to help make decisions about daily living and holiday plans

This can help them to feel more control of their changing life. Allow them to attend holiday parties and family gatherings and have fun!

Provide stability

Children need to have a sense of constance in their life. Spend a lot of time with them. Provide structure with bedtime, meals, school, homework and screen time. Allow other adults to be a part of your child’s life so that you can get needed breaks.

Be honest with your feelings

Don’t feel like you always have to be composed. It is okay for children to see your tears and to feel your pain. Ask your children for a hug on your sad days.

Maintain good physical health for yourself and your children

Take care of yourself and your family with good health routines; proper nutrition, adequate rest, hydration and physical exercise.

Bake a special holiday meal or dessert in memory of their loved one

Invite family and friends to join in. Encourage children to make items and talk about how much their loved one enjoyed these favorite items.

Allow them to go to a candlelight memorial service

Or encourage them to have one of their own. Let them honor the memory of their loved one.

Help others

Let them help those who are less fortunate than themselves. Purchase a gift for another child, deliver meals to a less fortunate family or volunteer as a family at a shelter feeding the homeless.

Honor their grief timeline

Grieving is a life long process with no specific timeline or order. Memories of their loved one will likely change throughout their lives as they developmentally grow and mature. Remind them that is okay to honor their memories of their loved one, while still continuing to move onward.