What Can I Do To Help Myself Deal with Loss and Grief?

There are certain tasks that help people adjust to a loss. Every person will complete these tasks in his or her own time and in his/her own way. The below suggestions may help you.

**Understanding: facing the reality of death**
1. Take the time to talk about death and loss as you experience it in everyday life. Tell your “story” of the death of your loved one.
2. Find someone who will listen -- a parent, a trusted adult, a health professional, or counselor.
3. Find someone who will listen long after you think you should be moving on, as you will revisit this grief in some way throughout your life.
4. Ask questions about death and loss.

**Identifying and expressing feelings**
1. Notice how other people talk about feelings.
2. Trying to identify and express your feelings.
3. Try one of these activities:
   - writing about feelings
   - talking to someone about feelings
   - snuggling
   - arts and crafts
   - physical activity like dance, martial arts.

**Commemorating/honoring the person who died**
1. Create an ongoing list and put it on the refrigerator: “Things I remember about _____” and have family members contribute to it when they want.
2. Write a story, poem, prayer, or song for the loved one.
3. Create a memory book or box with photographs and/or items.
4. Plan a visit to the cemetery with your family. Take flowers or a balloon.

**Going on - not “getting over.”**
1. Create a ritual to say good-bye to the loved one.
2. Create a collage of the feelings that make you happy to be alive.
3. Express your mixed feelings about “going on”.
4. Develop rituals around anniversary dates for remembering the loved one.

Information for Parents on How to Help Your Child/Teen Cope with Stressful Events or Uncertainty

The most important thing that you can do to help your child/teen cope with stressful events is to remain as calm as possible when you are with him or her. Children pick up on their parents’ anxiety very quickly. If they sense you are anxious, they will be anxious as well. Therefore, if you are having difficulty coping with a stressful situation, it is a good idea to reach out to resources to help yourself, such as friends, family members, support groups, clergy, or healthcare professionals. Taking care of your own stress so that you are less anxious will help your child to stay calm.

Recognize Signs of Anxiety/Stress in Your Child

- Children and teens typically regress when stressed. That is, they go back to doing things they did when they were younger to help themselves feel more comfortable and secure. For instance, a preschool child may go back to sucking his/her thumb and a school-age child or teen may act more dependent upon the parents or have difficulty separating from them.

- Other common signs of anxiety in young children include: restlessness/hyperactivity, temper tantrums, nightmares, clinging behaviors, difficulty separating, and distress around new people.

- Common signs of anxiety in older school-age children and teens include: difficulty concentrating and sleeping, anger, restlessness/hyperactivity, worry, and physical complaints, such as stomachaches or headaches.

- At age 9 years, children realize that death is permanent. Fears of death or physical violence and harm are often common after this age.

- Signs and symptoms of anxiety such as these are usually healthy, temporary coping strategies that help your child to deal with stress. However, if these symptoms persist for several weeks or interfere with your child’s functioning, talk to your child’s primary healthcare provider about them. Your child’s doctor or nurse practitioner will know what to do to help.

- Be honest and give age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate explanations about stressful events when they occur.

- For young children (under 8 years of age), only provide answers to questions they are asking and do not overwhelm them with too much detail. Use language that young children can understand. Do not expose young children to visual images in the newspapers or on television that may be terrifying.

- It may be easier for young children to express how they are feeling by asking them to talk about how their stuffed animals or dolls are feeling or thinking.

- Help children and teens to express how they are feeling about what they have seen or heard. If children have difficulty verbally expressing their feelings, ask them to make a drawing about how they are feeling. Older school-age children and teens can benefit from writing about how they feel.

- Ask your child/teen, “What is the scariest or worst thing about this event for you?” or “What is worrying you the most right now?” and take time to really listen to what he or she has to say.

- Reassure children that they did nothing wrong to cause what happened. Toddlers and preschool children, especially, feel guilty when stressful events happen.

- Tell children and teens that what they are feeling (e.g., anger, anxiety, and helplessness) is normal and that others feel the same way.
• Decrease anxiety in your child by reassuring him or her that you will get through this together. Emphasize that adults are doing everything possible to take care of the stressful situation and that he or she is not alone.

• Help your child/teen to release tension by encouraging daily physical exercise and activities.

• Continue to provide as much structure to your child’s schedules and days as possible.

• Recognize that added stress/anxiety usually increases psychological or physical symptoms (e.g., headaches or abdominal pain) in children/teens that are already anxious or depressed.

• Young children who are depressed typically have different symptoms (e.g., restlessness, excessive motor activity) from those experienced by older school-age children or teens who are depressed (e.g., sad or withdrawn affect; anger, difficulty sleeping or eating; talking about feeling hopeless).

• Use this opportunity as a time to work with your child on their coping skills (e.g., relaxation techniques, positive reappraisal, and prayer). Children watch how their parents cope and often take on the same coping strategies. Therefore, showing your child that you use positive coping strategies to deal with stress will help him or her to develop healthy ways of coping.

