



GriefCare for Families
Module 4: Caregiving after a loss
Topic 6: Strengthening support for grieving children

Confidence increases when your expectations are realistic. It can be hard to lower your expectations for parenting and caregiving after a loss because you know your child needs you.

Bereavement is a time when you can and should have help and support. You can get this support from friends, family and/or professionals. The important thing is to get what you need and to be open to receiving it. Check out the resources in Module 7 of this program.

There are many excellent places to find support grieving families. Message our team if you want to discuss this. It's often difficult for adults to ask for help but it can be an important part of the process of building your confidence in being an effective parent of a grieving child.

Your support team

We all need connections to other people and we sometimes need support and help. If you are grieving and you have children who are also grieving, you'll likely need some help.

For most adults it's not so easy to accept help from others. Most of us find it's more comfortable to be on the giving than the receiving end of support. This is very natural, but there are times when it is important to let others help.

A good way to get support from others is to think about what you and your child need and to decide who can best support you. You can then orchestrate the way you get this help.

For example, if you find you are often highly emotional in certain situations or at certain times of the day, you might want someone to step in to be with your child during those times. This can give you a break from worrying about how emotional you might be with your child and allow you to honor your own grief.

Some parents and caregivers find it helpful to contact a grief support organization. You may want to find a grief organization in your community so that you and your child can connect with others who are also grieving who you can talk to and be with at times.

There are no rules about who provides support. The important thing is to be open to getting support. It will help you and your child for you to actively organize a support team.

Your role in supporting your family

Getting help does not mean you are helpless. There are many things you can do to take care of your bereaved child. You can help them understand what happened. You can

reassure them that they are still ok, even if they don't feel like it. You can support their desire to stay connected to their friends and you can give them hope for the future.

Other things you can do to support your child in their bereavement are to share your experience and listen to theirs. Be a role model. Show them that you can accept the pain of grief and still be ok, that you can experience pain and also have times when you set it aside. You can accept what happened, honor the person who died, and rebuild your lives together in a way that means the future can still be bright.

A useful way to think about bereavement is to imagine that it is like a physical injury. Consider how you would feel if you and your children were in an accident in which you were injured and they were too. Imagine that your leg was broken. You would know that you couldn't walk and you would accept that. You would probably have confidence that your leg would heal and would try not to do things that would prolong the process. You would get help to make sure your children's needs were met in the meantime.

If you broke your leg, you would not stop being a parent, and you would recognize your limitations and not criticize yourself for not being able to walk.

With your leg in a cast you would not be fully functional. Both you and your children would need help from friends, family or other caregivers. Professionals might help you understand the injury and how to best care for it. During the time it takes to heal, you may need help with household chores or driving or things like bathing your children. As much as you would want to take care of your children, there are things you couldn't do without help until your own injury healed.

Having limitations is not the same as being helpless. There are also things you could still do perfectly well – even with a broken leg. You could talk to your children or read to them. You could sing and draw and tell them stories. You could take charge and organize their lives and orchestrate the contributions of the helpers.

Even with a broken leg you could help your children understand what happened. You could reassure them that even though you were injured your family is still ok. You could find ways to play together while you are healing and give them hope for fun and satisfying things in the future.

You could also help your children by sharing your experience and asking about theirs. You could listen closely and help them feel loved and cared for. You could be a role model, accepting your pain and difficulty functioning as you gradually rebuild your strength.

Thinking about loss in this way can help you decide how best to parent your grieving children. You have sustained a painful psychological injury and you need time to heal. While you are healing you can still be a parent but there are limitations to your ability to fully meet your children's needs. You and your children will need help from others. That's very natural.