

A photograph of a dark, foggy road with a bright light source at the end, symbolizing a path through grief. The road is paved and has a double yellow line on the left side. The fog is thick and white, obscuring the details of the road and the surrounding environment. The light source is a bright, circular glow at the end of the road, creating a strong contrast with the dark surroundings. The overall mood is somber and hopeful.

**GRIEF:
GETTING
THROUGH
THE
DARKNESS**

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YOU CAN OVERCOME GRIEF

“When my husband died...I thought my life was over. There was nothing I wanted to live for. I was full of tears and self-pity. I felt lost and frightened and lonely. I was angry, self-centered, and, in my preoccupation with my grief, I fear I was boring.”

—Dr. Joyce Brothers,
from her book, *Widowed*

Each and every day a family loses someone they love due to death.

- During the coming year, nearly 2 of every 10 American adults will lose a family member to death.
- One of every 20 American children under the age of 15 years loses one or both parents to death.
- One-fourth of all pregnancies end in miscarriage or abortion.
- Each year in the United States, approximately 71,000 children under the age of 19 will die, leaving families to cope with the excruciating, painful process of grief.

Like Dr. Brothers' experience, loss of a loved one catapults survivors into the unfamiliar emotional terrain of bereavement. The death of a loved family member is one of the most significant and stressful experiences people have.

Here are 28 ways to feel, deal and heal from the wounds created by grief:

1. *Accept your loss.* Numbness and disbelief are natural responses to the death of a loved one. Resist any temptation to deny or suppress feelings about the loss. “When someone dies, even if the death is expected, there is always a sense that it hasn’t happened,” notes Dr. J. William Worden, Ph.D., author of *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*. “The first task of grieving is to come full face with the reality that the person is dead, the person is gone and will not return.”

2. *Expect to feel a multitude of emotions.* In the early months of the grieving process you will feel a wide variety of confusing and conflicting emotions. Some of the feelings you may experience include: anxiety, depression, guilt, regret, anger, frustration and fear—all coupled with feeling disorganized and disoriented.

3. *Talk about your feelings.* Find a few good listeners. Talking helps you accept and resolve your loss. “Empty out your feelings. Cry when you need to cry. Be angry when you feel angry. Don’t suppress yourself or pretend to be stoic. The more you express your pain, the more you free yourself from it,” says Judy Tatelbaum, an author and social worker.

4. *Have faith in God.* The Bible is very clear that **God hears, helps and heals** those whose hearts are burdened by loss—“He heals the brokenhearted, binding up their wounds” (Psalm 147:3, New Living Translation). “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18). “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

5. *Learn about bereavement issues.* Lynn Caine, whose husband died in his forties, says in her book, *Widow*, that it would have been very helpful to have known more about the bereavement process. “If only someone whom I respected had sat me down after Martin died

and said, ‘Now, Lynn, bereavement is a wound. It’s like being very, very badly hurt...you will recover. But recovery will be slow...little by little, you will be whole again. And you will be a stronger person. Just as a broken bone knits and becomes stronger than before, so will you.’”

Rather than just stumble through grief, read some books about it. Educate yourself so you will better understand what is happening to you. This knowledge will help you feel more in control.

6. *Stay in touch with people who are helpful to you.* Some people have a special gift for bringing comfort and consolation. Keep in touch with those unique individuals.

7. *Keep a journal.* Writing is a powerful and therapeutic way of expressing pain. You can write without worrying about how you “sound” since no one else will read your journal. “My journal became my instrument for survival,” recalls one widower.

8. *Be willing to change.* The death of a loved one will bring changes, large and small, into your life. Don’t resist those. Embrace them in order to allow new ways of living to emerge for you.

9. *Join a grief support group.* A support group can help you break the isolation and loneliness you may be experiencing. Also, in a group you will see others successfully coping with loss.

10. *Be patient.* Don’t expect miracles overnight. There is no quick fix for grief. It takes time, usually a much longer time than most people expect. Remember this wisdom from William Shakespeare: “How poor are they that have not patience! What wound did ever heal but by degrees?”

According to an eight-year study done by the National University of Ireland (NUI), most people take nearly two years to start recovering from the loss of a close relationship. It is important to note that the two-year mark is simply the “start” of the recovery period. That means

grieving continues but is gradually starting to ease up, eventually diminishing completely.

