



The Grieving Heart

When encountered with a tragedy or death, many people become anxious, confused and ask questions. Truthfully, any kind of loss can be overwhelming, and may require some extra family or pastoral care, and for some grieving can be a long process. For parents of the grieving child the focus must look beyond their behavior, and to their heart.

Remember that children are concrete learners and handle grief differently than adults. You may see evidence of grief, like denial or anger in adults, but children tend to exhibit two main feelings: **insecurity and sorrow**.

Insecurity is fearful anxiety that occurs when we feel threatened or unsafe and this can be different for each child. One may have loud outburst, while another may become withdrawn or hide, especially in large gatherings. Some may not want to be alone or have a physical response like a stomachache.

Sorrow is a combination of emotions defined by a tragic personal loss which can be physically and emotionally debilitating. Physical signs may include a headache, stomachache, fatigue, and emotional concerns like excessive crying, anger, detachment, anxieties and others. For children, this can include any combination of these emotions, which can be exhausting for a family during the grieving process.

Responsive Guidelines for Parents:

1. **Reassure your child of your love and care often.** During a time of sorrow, children need encouraging words of affirmation and love several times a day. Some parents have a special way to say, “see you later”, like throwing kisses, or a hip-bump. Others have a special book they read at bedtime, or song or prayer. Developing a way of showing your care can last for years and be very special to you and your child.
2. **Keep to the child’s routine as much as possible.** Children rely on a basic routine of their day to feel secure. So, when their daily routine suddenly alters, you may see some behavior concerns or frustration. When grief is involved, their routine may be forever altered, so, if possible, create a daily plan, or talk to them about upcoming changes.
3. **Tears are nature’s method of healing.** Children cry over many things, but when death enters their world, they shed a unique kind of tears. This sudden, intense, emotional reaction to severe pain or trauma is grieving, or mourning. For a child, grieving can last a long time and it is important to allow time to cry and be sad. Unfortunately, sadness is a part of the world we live in, but tears are healthy and God’s way of cleansing the soul.
4. **Remember and press on.** During the grieving process, children may need a special way to remember their loved one or friend. Remembering the person can be as simple as singing their favorite song or baking their favorite dessert, or planting their favorite flower. Talking with your child about upcoming events provides a hope and purpose and bring comfort to your child and others.

Remember God is a refuge and protection during a time of loss, and He is close to those who are brokenhearted. His love casts out all fear, and so spend time with your child reminding him of God’s love for your family. For a grieving child, nothing is better than feeling arms embracing them and comforting their pain. Just like an open wound, some require more than a hug; Some hurts need time to heal, and a little more attention to fully recover. When a child senses an intuitive heart, they will become more willing to share their feelings and hurts and respond to their sorrow in a healthy way.

Remind your child that God is our refuge and protection during a time of loss, and He is close to those who are brokenhearted. Also remember that love casts out all fear, and so spend time with your child reminding him of God's love for your family.

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