

Tips From The Top

[advice from experts]

10 TIPS

To Help Grieving Children

Professor Child is an organization that develops films and workbooks for children experiencing challenging life events, and it believes in the power of children teaching children by sharing their stories. In the film *Children and Grief*, 10 children share their stories of losing a loved one. These children have experienced a life-changing event, yet manage to share their stories with a sense of strength and resiliency. Rory Kidder, a co-founder of Professor Child, shares 10 tips on helping grieving children.

1. ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO SHARE THEIR GRIEF STORIES.

In *Children and Grief*, all the children interviewed emphasized the importance of talking about their experience. "If kids don't talk to anybody, I feel like they'll be just left alone and keep on being sad," shared Aurora, 9.

2. ASK CHILDREN WHAT THEY THINK "GRIEF" MEANS.

"Grief means every emotion, I think," shared Alexander, 14. Encourage children to create their own definition of grief. What does it mean to them? Help them understand there are many ways to experience grief.

3. DON'T ASSUME EVERYTHING IS OK.

When a death of a loved one occurs, adults are often faced with grief and dealing with new worries and challenges. Children also have worries and challenges but may not be sharing them. Encourage children to share their worries, and let them know they are not alone in what they are experiencing. Check in regularly with kids by asking open-ended questions about

how they are dealing with their loss.

4. LITTLE THINGS HELP.

Children find comfort in small gestures adults may overlook. Some things that may help children include going to the park, spending time with pets, being with family, looking at pictures of the loved one who has passed, talking to their stuffed animals, getting a pat on the back and simply being told everything is going to be OK.

5. CONDOLENCE IS A BALANCING ACT.

In *Children and Grief*, all of the children interviewed expressed the importance of having others acknowledge the passing of their loved one. Although they want you to offer condolence, understand that they may not feel like talking about it at that time. But don't give up! Keep asking how they are doing. Kids like to have people regularly check in on them.

6. ASK CHILDREN WHAT THEY BELIEVE HAPPENS AFTER A PERSON DIES.

Have children draw pictures of where

they think their loved ones are now. Support their ideas by letting them know there are many beliefs about life after death.

7. CONTINUE TO CELEBRATE AND REMEMBER THE LOVED ONE WHO HAS DIED.

To help children work through grief, create a ritual/tradition to celebrate and remember a loved one. Create collages or artwork to remind them of their loved ones. Kids also like to decorate objects with things that remind them of those who have died. Let kids come up with their own unique ways to celebrate their loved ones.

8. A SHIFT IN PERSPECTIVE CAN HELP THE HEALING PROCESS.

Julia, 9, has learned it is a gift to have her family members who are still alive. Sequoia, 11, has learned she can get through anything after what she has gone through. What have the children you work with learned from experiencing grief?

9. HELP CHILDREN STAY FOCUSED ON THEIR DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE.

Ask children, "What are your hopes and dreams?" Having children focus on their hopes and dreams lets them know their lives are much more than the grief they are experiencing. This positively affects self-esteem while instilling confidence and creating a purpose in life.

10. ASK CHILDREN TO DEFINE WHO THEY ARE.

Have them answer the following questions: What are some of your strengths? What do you love? What are some words that describe who you are? Have them define themselves using "I am" statements. Post somewhere visible so they are reminded of who they are. •

For more information on the film, visit www.professorchild.com.