

# Navigating Grief After the Loss of a Child

## Helpful Information on Grief and Coping Strategies for Families

While every person grieves in their own way, these are some of the emotions that parents, grandparents, siblings, and other family members often feel:

- Crying, sadness, and low moods
- Restless sleep that leaves you feeling tired the next day
- Not wanting to eat, or eating a lot more than usual
- Flash anger that seems to come out of nowhere
- Fights that break out when grief causes you to criticize, attack or blame others
- Guilt that your child was taken, but you're still alive
- Loneliness and isolation, even if you spend time with people throughout the day
- Clinging to your other children and fearing for their health and safety
- The feeling that your life will never be the same again

## How to Support Your Other Children After Sibling Loss

Families with more than one child may find it even more difficult to manage their grief. There are four things you must be clear about to help your other children deal more effectively with losing their sibling.

**1 - Death is final.** Their loved one will not come back, even though they may wish for that—or feel angry that it can't happen.

**2 - Their sibling is not suffering.** Knowing that all life processes end when someone dies will protect your kids from the concern that they're cold, hungry or in pain.

**3 - Everything that lives will die someday.** If kids don't understand this, they might wonder if they—or even their sibling—did something wrong. This can lead to terrible guilt and shame.

**4 - People die when their bodies stop working.** If your kids know that their sibling's heart stopped or their bones broke in ways that couldn't heal, they will be better prepared to accept what happened. Simple, age-appropriate explanations can start with the fact that people of all ages, even kids, can and do die. This protects kids from imagining other causes, leaving them vulnerable to self-blame and fear.



## Three Ways to Help Manage Your Own Grief

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**Let your feelings flow** - there's no way you can get through this without losing control of your emotions from time to time. You may spend whole days crying, feeling guilty or wondering if life has any meaning at all. Knowing these feelings are natural may help you avoid bottling them up, which can be harmful to your health.

**Expect people to say and do awkward things** - others may not know what helps and what hurts when someone has lost a child. They may go silent and start avoiding you or smother you with well-meaning suggestions. Some will say things meant to comfort you that actually make you feel furious, hurt, and alone. You can ignore these comments and actions without guilt. It's not your job to help other people feel better, so don't take it on.

**Accept help but set boundaries** - give yourself a break by letting others support you. This might mean letting others manage things like errands and household chores or taking all the sick days you're owed – even accepting PTO days donated by your work friends without shame or guilt. At the same time, if handling a few simple chores every day makes you feel better, say so.

## Your Health Still Matters

Grief can also cause physical pain that makes your body ache all over. Anxiety, depression, and even suicidal thoughts can happen while you're mourning a lost child. If you experience any of these feelings, it is crucial you reach out to your doctor immediately for assistance.

Contact a helpline if you or a loved one is experiencing mental health-related distress. They are confidential, free, and always open (24/7/365).

**Suicide and Crisis Lifeline** – call or text 988

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** 800-273-TALK

**Crisis Text Line** – text TALK or HOME to 741741

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** 800-273-TALK

**Safe2Help Illinois:** 844-4-SAFE-IL; Text SAFE2 (72332)

**Illinois CARES:** 800-345-9049



**Get Additional Guidance**

Scan the QR code or visit [HealthyChildren.org](https://HealthyChildren.org) to learn more.



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