

## **How Can I Help My Kids Grieve?**

Kids grieve differently than adults. There's a fluidity to their emotions, that can be freeing, and sometimes confounding for us, as grown-ups. They cry with passion and fervor over loss...the loss of a family member, friend, or pet. And then, five minutes later, they're up and wanting to play outside or be with friends. It's normal—and even healthy.

As adults, we want to give them opportunities to talk about their feelings when they're in them, and the space and freedom to not talk when they're not. I see many parents in my office who are worried that their children aren't grieving "enough." We need to remember they grieve *differently*. They grieve almost like they swim. They hold their breath and plunge into the depths of water, then splash to the surface for air. They do the same with their emotions. They need us to sit with them in their tears, scratch their backs, ask open-ended questions to help them talk. And then they need us to allow and even come up for air with them—to re-enter the world of play.

For girls, this can be particularly important. Girls can be as concerned, if not more concerned, about the feelings of family members as they are their own. Remember, girls are profoundly relational. They're wired in and tuned in to the emotions of those around them. And, if we're not careful, their gifts of intuition can cause them to be so tuned in to us that they fall out of tune with themselves.

Girls need to be given opportunities to talk. They need to see us grieve in small doses, to know that it's appropriate and healthy. But they need frequent reminders that they are not in charge of us...it is not their jobs to take care of us or our feelings in the midst of grief. It's God's. And He longs to wipe away every tear that all of us are freed up to cry in the midst of His great love.

Boys often need an outlet to channel the physicality of the emotion. They may need to work through intense sadness, confusion and anger by running, kicking or hitting something (pillows or a punching bag). Think about how often you've read stories or seen movies with boys screaming and yelling, only to end up crying or sobbing.

They also need empathy. They don't need us to correct their feelings. They need permission to ask questions, to doubt and to express whatever emotions rise to the surface as they are navigating loss. If you sense your son or daughter is stuck in his or her grief, talk with your pediatrician or consider a consultation with a trusted counselor who specializes in work with children and adolescents.

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