



# helping children cope with *grief*

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James Baldwin says, "You cannot fix what you will not face." During times of loss and uncertainty, it is especially important to take care of yourself, even as you take care of others. When losing a loved one, there is not a magic wand or an amount of duct tape to make the pain disappear. Grief is one of the toughest emotions to go through as it takes a very real toll on the body, mind, and spirit. One minute sadness fills your heart, and you feel full of pain, possibly anger, and/or guilt. Then, the next minute passes and you may find yourself laughing about a funny memory that you had with the person who has passed. Everyone grieves differently too, especially children who may not understand what death means or how to appropriately handle their emotions. As we face and embrace our grief, we can begin to repair our broken heart and develop strategies to cope with our new reality.

(Western Reserve Grief Services, 2021)

Be the things you *loved* most about the *people* who are *gone*.



## Ten Strategies to Try When the Grief Tide Rolls In

- Remember to breathe** – When we get tense, we tend to hold our breath or have short, shallow [breaths](#). First, notice that you are breathing and then try slowing it down, breathing more into your belly and exhaling a little longer than you inhale.
- Move your body** – This does not have to be a sport or new membership to the gym, this could be taking a walk, do a push up, dance, or practice [yoga](#).
- Call or text a friend** – Pick ones who know how to show up and listen or will at least send you a cute animal video.
- Write it out** – Forget spelling and grammar, [write](#) out all your thoughts and feelings on paper.
- Get messy** – [draw](#), [paint](#), [collage](#) – Sometimes grief does not have words and [art](#) can be a great way to get out the feelings that do not [always](#) make sense.
- Make room for whatever feelings are coming up** – If you try to push them away, they will probably just push back harder and make matters worse. Feelings change and they will not last forever. Grief has no timeline, but it really does change over time.
- Be kind – to yourself** – You know that voice that sometimes gives you a really hard time? It might sound strange, but you can talk to that criticizing voice and ask it to quiet [down](#).
- Be a good friend – to yourself** – Experiment with telling yourself you can do this, even if you do not know what you are doing. You might be feeling emotions you have never had before or doing things for the first time and all of it is happening without the person who passed. Take a moment to acknowledge how new and different this is and tell yourself, "Even if I am overwhelmed, I will figure this out."
- Ask for help** – We know, this one can be hard and scary to do. Keep it simple and remember that people usually want to help, they are just waiting to be asked. [Help](#) others in time of need too.
- Take time to celebrate whatever is going on** – When you are grieving it can be hard to make space for feeling good. You might feel guilty if you find yourself laughing or having a [good](#) time. Taking a break from grief does not mean you love or miss the person any less. It does mean that you are healing. Have an attitude of [gratitude](#).

## How to Help Students Cope with Loss



- Encourage students to ask questions** – respond with "what do you think" and be a good listener.
- All students are different** – do not assume that every student in a certain age group understands death in the same way or with the same feelings.
- Grief is not predictable** – allow adequate time for the child to work through the grief process.
- Do not lie or tell half-truths** – children will see through false information, be as honest and open as their age and comprehension allows.
- Encourage students to speak with their parents/guardian, school counselor or social worker** – allow the student to see the mental health professionals on campus.

## Additional Resources

Resource	Description	Grade Level	Educator	Family
<a href="#">Friends of Citrus and the Nature Coast</a>	Helping People – Healing Lives	All	X	X
<a href="#">Grief Out Loud</a>	Grief through Father's Day	All	X	X
<a href="#">Grief Out Loud</a>	Grief through Mother's Day	All	X	X

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Providing support and creating opportunities through targeted services for students and families while maximizing student potential and creating a safe, positive learning environment.

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