

# 10 Tips on Child Grief and Talking to Your Grade-Schooler About Death

How to tackle the difficult subject of child grief with your grade-schooler

By [Katherine Lee](#) Updated September 30, 2016

[Grade-school age children](#) have a better understanding of death—that it's a permanent thing that can happen to anyone—and may be able to handle grief better than we think. By this age, your child has probably been exposed to the concept of death and grief through [movies](#), [TV shows](#), [books](#), and even conversations with friends. But unless they've had to deal first-hand with the death of someone close to them, it can still remain an abstract thing—something that happens to other people. Losing someone close to them can change all that.

If your school-age child has had to deal with the loss of a loved one, whether it's the death of a grandparent, another family member, or even a pet, she may show grief in many different ways. Here are some things you can do to help your child understand death and cope with her loss:

**1**

**Be open to questions related to child grief.**



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Children are naturally curious about death, even before they experience a personal loss and child grief. Be as honest as possible while keeping it still simple enough for a grade-schooler.

## 2

### **Don't avoid the word "death."**

Don't use phrases like, "gone away," "lost," or "went to sleep" to refer to someone who died, even when talking to a kindergartener. This can just create more confusion in a younger child, and give an older grade-schooler the impression that death is something to be feared and not discussed.

### 3

#### **Be straight with your child.**

My son was about 6 when I let him see [Barnyard](#), a movie in which the dad dies. For days afterward, he was distraught, and kept asking if his dad or I could die. I told him it's extremely unlikely, that we are healthy and young, and we are super-careful about not putting ourselves in danger. But I didn't say no, we won't die. As much as I wanted to comfort him, I knew that lying would've just given him false reassurance and would've led to distrust when he found out the truth.

### 4

#### **Don't assume your child understands everything the first time.**

She may ask the same questions over and over again, over a period of weeks or even months. There are several reasons for this. It can be tough for a grade-school age child to digest everything at once. She may also be trying to work it out in her mind through repetition. And the same information can become meaningful to her in different ways as she matures emotionally and intellectually.

### 5

#### **Don't be afraid to admit you don't know something.**

A grade-school age child may pepper you with questions about things like what it feels like after you die and why you can't still talk to a person once he or she passes away. It's better to be honest about the fact that you don't know everything than to lie or give her an explanation that you think she'll want to

hear.

## 6

### **Expect it to take some time.**

Grief can be a process, even for adults. Your growing grade-schooler may seem nonchalant about the death of a loved one, and then fall apart over a broken toy.

## 7

### **Anticipate some emotions.**

Your child may become angry over the loss of someone. She may feel guilt, especially about the death of a sibling or parent (a young child may believe that the person died because she was “bad.”) She may regress, becoming more clingy or wanting to come into your bed.

## 8

### **Consider letting your child attend the funeral.**

A ceremony may help your child process the loss of the loved one. But be sure to take into account your child’s personality and how emotional the service may be. If your child is very sensitive to other’s sadness and is likely to become very upset when other people cry, it may be better to keep her at home.

## 9

### **Give her room to grieve.**

Let her know that you are ready to listen or answer questions but don't press her if she seems reluctant to talk.

## 10

### **Acknowledge your own feelings.**

Grade-schoolers are more likely to be attuned to your emotions, so don't try to hide your grief. While you don't want your child to see you fall apart—it can be too scary for kids to see their source of support crumble—don't try to hide your feelings. By letting her know that it's okay to be cry and be sad over the loss of someone you love, you are teaching her how to handle loss in a healthy way.