

How to Support Your Child or Teen: For Parents/Caregivers

1 Listen to Your Child
It is important for your child to have a safe space to talk and share their feelings. Act as a sounding board and validate your child's feelings. This can help them to create their unique story. This story can even be used as a way for your child to support a friend in the future.

2 Allow Emotional Expression
Allow your child to have a safe space to express their emotions. Your child may experience a wide range of emotions: anger, sadness, pain, shame, guilt, or other powerful emotions. Often, children are not able to verbalize what they are feeling. Avoid minimizing these emotions, telling them how they should feel, or trying to put a positive spin on things.

3 Encourage Coping Skills
You can support your child by helping them find healthy ways to cope with the overwhelming emotion. Try out different activities as a family: deep breathing, yoga, taking breaks, going for walks, gratitude jars, artistic expression, etc. Help your child identify the different activities that work well for them and develop a plan for when these feelings arise.

4 Practice Self-Care
Just like the oxygen mask theory, you must take care of yourself first before you can support your child. Implement healthy coping skills, develop a self-care plan, surround yourself with a support system and express your emotions—this way you can serve as a role model for your child.

5 Understand Grief Comes in Waves
Both you and your child will have easier and harder days, and it is important to give yourself and your child grace to grieve. Be open about it if you are having a difficult day and encourage them to do the same, as this can help prevent misunderstanding.

6 Establish/Maintain Routines
Children need routine and normalcy to feel in control, supported and comforted. Keep limits consistent and clear to provide a safe and secure environment for everyone.

Ask for Help
It can be difficult to ask for help. Stay connected with your support system and encourage your child to identify friends and adults that they can go to when they need support. Look for resources in your area that can help your child to build their social support with others who understand what they're going through.

8 Make New Memories
Remind your child that it's okay to be happy and make new memories. Plan family dates: go for walks, visit new places, go to the movies, make new traditions, etc.



Childhood Grief

Guidelines for Caregivers

As adults, we learn to speak about death through euphemisms and code. Loved ones “pass on” or are “at rest.” Words like “dead” feel too blunt and painful. Children, however, have not yet learned this code. When we avoid speaking openly and honestly with kids about death, the gaps in knowledge are filled with their own theories and ideas, many of which are worse than reality.

Use this handout as a guide for speaking with your child about death and helping them cope. Consider their age, developmental level, and needs as you approach this topic.

Talking to Children about Death

Be open to discussion. Blunt conversations about death might seem taboo, but they don't have to be. Bringing up the topic of death, and allowing kids to do the same, gives them permission to ask questions and express their feelings. However, don't force conversation if they are not ready.

Teach children about death. Many kids do not understand that death is permanent. They might wonder how the deceased will eat or drink, or if they feel pain. Explain that when a person dies, their body stops working, and they no longer do these things. Children might need many reminders that the person will not return.

Avoid using euphemisms for death. Kids are likely to misunderstand phrases such as “he passed,” “he's gone,” or “we lost her.” They will want to search for someone who is “lost,” and will expect someone who is “gone” to return. Instead, state clearly that someone died.

Give accurate information about how a person died. Explain what happened very simply, while omitting details that are frightening or traumatic. For example, “they died because they were very sick” or “they died in a car accident.” Without information, children will make up their own version of events.

Make it clear that kids are not at fault. Children may believe something they said or did caused the person to die. Reinforce the fact that thoughts, words, and misbehavior do not kill people.

Reassure children they are safe. After a death—particularly the death of a caregiver—many kids become concerned about their own and their family's safety. Reassure children they are safe and will always be cared for by an adult.

HOW TO HELP YOURSELF: FOR CHILDREN

HERE ARE SOME IDEAS OF THINGS TO DO TO HELP YOURSELF FEEL BETTER WHEN TIMES ARE TOUGH!

MOVE YOUR BODY

Move your body. Play, run, jump, wiggle, dance, hit a balloon or yell into a pillow.



SLOW DOWN

Try moving with super slow speed for a bit, sit in a quiet space or listen to soft music.

POSITIVE SELF-TALK

Talk kindly to yourself like you would talk to a friend. Examples: "You can do this." "You're doing the best you can." "You will figure this out."

FIND SUPPORT

Look for people you can talk to when you are feeling down. Examples: friend, family member, teacher, coach or counselor.

GET CREATIVE

Express yourself through art, writing, drawing, dancing or listening to/playing music.

RECHARGE

Recharge your strength by getting lots of sleep, good food and water.



STRENGTH

Do something you're good at, whatever that may be, and celebrate the little things. Examples: Making it to school on time, remembering homework, helping a friend, scoring a goal at soccer.

ALLOW EMOTIONS

Remember that it's OK to feel sad or angry. You do not need to be strong all the time. Crying is OK, especially when you are talking or thinking about your special person.

SIT AND BREATHE

Take some deep breaths. Try blowing some bubbles, smell the flowers, or just notice how fast you are breathing and try to slow it down. Breathe out a little longer than you breathe in.

FIND COMFORT

Choose an object or make something that comforts you. It could be as simple as a stone you find. Keep it with you to feel comforted whenever you need it.



