

## HOW TO HELP CHILDREN COPE WITH TRAUMA/GRIEF

1. **Listen** – Provide opportunities for children to talk and express whatever they are feeling and thinking.
2. **Be supportive and non-judgmental** – Let children have their own reactions. Don't tell children what they should or should not feel.
3. **Support children in expressing feelings, verbally and non-verbally** – Talking, crying, drawing, writing and playing are all helpful ways to process reactions. Children will often work through their feelings through play and may re-enact the death, trauma, funeral, etc. with playmates, dolls and other toys. This is a normal and healthy way for children to heal.
4. **Be honest and provide accurate information appropriate to the child's ability to understand and wish to know** – In order to cope, children need to trust that we will be honest with them. The unknown and the imagined can be much more terrifying than the truth.
5. **Be patient** – Realize that this will take time. Children may take longer than adults to resolve trauma and grief. Their processing of it may be intermittent. They may need to ask the same questions over and over.
6. **Share your feelings** – It is okay for children to know that you are human and have feelings, too, but don't overburden your children with your anxieties. Make sure you take care of yourself and have good support from other adults.
7. **Provide affection and reassurance regarding safety issues** – Let your children know that they are loved and that the adults in their lives will do their best to keep them safe. Children may temporarily need extra safety measures: i.e., sleeping in your room, leaving lights on, etc. You may want to say, "We will do this for a while and then get back to normal."
8. **Maintain order, security and stability in your children's lives** – Children need regular routines and structure to continue as much as possible.
9. **Give choices so that children have a sense of control and participation** – Ask: What would help you feel safe? Do you want to go to the memorial service?
10. **Memorialize** – Light candles. Create a scrapbook or memory book. Write letters to the person who has died. Ritual helps us heal.

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