



Talking to Children about Loss

Simple DOs and DON'Ts

- **DO - Go first.** As the adult, you are the leader.
- **DO - Tell the truth about how you feel.** Telling the truth about your own grief and about how you feel will establish a tone of trust and make your child feel safe in opening up about his or her own feelings.
- **DO - Recognize that grief is emotional, not intellectual** and that sad or scared feelings are normal. Avoid the trap of asking your child what is wrong, for he or she will automatically say, "Nothing."
- **DO - Listen with your heart, not your head.** Allow all emotions to be expressed without judgment, criticism, or analysis.
- **DO - Remember that each child is unique** and has a unique relationship to the loss.
- **DO - Be patient.** Don't force your child to talk. Give your child time. Make sure to plant healthy ideas about talking about feelings.

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- **DON'T - Say "Don't Feel Scared."** Fear is a common and normal response.
 - **DON'T - Say "Don't Feel Sad."** Sadness is a healthy and normal reaction. Sadness and fear, the two most common feelings attached to loss of any kind, are essential to being human.
 - **DON'T - Ask your children how they are feeling.** Like adults, fearful of being judged, they will automatically say, "I'm Fine," even though they are not.
 - **DON'T - Act strong for your children.** They will interpret your "non-feeling" as something they are supposed to copy.
 - **DON'T - Compare their lives or situations to others in the world.** Comparison always minimizes feelings.
 - **DON'T - Make promises that you cannot keep.** Instead of saying "Everything's going to be okay," say, "We'll do everything we can to be safe."
 - **DON'T - Forget that your children are very smart.** Treat them and their feelings with respect and dignity as you would like to be treated by others.