• Be sure to have your child or teen seen by a healthcare provider or mental health professional for signs or symptoms of persistent anxiety, depression, recurrent pain, persistent behavioral changes, or if he or she has difficulty maintaining routine schedules.

• Remember that stressful times can be an opportunity to build future coping and life skills as well as to bring your family closer together.
What is Grief
Grief is a term used for the many feelings and behaviors we experience when we are faced with loss. The loss may be from the death of a significant other, relocation, or divorce. Grief is a normal reaction to loss and change. Children do experience grief as they have feelings and are aware of losses. However, children grieve differently based upon age and personality.

What Are Some of the Feelings Children Might Have
Children may have one more of these feelings: abandonment of the feelings of being left alone, anxiety, confusion, anger, guilt, fear, body distress, rejection, sadness, and panic. It is important to help children identify, label, and label about these different feelings.

What Is the Effect of Age on Children Who Are Grieving
Children’s development and age will have an impact on how they think about deal and the loss.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Reaction</th>
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<tr>
<td>Infants and young Children (0 - 2 years)</td>
<td>React the way they see their caretakers react. They may resist change and separation from caretakers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preschool aged children (3 - 5 years)</td>
<td>Do not accept death as permanent. They will often ask when the deceased person will return. They may react primarily to separation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Young school-aged children (5 - 9 years)</td>
<td>Accept that death is permanent, but not universal. Question about why their loved one had to die and not someone else is common.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Older school-aged children (9 - 12 years)</td>
<td>See death as permanent and universal. They take death personally and understand they also will die someday. They are interested in concrete details about death, such as funeral and burial.</td>
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<td>Older children (12 years and older)</td>
<td>Have started to reach an adult understanding of death. They spend a significant amount of time thinking about death and trying to understand what happens after death. They have very intense emotions during this time.</td>
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As children go through the different developmental stages, they re-grieve the loss and try to understand their loss in new ways. This can be confusing and difficult for adults.
What are Some of the Behaviors You May See in Your Child Who Is Grieving
Children will normally act out some of their feelings. In a supportive way, let children know what behavior you see that has changed. Continue to expect that the child will function. It is important to see limits on destructive behavior should disappear.

Temper outbursts, panic attacks, regression or less mature behavior, disinterest in usual activities, increased dependency on adults, stomachaches and headaches, silence, model child behaviors or trying to be “the perfect child”, withdrawal, adult role behaviors or taking on adult responsibilities, over-activity.

What Is The Difference Between Grief and Mourning
Grief can be thought of as the internal experience about a loss. Mourning and bereavement are words that people use about the outward signs of grief. The goal of dealing with children who are grieving is to help them talk about how they feel.

What is the Difference Between Grief and Depression
The symptoms of depression and grief are similar. If you have any concerns about how your child is adjusting to the loss or whether your child has slipped into depression... TALK TO SOMEONE! People that can help you are nurses, doctors, nurse practitioners, school counselors, and psychologists.

How do Children Grieve Differently than Adults
Adults often feels sad over an extended period of time, whereas children’s grief tends to come and go. Children’s expression of grief may flare up and then be over relatively quickly as they move on to the next activity. This “volcano”-like mourning, though different from that experienced by adults and possibly uncomfortable for adults, is a normal grief pattern for children.
Information For Teens About Coping with Loss and Grief

What is Grief
Grief is the term used for many feelings and behaviors we experience when we are faced with loss. The loss may be from the death of a significant other, relocation, or divorce. Grief is a natural and normal reaction to loss and change. Teens do experience grief as they have feelings and are aware of losses. However, everyone experiences grief differently.

What Are Some of the Feelings I May Have
You may have 1 or more of these feelings: abandonment or feeling of being left alone, anxiety, confusing, anger, guilt, fear body, distress, rejection, sadness, and panic. It is important to try to identify, name, and talk about these different feelings with your parent, a health professional, or counselor.

Some Teens Who Are Grieving May Notice Some of These Behaviors
Temper outbursts, panic attacks, regression or less mature behavior, disinterest in usual activities, increased dependency on adults, stomachaches and headaches, silence, trying to be “the perfect child”, withdrawal, taking on adult activities, over-activity. If you notice any of these changes in your behavior, again share this with your parent, a health professional, or counselor.

What Is the Difference between Grief and Depression
The symptoms of depression and grief are similar. If you have any concerns about how you are adjusting to your loss or wondering if you depressed........ TALK TO SOMEONE! People that can help you are nurses, doctors, nurse practitioners, school counselors, and psychologists.

How do Teens Grieve Differently than Adults
Adults often feel sad over an extended period of time, whereas a teen’s grief tends to come and go. Your expression of grief may flare up and then be over quickly as you move on to the next activity. This “rollercoaster” feeling, though different from that experiences by adults and possibly uncomfortable for adults, is a normal grief pattern for teens.