

Helping Grieving Children - A Christian Perspective

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- ♥ Do not isolate or insulate children from the death or from others' as well as their own grief.
- ♥ Listen (with your ears, eyes and heart).
- ♥ Answer the children's questions as directly and as honestly as you can even if the answer is, "I don't know." (We can follow-up a child's tough question with, "*That's a great question!*"). This expresses your respect toward the child and the very real feelings he or she is experiencing. Keep in mind that children tend to know when they aren't being told the whole truth; sometimes the answers they will come up with in their own minds are much more frightening than the truth.
- ♥ Encourage and define appropriate expressions of grief (talking, drawing, writing, yelling, running, etc.). Provide appropriate and "safe" places for grief expression.
- ♥ This death may trigger thoughts and feelings about other losses the children have experienced in their own families. It is essential to take time to listen to their stories and experiences.
- ♥ AVOID EUPHEMISMS AND CLICHÉS!!!
 - Someone has **died**, not "passed away" or "gone to sleep." These euphemisms, or words used in place of the word dead, can confuse children. Instead, one should use simple, direct language in all explanations pertaining to the death or pending death.
 - God did not TAKE the child, NEED the child or CAUSE the illness. Making statements such as these, first of all, is very presumptuous, second, leaves a very scary portrait of our loving God, and third, is theologically improbable and likely unbiblical. Check with your pastor about his views here.
 - When someone dies, there is nothing in scripture which suggests that they "become an angel". Angels are not former humans! Angels are created beings distinct from human kind and are messengers and helpers of God.
- ♥ Example: The children may wonder, because their friend died, "Why didn't God answer our prayers?" A perfectly acceptable answer is, "We don't know." Another avenue to take with regard to this important question is to suggest that perhaps God **has** answered everyone's prayers. In His sovereignty, He has given this child the ultimate healing, because He knew that would be best. When going with this explanation, it is crucial to follow-up with the validation of everyone's very real grief feelings. "While (child's name) is now healed and perfect in heaven, we are all still very sad because we will miss him and we wish he were still with us."

- ♥ Example: “Why did God allow our friend to get cancer?” What a great question for all of us. While only God knows this answer, we do know that the reason evil exists is because of human sin. If there were no sin in the world, there would not be death, illness, sadness or pain. We also know that God can take any tragedy, no matter how devastating and use it for good for His kingdom! (*Romans 8:28*).

**Another critical point is that in *Psalms 139* God declares through David that each individual conceived is “wondrously” made. This does not mean ‘wonderful,’ as in ‘perfect,’ but rather that each individual has a unique and God-given purpose. We may not yet understand this child’s God-given purpose, but we can be sure that his purpose has been or will be fulfilled perfectly – according to God’s own will and pleasure.

- ♥ Some children may be fearful that they too will “get” or “catch” cancer. It is important to explain to these children that cancer isn’t something that one can catch from the germs of someone else, like we can a cold. They also need to know that there are many people who have cancer and do not die – they get well again. There is much that doctors do not yet know about cancer, but every day they are learning more so that they can help more and more people get better.
- ♥ Some children will have very real worries about someone in their immediate family dying, “Will my (brother, sister, mommy, daddy) die too?” We need to be available to listen to these worries and offer comfort and reassurance, while at the same time being realistic and not suggest that no one in their family is ever going to die.