

WE ALL FALL DOWN: how to help children grieve a death.

ring around the rosie

Death. It has come to our little corner of the world. It has taken the life of a young child from a local elementary school. It was sudden. And unexpected. It leaves us raw and asking why. And our children feel this, too. Why him? When me? How you?

pocket full of posies

Not long ago, we lived fully in life's cycles. We planted, tendered, harvested, fallowed. We knew death as a season. We raised our cattle and flocks. We knew death as part of the rhythm. But now we live away from the land. We live in a place that often idolizes youth and doesn't always hear the wisdom of our elders. We lead longer, healthier lives. And so death surprises us. Especially when it is the death of a child.

ashes, ashes

How can we help our children when another child dies?

- **Answer every why.** With each question your child asks, give them the information you have. And when you don't know, say *that*. You don't have to have all the answers. None of us do. But in responding, you are honoring them with your truth, and telling them they matter. *Offer answers.*
- **Sit in silence.** Grappling with death is big work. Providing quiet down time allows kids to think. And figure out how they feel about their thinking. Don't feel pressured to fill the silence with words, simply sit with them. Allow them the space to start conversations. Then ask them how they feel. *Offer quiet.*
- **Reach out.** Being held is one of the greatest comforts in grief. Give an extra dose of hugs. Ruffle their hair. Hold a hand. Rub a back. Kids open up when snuggled close. So offer couch time, or set bedtime early so they have time to talk before sleep. *Offer touch.*
- **See the signs.** Grief may show up in unexpected ways. Your child may now not want to be alone, when before they craved solitude. Or might become afraid of the dark—which hasn't happened in years. Or your adventurous child may suddenly not want to try new things. A great sleeper becomes restless. A loud child, quiet. A calm child explodes. Expect the unexpected. It's all part of grief. *Offer compassion.*
- **Mourn in style.** We grieve the way we learn, because mourning is learning the steps of death. So consider, what is your child's learning style? Are they a reader? A writer? An artist? One who learns by talking out loud? Or does their best while in motion? Outside? Provide them options that match the way they learn best. Books. Journals. Art supplies. Talk times. Walk times. Nature hikes. *Offer support.*

- **Ride the rollercoaster.** The feelings of grief will sometimes be sharp and at other times muted. And the feelings themselves will change. Anger. Sadness. Confusion. Even envy. All of this is real in grief. You may hear about some mystery aches and pains. It's hard when we are hurting. *Offer empathy.*
- **Playground perspectives.** What happens when we die? And what comes after? Talk to your child not only about death, but about your family beliefs about what comes next. Let them know that friends and classmates will be talking about it at school—what happened, how they feel, what their families' faiths say happens beyond death. Share with them that there are many traditions about our souls, and each one speaks to the heart of the believer. *Offer belief.*
- **Act out.** Resiliency grows when we know we are capable of making a difference, especially in difficult situations. Ask your child if they'd like to do something to remember their friend. It may be organizing a group--donating new books for the library or raising money for a friendship bench on the playground. It may be on their own--writing a letter, drawing picture, something they may want to share with his family. Whatever way gives your child strength. *Offer action.*

we all fall down

We will all die. If we are lucky, we will be surrounded by, remembered by, honored by those who love us. Show that. Model that. Help your child walk that path in their mourning. Because when your children know they can talk to you about death and any big event in life, it is one of your greatest gifts.

with deepest empathy & love,

Emily

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P.S. Please share. We want parents to feel as much support as our children