

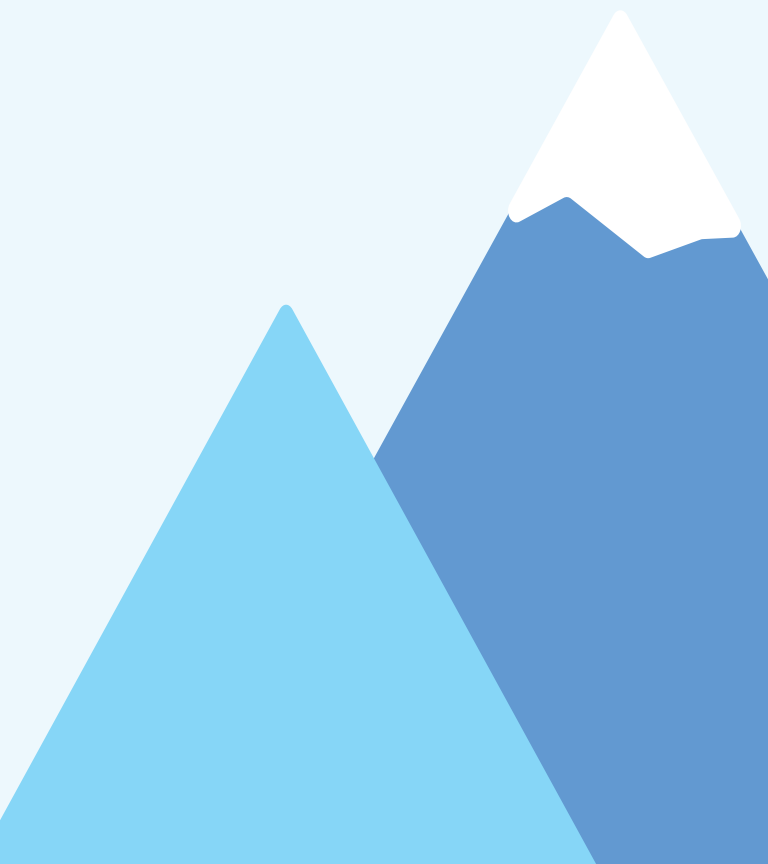
HIGHMARK

CARING PLACE 

finding hope in grief

Connecting with grieving
children and teens

Facing big
questions
together





Every child's grief journey is unique.

When someone close to a child dies, first listen with an open heart and mind. You will get a better understanding of their point of view.

Sometimes, big questions tumble out like tears. Some questions may be the ones you're having a hard time answering for yourself.

But you can approach questions big and small together. Because the best answer to each one is your loving presence and deep listening.

"In times of stress, the best thing we can do for each other is to listen with our ears and our hearts and to be assured that our questions are just as important as our answers."

— Fred Rogers,
Honorary Chairman
of the Caring Place

Responding to young children

“I know Daddy is dead, but when is he coming home?”

Young children won't grasp that death is permanent. You might need to explain things again and again. With calmness, patience, and persistence.

Go at their pace.

Children grieve in spurts. They'll engage with their feelings when ready. Let them come and go from grief, allowing room to just be kids. Revisiting grief is typical and helps them to make sense of what has happened. Support them without rushing.

**Try to understand their point of view.
Listen carefully when they need to talk.**

“If Mommy died, does that mean you're going to die too?”

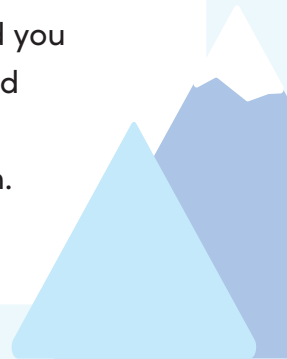
When children experience the death of someone close to them, they often fear that someone else they love will die.

You can't promise that you'll never die. But you can truthfully tell them that you plan to stay and take care of them until they grow up and can take care of themselves.

Soothe fear.

Children's questions can reflect their fears about death. For example, they may fear they caused the person to die.

Reassure them that they did not make the person die, and you can help them understand that the person who died didn't want to leave them.



Responding to teenagers

Be patient, listen, and share.
Create a safe space to ask questions.

For teens, grief can be overwhelming.

They know the impact of death and carry the loss intensely. In the midst of growing up and wanting independence, they're faced with navigating a new world without their loved one.

“What do I do now?”

“How can I stop hurting?”

Ask for their point of view. You might say, “That’s a hard question. We can figure it out together. What feels most important to you right now?”

“How can I cope with everyday stuff like school, friends, homework, or a job?”

Grief takes a lot of energy. They may find relief in sticking to routines or cutting back on activities. Encourage them to find safe people to talk to. Having understanding people around you helps with feeling overwhelmed.

“How do I deal with such strong feelings?”

Reassure your teen that all feelings are OK. Sadness, fear, frustration, guilt, and anger may arrive alone or together. Give them outlets to express their feelings.

They may prefer to talk to friends or not at all. Give them space and time. Let them know you will be there whenever they are ready to talk.



Scan to learn more about child development and grief.

Helping grieving children and families heal over a lifetime

Our mission is to create a world of compassionate communities where all people can find hope and healing after the death of a loved one. We provide grief support for families and individuals of all ages through peer groups, education, and advocacy.

Where to find us

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