11. Persistently pursue recovery and healing. “Many strokes overthrow the tallest oaks,” notes the poet John Lyly. After her husband died, Mary Zemites of Mesa, Arizona, declared to her mother: “Mom, it’s so hard without Greg.”

Her husband had recently died, and she was left to raise their three young children alone. “Could I be both mother and father to the kids? What did life hold for us? I just don’t know if I can make it,” she said to her mother. “You can,” Mary’s mother replied. “Just don’t give up—ever!”

As her mother spoke those words, an inspiring memory came to Ms. Zemites. She recalled a summer when she was 14. She and her friends spent most of their hot summer days at the local pool. That same summer was the summer her mother decided to learn to dive—at the same pool Mary and her friends frequented.

One afternoon as Mary was sunning, her mother came to the pool and made her way up the high diving board. Mary stared in amazement at her mother, perched on the end of the diving board.

“I could tell she was scared. Mom stood there for an eternity. Then she jumped—feet first!” While that “dive” was not impressive, Ms. Zemites’ mother continued coming to the pool most of the summer, eventually working up her courage to dive head first. There were many noisy belly flops. Other swimmers and lifeguards cringed at the sound of the mother attempting to dive from the high diving board.

One day toward the end of the summer, Mary’s mother crossed the hot concrete at the pool and again made her way up the high diving board. “With a small bounce, she launched herself upwards. She made a graceful arc in midair, then straightened and slipped into the water with hardly a ripple. A perfect dive!” Ms. Zemites recalls. A lifeguard cheered, and a friend said to the teenager: “Wow, your mom’s great.”

The memory of her mother’s determination and perseverance that summer empowered Ms. Zemites to face the challenges of bereavement more courageously and hopefully. “Twenty years later I stood at a turning point in life. I knew the future would not be easy for my children or me, and there would probably be plenty of painful ‘belly flops’ along the way. But I would always remember that summer at the pool.”

Perseverance and determination can produce amazing results. A mother overcame fear and learned to dive. Mary Zemites used perseverance and determination to face the challenges of life without her husband, as a single mother.

12. Rely on God. The journey through grief is a lonely and isolating one. Every day ask God to strengthen you, direct you and give you a renewed purpose for living. Take courage and hope from these words of the apostle Paul: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3).

13. Employ the therapy of laughter. Although it may appear that grief and laughter are mutually exclusive, they do come together. “Laughter permits you to approach grief, reduce it to size, and manage loss effectively,” notes Rabbi Earl Grollman, a noted authority on bereavement. “Like a safety valve, humor offers a shift in perspective and energy that restores a sense of balance. It’s okay to laugh again,” he says.

14. Go easy on yourself. Remind yourself that grieving is hard work; that it takes a toll on you emotionally and will leave you feeling exhausted. So be gentle with yourself. “The simplest habits of daily living such as shopping, eating, sleeping or dressing may become burdensome for a while. But every day you survive takes you farther along the path to recovery,” says Dr. Nancy O’Connor, Ph.D., in her book, *Letting Go With Love: The Grieving Process*.

15. Expect some friend-shifts. “Don’t be alarmed if friends or relatives on whom you may have counted most for support turn out to

be a total loss. No call, no invitation, just silence. You will feel shocked, hurt, angry,” says Harris E. Adrians who wrote a booklet on grieving titled, *Challenge*, shortly after his own wife died.

“Some doors just shut without any visible reason. Fortunately, there is a counterbalance to this very disturbing situation. New friends appear and you find a special warmth and understanding in people you scarcely knew before or from whom you least expected such a rewarding association.”

16. *If you have children, bring them into the grieving process.* “They should not be shielded from tragedy,” says Rabbi Grollman. “Death is a crisis that should be shared by all members of the family. Children too often are forgotten by grieving adults. Silence and secrecy deprive them of an important opportunity to share grief. When in your heartache you overlook your children’s feelings, you heighten their sense of isolation. The youngsters need your help to sort out their emotions,” he says.

17. *Take care of your health.* Eat balanced, nutritious meals. Drink plenty of water daily. If you are concerned about your health for any reason, consult with your physician. Getting a physical checkup shortly after your loss is a good idea.

18. *Keep busy.* Keeping busy at various tasks will give you a break from the grief. “Getting out of the house and going to my part-time job every day has been a big boost to my mental health,” says Carolyn, whose husband died from a terminal illness at age 39.

