

Helpful or Hurtful?

Tips for talking to a grieving child.

It's hard to know what to say to a grieving child. This guide identifies hurtful statements and suggests helpful comments that can lead to supportive conversations.



Hurtful

"I know just how you feel. I had someone die when I was your age."

This takes the focus off of the child's grief and centers your loss history. Try to be curious and open to talking about the child's grief reactions.

"At least they're not suffering anymore."

Anything that starts with "at least" is usually not a good idea. This makes it sound like they should feel a certain way about the death.

"I know how hard things are for you right now, but you need to be strong. Your family needs you."

How do we know what "strong" even means? We should be careful of placing adult responsibility on a child.

Helpful

"I heard your brother, Joe, died. I'm here if you want to talk or if you just need some space."

Don't be afraid to use the word "died". Use the deceased's name and let the child know that you're comfortable having difficult conversations.

"Do you want to tell me more about what this has been like for you?"

Open up the conversation and give the child an opportunity to say "no" if they aren't feeling up to talking about their grief.

"I think it's been a few months since your mom died. I just wanted to check in."

Write down and remember important dates! Grief waves can intensify around these big days, so provide the child with a space to talk.