



Often parents ask how to talk to their children about death. Many feel helpless when trying to explain death, or they want to protect their children from emotional pain.

Professional experience with children has shown that they are resilient and can work through their grief with time, understanding and support. Without this opportunity, behavioral and emotional problems may arise, either immediately or in the future.

Many feel helpless when trying to explain death, or they want to protect their children from emotional pain.

Just as we encourage you to fully participate in your own healing journey, you can help your children heal by following these guidelines:

- **Be a role model for your children** — Set a good example for your children by freely sharing your feelings with them. If you hide your grief, they learn to hide theirs, too. It is OK for your children to see you angry, upset, crying and relieved. You allow them to see what you are really feeling. This also gives them permission to express the same feelings. It's OK to let your children know if you do not understand something. They need to know that their emotions and confusion are normal and acceptable.

- **Tell your children immediately when the death occurs** — Gently explain what has happened, what is happening now and why you may be crying.

- **Explain the death in terms that your children can understand** — Use correct terms such as die, died, dying and dead. Words and expressions like sleeping peacefully, passed away, departed, expired and lost are confusing to children.

- **Do not force feelings of grief** — Allow your children to express their feelings naturally, in their own way and in their own time.

- **Really listen to what your children are asking or saying** — To understand what they are expressing, you may need to ask further questions.

- **Maintain routines as much as possible** — It may help your children to remain in their home or room, and with familiar loved ones. Even though a death has occurred, your children's lives need to go on.

- **Help your children understand the reality of death** — Your children may need to see or touch the body to help them understand death.

- **Provide them the opportunity to say "goodbye"** — Saying goodbye is important for children. There are a number of ways that may help them say goodbye:
 - Talk to the loved one who has died
 - Write a letter or draw a picture
 - Place a picture or favorite toy in the casket or in the grave
 - Place flowers on the grave
 - Complete a project that the children were working on with the loved one before the death occurred

- **Keep the memory alive** — Reassure your children that their loved one remains in your hearts and in your memories.

- **Remain open to talking about your loved one and the subject of death in general** — There is no inappropriate time or place to talk about death and dying.

- **Remember your own needs** — Be sensitive to your own feelings and needs, and take care of yourself as you guide your children through their grief.

"Only people who avoid love can avoid grief. The point is to learn from grief and remain vulnerable to love."

— John Brantner

bringing comfort to each day

Healing Through Grief

Dear Friend,

Sharp HospiceCare understands that, when a loved one dies, the family continues to need long-term care and support. That's why we will be here for you throughout your first year of bereavement.

Healing Through Grief is a monthly newsletter which will keep you informed about Sharp HospiceCare's bereavement support program and how it can help you throughout your grieving process. In each of the 13 monthly issues, you will find information about loss and grief, and what to expect during your journey along with proven strategies for coping. You will find suggestions and information that will help validate your feelings and normalize many of the reactions you may experience. You may be asked to challenge societal myths or time-honored expectations about grief in order to help you heal.

Getting through grief — not over or around it — means finding the courage and strength to lean into your pain. As a companion through your journey, Sharp HospiceCare offers many services to let you know you are not alone, from support groups to family and individual counseling. We're here to help. If you would like to talk about your loss, reactions or concerns, or if you have any questions about our services, call 1-800-681-9188 to speak to a bereavement counselor.

Sincerely yours,
The Bereavement Department of
Sharp HospiceCare

Reaching Out for Support

Great love brings great grief. Be thankful for both.

Even though grief is a normal, natural response to loss and death, many people are still unprepared for the depth of the pain they experience. People often hear messages that imply they "should be better by now" or "everyone experiences grief, and counseling isn't necessary."

So often, people don't reach out to others for support, thinking they should be able to handle their grief by themselves. In fact, you may have been convinced by others that you should be over your grief by now, even though it may only be a few weeks or months since the death. This can prove to be unhealthy, depriving you of the social support that is a necessary component of the healing process.

Some grievors even shut themselves off from others in their own families or from close friends, fearing that they may burden them or add to their pain. It is important to understand that grief shared is grief diminished, and grief heals best in a social context.



Grasp the hand of a trusted friend
Remember the joys of yesterday
Involve yourself in something new
Enjoy the fresh flowers of today
Visit the good, the bad, and the ugly but don't stay
Inspire someone and let them love you
Nurture yourself with caring and something enjoyable
Go forth to seek the summer surely to come

— Will Buxton
In memory of his wife, Ruth E. Buxton

Sharp HospiceCare strives to bring comfort to those working through the grieving process. Bereavement counselors provide a supportive, confidential environment for families and friends dealing with the loss of a loved one. To learn more about Sharp HospiceCare, including support groups, call 1-800-681-9188.

