

Helping Grieving Children Through the Holidays

After the death of a loved one, your children may be confused and anxious about the coming holidays, even if they don't express it. These ideas will help you and your children connect with each other and find a sense of peace and enjoyment in the coming days.

Conversations and connect ... Talk with them about their loved one. Be specific with good memories. Let the children share their feelings and stories. Children may not always have the correct details. Talk about anything and everything. Keep the communication lines open by spending one-on-one time with a child who is grieving.

Communicate ... When discussing the death, explain to the children in simple terms that the person's body has quit working. Use the words "death" and "died" with the children. Steer clear of phrases such as "went to sleep." Since children are literal thinkers, they may be afraid to go to sleep.

Contact ... Appropriate hugs and kisses are a great way to stay in contact. Ask them how they would like to be greeted (e.g., by touching elbows, shoulders, the head, or giving a high five). Respect their rights not to be touched also.

Clown around ... Children need to take breaks in their grieving. In other words they will not grieve continuously, every day, all day long. Let them laugh and kid around. It's okay to laugh. Laughter releases good endorphins in the brain.

Create ... Let them draw, color, paint, or construct their world through blocks and other manipulative items. Make an ornament or a collage. What does my life look like? Who is in it? Who is not?

Carry ... Let them have a photo or a small memento they can carry with them. It helps them feel close. Allow the children to have a loved one's shirt or other article of clothing to sleep in. You can even spray the item with perfume or aftershave lotion that smells like their loved one.)

Cope ... Let them journal. It could be in the form of a letter, a daily meditation with God, or in a book form. (It's like peeling an onion and getting to the core, their heart.)

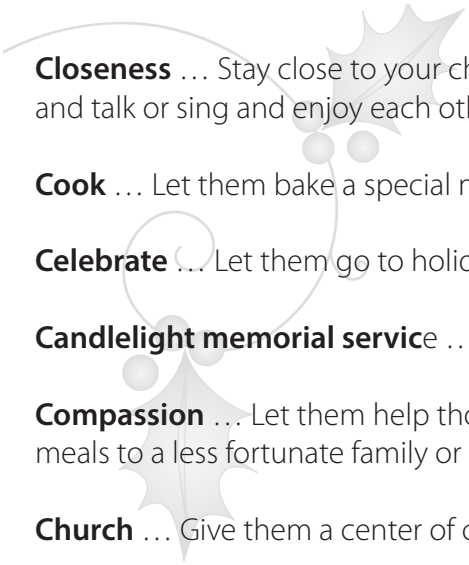
Change ... Allow the children to make decisions about day-to-day living (as appropriate). The children may feel they have more control of the situation when they can make their own decisions. Change is okay. For instance, the children can help make decisions about holiday plans.

Center ... Remember the family is the center of your children's world. They need stability. You are it. However, if this is too much for you, then allow other adults to minister to your child. Always be close by so your children do not feel abandoned.

Compose ... Remember your children's world may be in chaos; they need structure (e.g., wake-up times, bed, meal, school, homework, and television times).

Composure ... Don't feel like you always have to be composed. It is okay for the children to see your tears and to feel your pain. Ask your children for a hug on your down days.

Care ... Care for each other. Care for yourself by eating, exercising, and sleeping well.



Closeness ... Stay close to your children through daily talks or activities. Turn off the radio, iPod, DVD player or TV and talk or sing and enjoy each other. One of the best places to get a child to talk is in the car.

Cook ... Let them bake a special meal or dessert in memory of their loved one. Invite family and friends to join in.

Celebrate ... Let them go to holiday parties and family get-togethers. Make new memories and new traditions.

Candlelight memorial service ... Let them honor the memory of their loved one.

Compassion ... Let them help those who are less fortunate than themselves. (Get a gift for another child, deliver meals to a less fortunate family or assist at a shelter feeding the homeless.)

Church ... Give them a center of community, a place where they can praise and worship God.

Christ ... Give them hope. A personal relationship with Jesus is the best gift you can give a child. Prayer is beneficial; it helps to de-stress them.

Comfort ... Remember to pray for your children to be comforted. Pray in front of the children and with the children.

Closure ... There really is no such thing as "closure." For the rest of the children's lives, the loved one will be remembered. Children do eventually process and learn to cope and are able to move on with their lives. Encourage them to find ways to honor and remember their loved one and let them know this is okay to do.

We encourage you to find a GriefShare group near you by visiting www.griefshare.org or calling 800-395-5755. The GriefShare program includes a new video seminar with practical advice on helping children through grief. And at GriefShare, you will meet others who know the deep pain of grief and have an understanding of what you are going through.

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