19. *Avoid drugs and alcohol.* Don’t resort to sleeping pills or alcohol to soften the pain. The use of such substances only delays the healing process and often creates other more serious problems.

20. *Know that the wound takes a long time to heal.* The first year is often the worst because it involves experiencing various events without your loved one: holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, etc. Most people say it takes between three and five years for the wounds of grief to heal.

21. *Resume your daily routine.* As soon as possible, go back to work. Stay involved in religious activities, remain socially engaged—even if you don’t feel like it. Following a daily routine will establish important normal rhythms to your living.

22. *Exercise.* Many bereaved people report that daily exercise was extremely beneficial in easing depression and generally keeping them physically fit. Run, walk, jog, bike, swim, join a gym, take an aerobics class.

23. *Tell yourself, “I will triumph over this.”* Be positive about your ability to overcome the tragedy in your life. Be inspired by these words from Helen Keller: “Although the world is full of suffering, it is full also of the overcoming of it.”

24. *Hold off on making major decisions.* For a full year after your loss, do not make any major decision unless absolutely necessary. Don’t sell your house, don’t move out of state, don’t make any large investments. If your spouse died, wait for a while and carefully consider any thoughts involving remarriage.

Give yourself a year to recover from the loss before considering any major change. By that time you will be in a better emotional state and will be more capable of making a wise decision.

25. *Ignore “shoulds.”* Some people will insist on giving you all sorts of advice, telling you what you “should” or “should not” do. Be courteous and civil toward these individuals as they mean well, but be guided by your own intuitions about what you ought to do.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.”
2 Corinthians 1:3-4

26. *Stay engaged with life.* “Accept all the invitations you can, even if your impulse is to say no,” advises Harris Adriance. “You need to get out of yourself and to see other people. Invariably it helps, gives you a boost, mentally and physically.”

27. *Ask God to help you transform self-pity.* As you manage the various issues brought on by grief, don’t give in to self-pity. Self-pity usually reveals itself through these kinds of questions: “Why me? Why did this happen to me? How can I go on? Do I have a future?”

The problem with such questions is that they focus entirely on the negative. To turn self-pity into something constructive, try asking different questions.

Rather than focusing on, “What have I lost?” ask, “What remains and where can I go from here?” A change of question often results in a change of perspective. Rephrasing our questions allows us to count the pluses, not the minuses.

Army Major Frederick Franks found himself staring at a Christmas tree in his drab hospital room. Although it was a season of joy, Franks felt only sadness. Seven months earlier, in May 1970, while he was in Cambodia, grenade shrapnel had torn into the lower half of his leg. Doctors were scheduled to amputate it.

Franks had graduated from West Point where he was captain of the baseball team. He planned to make the Army his career. Now discharge seemed the only option.

Although Franks felt he still had a lot to offer the service—combat experience, technical knowledge, an ability to solve problems—he also knew that soldiers with severe injuries seldom return to active duty. They must pass an annual physical-fitness test which includes a two-mile run or walk.

Franks wasn’t sure he would be able to do that with an artificial leg. After surgery, Franks was overwhelmed with sadness over the loss of his leg.

However, a weekly baseball game helped him see his situation differently. At those games, he batted, but someone else would run the bases for him. Waiting his turn at bat, he watched a teammate slide into third base. “What’s the worst that could happen if I tried the same thing?” he asked himself.

While at bat, Franks hit the ball into center field. Waving away his runner, he began a painful, stiff-legged jog aided by his artificial leg. He got past first base, and seeing the outfielder throw the ball toward the second baseman, Franks slid headfirst into second. The umpire called “Safe!” and Franks smiled triumphantly.

Franks remained in the Army, rising in rank to become a four-star general. “Losing a leg has taught me that a limitation is as big or small as you make it,” he says. “The key is to concentrate on what you have, not what you don’t have.”

28. *Let nature nurture you.* As you manage your grief, keep in mind that nature is a great healer. Simply getting outside for a walk through a park or merely viewing nature from a window can facilitate healing.

In one study, post-surgical patients with a view of trees through hospital windows recovered faster and with less pain than those who looked out on a brick wall. Researchers at the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas, reported a reduction in tension and anxiety in long-term patients who did gardening.

