

Ideas For Helping You Heal

Children: 6-12

- **Remember the person who died.** It's okay to think about and talk about the person who died. Use their name and remember things you did together.
- **Let yourself feel whatever you feel.** It's okay to feel sad, mad, scared, or even happy. No feelings are wrong or bad.
- **Cry.** Crying isn't just for babies. Crying is for everyone - young or old - whoever feels sad. Crying helps your body let out its sadness. Drink water when you're done. Your body needs it!
- **Find a grief "hide-out"** or a private spot that you can go to when you are sad or want to be alone. When you're in your "hide-out" you can cry, write, draw or just sit and think. Let a grown-up know where it is so they don't get worried.
- **Draw out your feelings.** Try to put your grief into artwork - draw, paint, mold clay, paste together a collage, whatever you like to do.
- **Write a letter to the person who died.** Write down what you'd like to tell them and then you can read it to a grown-up. Bring it to the cemetery and read it to the person who died, or you can save it and read it later to yourself.
- **Make a Memory Book/Box.** A memory book/box is where you can put pictures, drawings, souvenirs or whatever you have that helps you remember the person who died. Then you can look at it whenever you are missing them.
- **Hold on to something that belonged to the person who died.** Sometimes having something from the person who died makes us feel better. A shirt, toy, book or something that reminds you of happy times together.
- **Do something you are good at.** Running, singing, making PB&J sandwiches. It will make you feel good and you might even have fun!
- **Do something the person who died liked to do.** Play cards? Dance? Eat chocolate cake? Sit outside and look at the sky? You might have fun and have time to think of happy memories.

For Teens:

- **Try to show grace.** People will say and do some things that are not very appropriate. They're not doing it to make you angry or hurt but because they don't know what else to say. Take a deep breath and try to ignore it.
- **Write a letter to the person who died.** There was probably a lot you wanted to tell them before they died and you didn't get the chance. Do it now. Tell them everything you're thinking, feeling, and forgot to say before they died. Read it to them & imagine they are there to listen.
- **Find a safe adult to talk to.** Someone who is a good listener. You may not feel like talking immediately but will in the future. This could be a teacher, grandparent, youth leader, neighbor, or a counselor.
- **Don't be afraid to talk about the person who died** or to use their name. It helps to remember them because they were important to you.
- **Buy a candle.** Light it when you want to remember. Buy a color, fragrance or something that reminds you of that person.
- **Make a memory book or box** that you can put either pictures or things into so you can look at them whenever you like. You could also do a virtual photo album or video with music and memories.
- **Find something that reminds you of the person who died.** You can put it in your pocket so it's there when you want it. A rock, charm, special coin, medallion etc.
- **Find a special place you can be alone** to cry, write, shout, think or just remember. Let someone else know where your place is just in case there is an emergency or they need to get a hold of you.

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- **When your emotions are especially raw** and you're feeling angry, use that energy to go for a walk, run, workout, dance, punch a bag or something that helps you unwind. We're all different and handle grief in our own way. It's important to find safe ways to release these emotions. Writing your angry thoughts on slips of paper and burning them, yelling your angry feelings and then throwing a rock into a pond or river, or writing your thoughts on a balloon and then letting them go are all options.
- **Turn on some music!** It speaks to the soul and can help you work through some of your feelings. Make sure the lyrics are uplifting and don't make you feel worse. A good dance session always helps.
- **Don't be afraid to cry.** Crying is your bodies way of releasing your pain. It's normal and people who say it's only for babies really have their facts wrong! Drink plenty of water because grieving is hard work!

Parents:

- **Don't expect your spouse to be your strength.** This is one time you're both hurting so you can't expect them to meet your needs. Be kind and forgiving. They ARE struggling. Their grief may just look different than yours.
- **Find a neutral party** that knows both of you and that you completely trust to monitor you. Make an agreement that if they see you dealing with substance or alcohol issues or needing emotional help you will listen and take the suggested advice. Taking care of yourself early is extremely important.
- **Don't be surprised if you find that you have changed.** That might lead to different friends or your thoughts regarding others. That's okay and totally normal.
- **You may struggle with how to introduce yourself,** discussing your family, or how and when to bring up the fact you've lost a child. It's okay to take a pass or just say your name. But the best option is to practice what you'll say ahead of time so you're prepared. You have not lost your identity! You are still a parent, even if your child is no longer living with you or has passed.
- **Cooking, current events, politics** and other things may become unimportant. That's okay. With time, you'll start to take an interest in these again.
- **Pretend each of you have a "grief card".** The grief card, like a credit card, should be used carefully and sparingly. On a day you just can't get dressed, cook dinner, or go to a social event, tell your spouse you're using the grief card and with no questions asked you get a pass. Some other examples of what to use the card for are a day shopping, taking a day off from all work, or staying a night in a hotel. One husband felt lonely and used his grief card to get a dog, no questions asked. This must be used with much love and trust. You may want to set up a specific number of uses or a time frame so it is not abused. Since all of us process grief differently this allows us to meet our individual needs in a safe way.

Everyone:

- **Don't forget** to tell those important to you that you love them. - OFTEN
- **Remember** that human touch is very important so a hug, pat on the shoulder or rubbing the back may help others feel connected.
- **Mourning is hard work** and will affect everyone differently. That's normal. Take care of yourself, not only for you, but also for those who care about you.
- **Mourning takes time,** a long time. It's not something you get over, but with time, it will become a part of who you are. You will get through it and heal. Don't try to rush it. Find a way to keep their memory alive.

Some of these ideas were taken from books written by Alan D. Wolfelt, PH.D, C.T. We especially suggest "Healing Your Grieving Heart For Kids", "Healing A Teen's Grieving Heart" and "Finding the Words" (how to talk to children & teens about death, suicide, funerals, homicide, cremation, and end of life matters). We have these books available if you'd like to purchase them.