

Talking To A Grieving Child: A Guide for Classroom Teachers

From Living with Grief: Children, Adolescents, and Loss, edited by Kenneth J. Doka

Be simple and straightforward.

A simple statement such as, "I'm sorry your Mom died," is much more effective and heartfelt than a long, fruitless attempt to comfort. Avoid euphemisms and use a normal tone of voice.

Listen and respect the child's feelings and fears.

Allow the child the right to his or her grief. You will not make children feel better by denying their feelings. Instead, allow them a safe place to talk. Help them identify people who can help them.

Be patient with repetition.

As they tell the story of their loss, it helps make it more real.

Be sensitive to the child's feelings of being different.

Extend attention carefully. Many children will resent being singled out. Be aware of classroom activities, such as creating gifts for mothers or fathers, that can accentuate loss and feelings of isolation. Such projects can be easily reframed as creating a gift for a special person.

Give the child a sense of control.

In extending support, give the child options on how you can best help.

Recognize that grief can affect schoolwork.

Grief not only affects the ways children feel but the way they think and behave. They may need a little more time or support during this time period. You may have to help them set priorities and solve any difficulties that may arise as their family copes with loss. At the same time, recognize that children do have a need for a constant sense of structure, as their own lives may feel more chaotic in the aftermath of this loss.

Watch for manifestations of problems and refer if necessary.

Students exhibiting problems such as accidents, substance abuse, truancy, self-destructive behaviors, apathy, aggressiveness, delinquency, or significant changes in behavior or performance ought to be referred to a mental health professional. **The Amelia Center [(205) 251-3430]** offers free, confidential individual grief counseling.

About The Amelia Center

The Amelia Center is a Birmingham, AL based non-profit organization that serves as a comprehensive community grief-counseling center. The Amelia Center is a support service of Children's Health System and is a United Way of Central Alabama agency. The Amelia Center provides individual and family grief counseling services at no charge to individuals. Our services also include loss-specific facilitated grief support groups, Critical Incident Stress Management response teams that serve schools throughout the state of Alabama when there has been a death, and we offer a variety of training and workshops in the area of bereavement and loss-related topics.

For additional information about The Amelia Center, please visit our website at www.ameliacenter.org or call our office at (205) 251-3430.