



How to...

DID YOU KNOW?
The Child Mind Institute was founded in New York City in 2009.



Honor the loss of a loved one

It's OK to feel many emotions when someone you love dies. Here is some advice to help you cope.

When you love someone, it can hurt very much when they die. That powerful feeling is called grief, which is a natural response to the loss of someone we care about. For many children, the loss might be a beloved family member, such as a grandparent. Many people also feel grief after the death of a pet. Everyone reacts to loss and grief differently, and no response is wrong. Here are some steps you can take to understand grief and to cherish the memory of someone you loved.

Expect a range of emotions

It's normal to feel sad after someone dies, but many people initially experience another feeling. "Disbelief is a very common first reaction, as if the loss can't even be real," says Katie Peinovich, a clinical social worker at the Child Mind Institute in New York City. Sometimes, kids can also feel surprised or embarrassed by their emotions. "There is a wide range in how comfortable kids feel with emotions, particularly strong emotions," adds Peinovich. Kids may wonder if there is something wrong with

them if they don't experience the feelings they were expecting. Some children may cry, and others may not. And that's OK, says Peinovich.

Find a trusted person to talk to

Children might be nervous to discuss a loved one who has died. But it's important to have someone to talk to. Peinovich says kids can think about who they trust with sharing their feelings. This could be a person at home or a counselor or teacher at school. Talking to good friends can be helpful too.

Resume activities if you wish

After a loss, one of the hardest transitions for a grieving person may be returning to their usual routine. It can feel strange for kids to go back to school and participate in their extracurricular activities. But picking back up with their everyday schedule doesn't mean kids don't miss their loved one or pet, and it's OK for anyone who is still grieving to do these things, says Peinovich. "Getting back into routines is important and can be helpful in moving through a loss," she says.

Remember that grief has no timeline

You might wonder when you will start to feel better. This answer is different for everyone, says Peinovich. If the loss happened within the past year, upcoming holidays that will be the "first" without the person or pet may be particularly sad. There may even be some guilt for feeling excited about the holidays. "It is possible to be both sad and happy at the same time," Peinovich says. If grief symptoms, like irritability, poor concentration, anxiety, or difficulty sleeping persist six months or more after the loss, a child may need their family's help to seek out a professional they can talk to.

Honor their memory

You can remember a person or pet in many ways. One can be doing something they loved, such as making one of their favorite family recipes. You could also talk to your family about planting a tree in their honor. Another idea: Put some items that remind you of them in a memory box. For a family member, it could be a photo and an item they wore. For a pet, it could include their collar and favorite toy. You are also welcome to use the form at right to record your memories as a special keepsake.



Plant a tree in their memory.