Grief: A Normal and Natural Response to Loss



Grief can be so painful and overwhelming that it can frighten and confuse you. Many people who suffer a loss worry about whether they are grieving in a normal and healthy way. The following are normal and natural reactions to losing a loved one:

- Tightness in the throat or heaviness in the chest
- Empty feeling in the stomach and loss (or gain) of appetite
- Restlessness and the desire to be active, but having difficulty concentrating
- Feeling as though the loss is not real and that it did not actually happen — this may include trying to find your loved one
- A sense of your loved one's presence, including expecting him/her to walk in the door at the usual time, hearing his/her voice or seeing his/her face
- Wandering aimlessly and forgetting to finish things you have started
- Difficulty sleeping and/or frequent dreams or visions of your loved one

- Assuming mannerisms or traits of your loved one
- Expressing guilt or anger over things that did or did not happen in your relationship
- Feeling intensely angry at your loved one for leaving you
- Sensitivity to talking about your feelings of loss because other people seem uncomfortable
- Needing to tell and retell the experience of your loved one's death
- Experiencing sudden mood changes over the slightest things, or without explanation
- Crying at unexpected times
- Feeling despair over beginning a life without your loved one

It is important for you to show emotion and talk with people when you need support. If you are concerned or worried about your reactions, or if you simply would like to talk with someone, please call a Sharp HospiceCare bereavement counselor at 1-800-681-9188.

Understanding Grief

Grieving is a natural healing process that moves slowly from the pain of loss to hope for the future. Although grieving has been studied, no one can understand your grief as well as you do. We encourage you not to compare your grief with the grief of others, although it may help you to know how others cope with their grief.

Coping With Grief

Cry — Your tears express your sense of loss and help you release built-up tensions. Crying is not a sign of weakness, but a way of cooperating with the natural healing process.

Recognize your body may react physically — You may experience appetite loss, overeating, sleeplessness, sexual difficulties, lack of energy, difficulty concentrating or other physical effects.

Take care of your own health — A well-balanced diet, fresh air, rest and physical activity can help your body heal. It is best to avoid drugs and alcohol because they can stop or delay the healing process. Use prescription medication sparingly and only under a doctor's care.

Allow time for the pain to lessen — After your loss, you may feel you have nothing to live for, and you may long for a release from the intense pain. Be assured that others have faced despair; in time, their pain has lessened and a sense of meaning and purpose has returned to their lives.



Share your feelings of regret — When your thoughts linger on past mistakes, real or imagined, you may find relief by expressing and discussing your regrets with other people. Eventually, you will be able to forgive yourself and release the troubling memories.

Grieving is a natural healing process. May you find comfort and companionship now and hope for the future.

Avoid bottling up anger — At times, you may feel intensely angry at the person who died or at family members, health care professionals or people who have been spared a similar loss. Expressing and sharing the anger in healthy ways can hasten the healing process.

Turn to faith — A loved one's death can challenge your faith or philosophy of life. Questioning your beliefs can be frightening, but it also can deepen and enrich your faith or philosophy.

Postpone major decisions — After the death of your loved one, you may face many practical decisions ranging from disposing of your loved one's belongings to determining your own future. Many people find it helpful to move slowly with these tasks and decisions. If possible, you may want to postpone major decisions for up to a year.

Plan holidays and special occasions carefully — Holidays, anniversaries and birthdays can be very stressful. Make sure you have the time and support you need to confront the feelings that the holidays raise so you can use these occasions to move your healing process forward.

Hospice Bereavement Services

Communication and acknowledgment of your feelings can help you and your family move through the grieving process. Sharp HospiceCare's bereavement counselors offer as much or as little support as you need.

Our bereavement services include:

- Professionally trained, caring, compassionate people who are here to listen to your concerns
- Education about the grief process to help prepare you for what you may experience during your own bereavement journey
- Encouragement to help you become involved when you are ready to seek out new support persons, groups and activities

Bereavement support can help you and your family move through the grieving process.

As part of our bereavement services, we encourage you to:

- Share your thoughts and ideas with others to help clarify the meaning and effects of your loss
- Discuss and express painful feelings such as sadness, anger and regret, to help reduce the intensity of those feelings and then endure them
- Reminisce about your loved one to help enrich and deepen your understanding of the relationship you shared
- Join others at a variety of support groups
- Participate in our counseling programs

For more information about our services, call a Sharp HospiceCare bereavement counselor at 1-800-681-9188.

