



Helping Kids & Teens Cope with Grief

Loneliness is very much a part of the grieving journey.

Grief is an inevitable part of life, but when it comes to children and teens, it can be particularly challenging for them to process and express their emotions. As a family member or caregiver, your role in supporting them through this difficult time is crucial. At the Austin Hatcher Foundation, we understand that grief can be an overwhelming experience, especially for families already dealing with the impacts of pediatric cancer. This blog aims to provide practical tips and insights to help you guide your child or teen through their grief journey, ensuring they feel supported and understood.

Be Available

Your presence is one of the most powerful tools you can offer a grieving child or teen. Be there for them—physically and emotionally—when they need you. Sometimes, just knowing they have someone to turn to can make a significant difference in their ability to cope.

Listen with Your Ears, Eyes, and Heart

Before you can effectively support your child or teen, it's important to confront and process your own grief. Children often take emotional cues from adults, so your ability to manage your grief can positively influence how they handle their own emotions.

Acknowledge that Grief is Messy and Painful

Grief is not a linear process, and it doesn't follow a set timeline. It's messy, unpredictable, and it hurts. Let your child or teen know that it's okay to feel a wide range of emotions, from sadness to anger, confusion, and everything in between.

The Power of Touch

Never underestimate the comfort of a simple hug or a hand to hold. Physical touch can often communicate compassion and understanding more effectively than words. It reminds your child or teen that they are not alone in their sorrow.

Concentration May Be Challenging

Grief can make it difficult for kids and teens to concentrate on schoolwork, chores, or even daily routines. Be patient and set realistic expectations for their behavior and performance during this time.

Provide Resources for Yourself and Your Child/Teen

There are many resources available to help both you and your child navigate the grieving process. Books, counseling, support groups, and online resources can offer valuable support and guidance.

Face Your Own Feelings of Grief

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Encourage Expression of Grief Through Creative Outlets

Grief can be overwhelming and confusing, especially for young people who may not yet have the vocabulary to express their emotions fully. Encourage them to use creative outlets like sports, art, dance, or music to express their grief. These activities provide a healthy and constructive way for them to process their emotions.

Do Not Isolate or Insulate Kids/Teens from Grief

It's a natural instinct to want to shield your child from pain, but isolating them from the reality of loss can do more harm than good. Grief is a normal and natural response to death. Allowing them to experience and work through their grief will help them grow stronger and more resilient.

Respect Their Individual Grief Process

Everyone grieves in their own way and in their own time. Respect your child or teen's unique process, even if it looks different from your own or that of other family members. It's important to honor their personal journey through grief.

Maintain Daily Routines

While it's important to allow space for grief, maintaining daily routines can provide a sense of stability and normalcy for your child or teen. School, tasks, chores, and schedules offer a comforting structure during a time of emotional upheaval.

Understand That Grief is a Lifelong Journey

Grief doesn't have an expiration date. As your child or teen grows and matures, they may revisit their grief and experience it in new ways. They won't "get over" the death, but they can learn to live with it and find ways to grow through the pain.