






Empowering Pediatric Health Professionals

Strategies to Help Families Cope with the Death of a Child

After the death of a child, grieving families need support from their pediatric team, but it may feel difficult to know what to say or how to help in those moments. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) 2023 clinical report *Supporting the Family After the Death of a Child or Adolescent* outlines key communication strategies pediatricians can use to support families navigate their path forward after such a devastating loss. Using a combination of short and long-term support strategies, health care professionals can help families heal and thrive.

-  **Visit Your Patient** – if your patient is seriously ill or dying, make the time to visit them at the emergency department or pediatric intensive care unit. This helps families feel supported and acts as a tangible demonstration of your care.
-  **Lean Into Compassion** – while there are no words to alleviate the immediate trauma of a child passing, compassion is a universal language of care that you can express by taking the time to listen and provide emotional support to a family. Mute devices and use eye contact and appropriate physical touch during these difficult conversations to demonstrate your undivided attention.
-  **Identify Cultural & Religious Traditions** – families may grieve the death of a child differently based on their cultural and religious background. Work to identify any significant cultural or religious needs as they relate to your patient's family to support the grieving and burial practices.
-  **Follow Up with the Family** – grieving the loss of a child is not momentary, it is consistent state of being that requires long-term acknowledgement and support. After the death of a patient, consider ongoing correspondence by connecting with the family at special times like the child's birthday, the anniversary of their death, or on special holidays.
-  **Screen Family Members** – Caregivers may be overwhelmed with their own grief and less able to tend to their other children's needs, but you are in a unique position to screen for grief and provide better support to siblings affected by their loved one's passing. Sibling reactions can include anger outbursts, sleep disruption, behavioral issues, and social withdrawal. If you identify any of these symptoms, make the caregiver aware and find resources and referrals to support healthier expressions of grief.



Build Your Loss & Grief Support Toolbox
Read the full 2023 AAP clinical report to learn more about:

Incidence of Pediatric Death | Grief & Bereavement | Survivor Consideration | Culture & Community Considerations | Pediatric Roles in Grief