

WHAT TO SAY AND WHAT NOT TO SAY

Tips for Talking to Grieving Students



COALITION to SUPPORT
GRIEVING STUDENTS

Here are some tips on how to speak with children who have experienced the death of a loved one.

Avoid saying this...

...and say this instead

"At least he's no longer in pain." Efforts to "focus on the good things" are more likely to minimize the student's or family's experience. Avoid trying to "cheer up" those who are grieving.

▶ *"What sorts of things have you been thinking about since your father died?"*

"I lost both my parents when I was your age." Statements that compare your losses with those of students or their families may leave children feeling their loss is not as profound or important. Maintain the focus on the grieving student's experiences and needs.

▶ *"Tell me more about what this has been like for you."*

"This is hard. But it's important to remember the good things in life, too." When people are grieving, it's important they be allowed to experience and express whatever feelings, memories, or wishes they're having.

▶ *"What kinds of memories do you have about your mom?"*

"You must be incredibly angry." It's not helpful to tell people how they're feeling or ought to feel. It's better to ask:

▶ *"Most people have strong feelings when something like this happens to them. What has this been like for you?"*

"You'll need to be strong now for your family. It's important to get a grip on your feelings." Telling grieving children they shouldn't express their feelings holds them back from expressing their grief and learning to cope with these difficult feelings.

▶ *"How is your family doing? What kinds of concerns do you have about them?"*

Please visit www.grievingstudents.org for additional tips and resources.