Positive Memories

When someone special dies, thinking about positive memories we shared can help us feel better. What are some of the positive memories you have about your special person or what are some positive stories that others have told you about? There are many different ways to share these memories. Here are some ideas (or you and your therapist might have other ideas about how you would like to share happy memories).

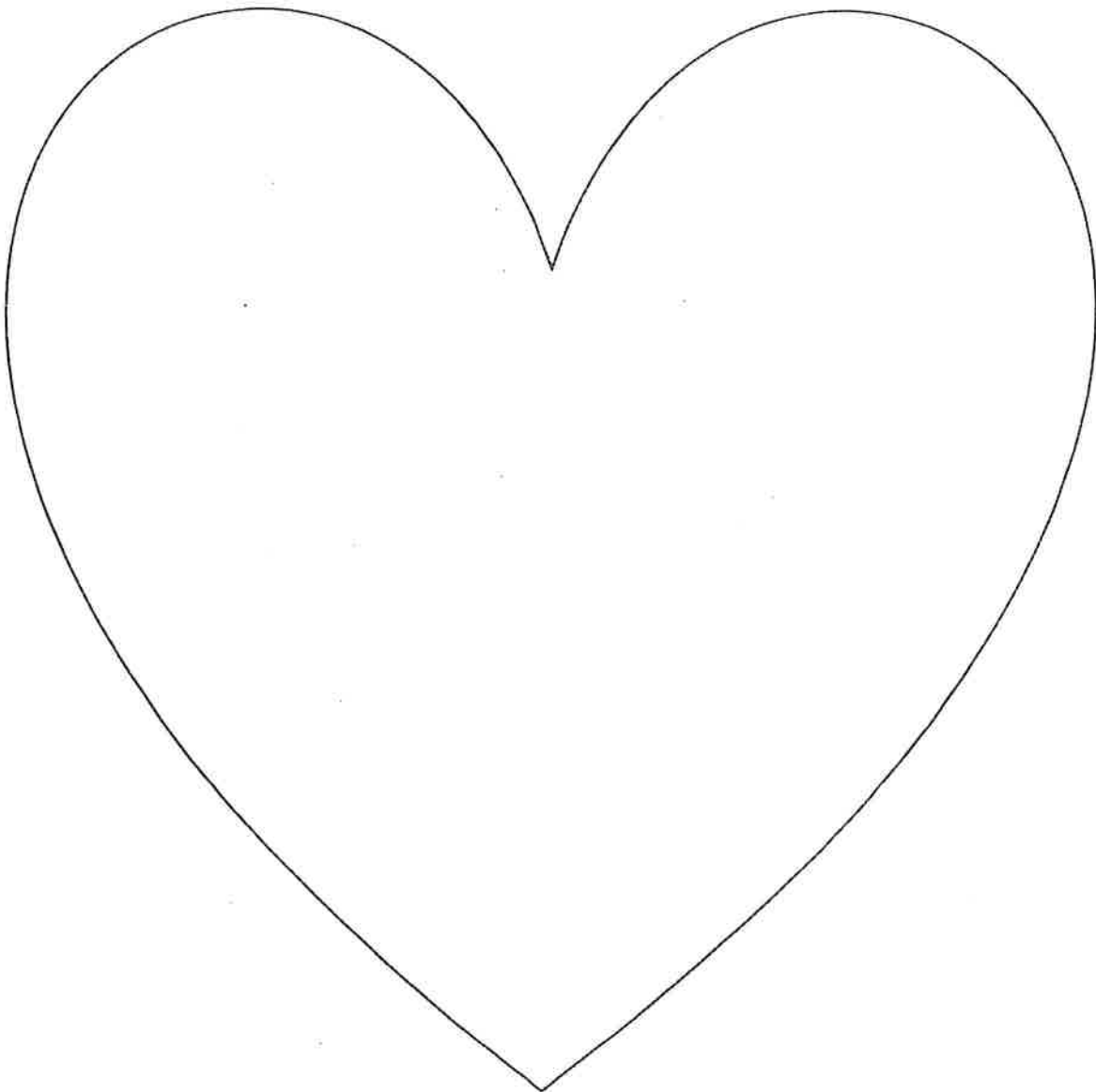
1. You can write down your special person's name and write a happy memory for each letter of their name.
2. You can create a memory book, memory box, or slideshow of happy memories you shared with your special person. You can include drawings, photos, images, and stories. You can ask other loved ones to add pictures and/or stories if you like.
3. You can plan and hold a memorial service in which you remember the happy times and pay tribute to your special person.





Room in Your Heart

Your special person will always have a special place in your heart. Did you know that your heart is big enough for a lot of other special people, too? You can draw a big heart below and write down all the names of all your special people (including your special person who died) in your heart. You can talk with your therapist about the special people who are in your life now and all the things you can do with them.





“What I Miss Most”

You may be experiencing big feelings because you miss doing things with your special person, you miss things about them, and/or you miss things they used to do for you. You can draw or make a list of the things you miss the most about your special person who died.

You can also talk with your therapist about things you will miss in the future and what you can do to cope.