

Resource Article

Helping Children and Teens to Grieve

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Many at-risk children and teens have suffered loss. How can those who love and care for these young people help them to deal with the pain in their hearts?

Principles of Grief and Pain

Everyone suffers pain, and God is able to help us through it.

Pain touches all of us. But it is especially unbearable when it touches children and teens. God enables young people to endure pain, and they can move through it to become healthy, functioning adults. Often, however, they need someone like you to help them through the process, someone who will share God's love with them.

Grieving is a process.

Children and teens who are encouraged to share their feelings of grief and who receive the support of a loving adults usually come through the grieving process as healthier people compared to those who cannot express their emotions or those who turn their pain into anger.

Life is a gift from God. It is precious, and we should value it.

Children and teens often consider suicide when they see no other way to escape unbearable pain. Your role is to show them the hope and help God offers.

God's Word teaches us about life after death.

There are many strange ideas about life after death. Help the young people understand that God's Word teaches that those who love Him will spend eternity with Him. Knowing this truth will comfort and protect them.

Helping with Grief and Pain

You can help your children and teens deal with their fears about death and their feelings of loss and rejection. Here are a few ideas:

Share the book of Psalms.

Psalms 23, 46, and 91 talk about the hope God promises. Read these psalms to encourage you as you help those who are hurting. Memorize verses from them so you can share with a hurting child or teen the comfort they bring. Psalm 139 talks about the value of each individual person. God does not want anyone to end His gift of life, no matter how horrible she feels. God can make a difference.

Communicate openly.

Suicidal or severely grieving children or teens may have difficulty sharing with anyone, including you and friends their own age. When they are willing to talk, it is important that you stop what you are doing and listen to them. Do not ignore or minimize the feelings of fear and depression. Show the child or teen that you care. Honestly discuss problems, and assure her that there are choices. Never lie to children or teens about death or try to make its reality seem less terrible. On the other hand, do not go into details beyond what they can understand or beyond what they are worried about.

Reach out over and over again.

Elegant words and perfect answers are not necessary. Often the best thing you can do for grieving children and teens is to simply be with them. Cry with them. Allow them to talk about their loss. Hug them. You can even offer some token of sympathy, such as a card. Tell them you are praying for them. Your Christian support is essential. Time does heal many wounds of grief, but God's love flowing out of you onto His grieving children and teens can prevent more scar tissue from forming.