



GriefCare for Families
Module 5: Caregiving after a loss
Topic 2: Helping children understand grief

It's hard for children to understand what it means that someone has died. Depending on their age, they may not know what the word death means. Even when they do know the basics, it's difficult for them to comprehend the reality of death. It may be challenging to understand the permanence of the loss. Especially with younger children, you may need to repeatedly explain that your deceased friend or family member is not coming back.

It can also be hard for children to understand their own reactions to the loss. Parents and caregivers can help by naming grief. You can help your child understand the different feelings they are having and share your own feelings and thoughts. It may be helpful to explore the thoughts your children are having about why and how the person died. Encourage your children to talk about their thoughts and memories of their special person.

Parents and caregivers can help children express and understand their grief by playing together, talking together or doing things together. Children might be better able to talk after they have an opportunity to play outside and get some meaningful exercise. Emotions are usually less intense when your child is relaxed after getting exercise. Children also might be better able to express themselves through art or music. They may be more inclined to talk when you are doing a project together, for example, cooking or gardening, playing a game, or straightening up the house.

You can help your child communicate about what they are thinking and feeling about the loss by telling them something about your own feelings and thoughts. The better you understand your own grief, the better you will be able to do this. Support your child in feeling safe and open to communication by telling them you love them. You might tell them you are sad, but you will be ok and you can still take care of them. Your children are also feeling sad about the loss and they will be ok, too.