

## Helpful things you can say:

*"I'm very sad too."*

*"When you want to talk about it, I am here to listen."*

*"I recognize this must be very hard for you."*

*"I don't have all the answers but I'm here when you want to talk."*

*"Your thoughts, feelings and reactions are okay just so long as you are not causing harm to yourself or others."*

## Avoid saying:

*"I know how you feel."*

*"You shouldn't feel that way."*

*"Be strong."*

*"They are in a better place."*

*"Be positive."*

*"You'll be okay."*

*"It's time to move on."*

Tu Nidito exists to create a community of acceptance and understanding regarding children in grief. As a non-profit organization, Tu Nidito specializes in providing support programming for children, teens, young adults & families impacted by the diagnosis of a serious medical condition or the death of someone special. Services are free of cost and offered in English and Spanish.

For more helpful information, including activities & resources, or to learn more about Tu Nidito visit:

[www.tunidito.org](http://www.tunidito.org)

Or Call:  
**(520) 322-9155**



*This brochure was printed thanks to support from:*



# Childhood Grief

Tips for supporting children grieving a serious medical condition or the death of a loved one.



Developed by:

## What is Grief?

Grief is the normal and natural response to loss or change, such as the death of a loved one or the diagnosis of a serious medical condition.

## What are Common Characteristics of Grief?

While everyone grieves differently, there are some common emotions and behaviors expressed by children and teens. Responses to grief will look different based on a child's age. Some of these include:

- **Emotional reactions** including anger, sadness, stress, fear, worry, hopelessness
- **Physical reactions** including headaches, stomach aches, changes in appetite, tension, rashes
- **Cognitive reactions** such as disbelief, denial, pre-occupation, indecisiveness, self-blame
- **Behavioral/social reactions** including withdrawal or isolation, defiance, attention-seeking behaviors (whining, tantrums, screaming), use of drugs/alcohol, loss of interest in activities or with peers, changes in academic behavior, sleep disturbances
- **Spiritual reactions** including feeling lost, empty, abandoned, judged; questioning religious beliefs

### **Grief Tip:**

***It's important to remember that grieving children and teens want:***

- ***To understand what has happened when a significant death or diagnosis has occurred.***
- ***To be able to express their feelings.***

### **Grief Tip:**

***Remember, grief is not linear. There is no timeframe; each individual person has their own unique grief journey.***

## How Can I Help a Child Navigate their Grief?

- **Listen;** give them opportunities to share how they are feeling.
- **Talk about the person who has died or is sick;** share memories, stories, or photos as you are able. By doing these things you give children permission to share their own memories and feelings.
- **Be honest and clear;** Explain the circumstances using age-appropriate language and let the child's questions guide what else to share.
- **Avoid using euphemisms when someone dies,** such as "passed away," "lost," "crossed over," or "went to sleep" as these can confuse children.
- **Answer their questions;** sometimes you may have to answer the same question over and over to help them make sense of what is happening.
- **Admit when you don't know an answer;** saying "I don't know" is OK! And, find the answer for them when possible.
- **Offer consistency** in routines to create predictability.
- **Provide physical outlets** to release energy and big emotions.
- **Be flexible in your expectations** at school and home because grief takes tremendous emotional and physical energy.

