



## NEW HOPE GRIEF SUPPORT COMMUNITY

### Processing Grief with Kids | Chaplain Matt Moriak, M.Div. BCC

When there is a death in a family, children and teens may feel strong emotions and difficulty processing and understanding. It is important to check-in and support children during these stressful moments. Here are some ideas to help children and teens when they experience loss.

**Encourage them to name their feelings.** There are a variety of emotions one might feel at times of loss—sadness, anger and guilt. Often, feelings remain on the inside. Helping children name them is the first step toward healing.

**Normalize the feelings.** Children and teens need to know what they are experiencing is normal. It can be confusing to have all these feelings at the same time, and even more so when the feelings conflict with each other. Sometimes, children can be angry at their loss and happy when they think of a good memory. People can feel guilty but also be at peace that their loved one isn't suffering anymore. Whatever the feelings are, let them know that their feelings are valid.

**Encourage them to talk.** Sometimes, children may not want to talk to a parent and burden them in their own grief. Ask kids who they feel comfortable talking to, whether it be a family member or a friend, and help them make those connections. If you or your support network feels overwhelmed by your child's grief, you may want to reach out to a mental healthcare professional.

**Help them process their emotions.** Beyond talking about their feelings, children can benefit from finding creative ways to process their feelings such as writing a letter to the person they are missing or creating art (drawing, painting, poetry, etc.).

**Talk about what they believe.** Don't assume that children and teens don't think about the afterlife. It may be simple or they may have complex beliefs. Asking them can give you some insight into what they are thinking and how to provide reassurance. For example, they may feel that they will see their loved one again someday in the afterlife, or they may believe that their loved one is watching over them (for some children, this causes comfort and for others, it could cause stress that their loved one can see them making mistakes).

**Look for warning signs.** Be aware that suicidal ideation can develop through grief, as a child or teen may be motivated by a desire to be with those they have lost. If a child is making statements about wishing they could just go away or not seeing the point in anything anymore, more conversations are needed.

**Talk about intangible gifts.** Intangible gifts are those things we can't see—a personality trait of the deceased like a sense of humor, or kindness and compassion. It could also be around something they did together, like cooking. Finding these intangible gifts are a way for the grieving child to feel as if the one they have lost lives on through them!

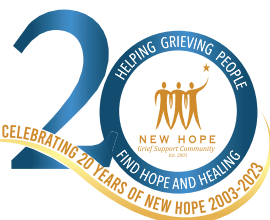
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