The practice of giving flowers to the sick or bereaved reflects the deep link between living things and comfort. So, try to spend some time every day with nature. That can mean getting out for a walk, going for a bike ride or gardening.

Other simple techniques for benefitting from nature include putting up a bird feeder and watching what goes on; hanging a wind chime outside your window, allowing the earth to “sing” to you; planting an herb garden in a window box; viewing sunrises and sunsets as often as possible.

TEN “COMMANDMENTS” FOR GRIEVERS

Here are ten “commandments” to keep in mind which will help you as you recover from grief:

1) You shall remember you are a survivor. You made it this far, and God will help you complete the journey through grief.

2) You shall remember that God has created you to heal from wounds. When we accidentally cut or scrape ourselves, healing scar tissue forms quickly. Bereavement is a deep spiritual wound, but you will heal. God can help you to heal from every wound.

3) You shall remember that God will lead you to do what needs to be done and that God will give you the wisdom and the courage to do it.

4) You shall remember that you are engaged in a process of healing. Recovery from grief takes time. Sometimes the recovery involves two steps forward followed by one step backward.

5) You shall remember that you are not required to apologize for your feelings, emotions and tears. It is not your job to make other people feel comfortable by denying your need to grieve.

6) You shall remember that you are not lacking in faith because you feel the pain of grief. Grief does not diminish or tarnish your faith in God.

7) You shall remember that you must provide your body ample rest, healthy, balanced meals and exercise.

8) You shall remember to flow with the process of grief rather than try to manipulate it.

9) You shall remember that God will send good people your way, people who sincerely want to help. Reach out to them as you need them.

10) You shall remember that this too shall pass.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS? WAYS TO COPE WHEN YOU ARE GRIEVING

The painting by artist Norman Rockwell of a festive family sitting around a holiday table laden with food may be an accurate image for many families. However, for those who have had a loss to death—that of a spouse, parent, grandparent, child or sibling—the holidays are anything but festive and happy. What is a joyous time of year for many is, for the bereaved, a season when pain is magnified and loneliness accentuated as they face the prospect of a holiday without their loved one. Yet, holiday hurt can be softened.

Here are suggestions that can help you cope when you are grieving:

- *Think it through.* Be very intentional about how you will celebrate the holiday. Will you keep the same patterns as in previous years, or will you change traditions completely? By planning ahead you will have a better grasp of what you will want to do and what you will not want to do. Remember there is no right or wrong way to celebrate.

- *Share your feelings with the family.* Let others in the family understand how you feel

the holiday could be best celebrated. Don't expect them to be mind readers. Communicate your needs. Most family members want to celebrate the holidays in ways that are most helpful to the person grieving the hardest.

- *Shop creatively.* If being in a shopping mall with festive crowds is too depressing for you, consider other alternatives. Make your holiday purchases via catalogs, phone orders or the internet.

- *Seek God in the midst of your pain.* The Bible makes it clear that God is always present to sustain us, to strengthen us and to bring new understanding to us. Consider these verses as you seek God: "Give your burdens to the Lord, and he will take care of you" (Psalm 55:22, New Living Translation). "Through each day the Lord pours his unfailing love upon me" (Psalm 42:8, New Living Translation). "I will be your God throughout your lifetime.... I made you and I will care for you. I will carry you along and save you" (Isaiah 46:4, New Living Translation).

- *Be gentle with yourself.* Allow yourself the freedom not to live up to the expectations of others. "The family and I always attended a midnight Christmas Eve service," says a grieving mother whose daughter died from an auto accident in autumn. "I just couldn't bear to be in that service without Terri so I gave myself permission to stay away from that service and, instead, attend the earlier service at our church. While some family members preferred for us all to be together at the midnight service, I felt it would be all right if I did not please everyone."

- *Change what needs to be changed.* "Every year my husband and I pulled out a huge box containing an artificial tree which we had used for nearly twenty-five years. However, the holiday after Al died, I couldn't bear to do that," says his wife. "Instead, I found it comforting to go out and buy a live tree and decorate it. That live tree reminded me that life was still flowing in our family. We had wonderful children, terrific sons and daughters-in-law as well as four delightful grandchildren."

- *Maintain the traditions that you need.* One widower recalls a family issue which emerged when his children decorated his home for the holiday. "They put out a stocking for every member of the family except for my beloved wife, Annie. I know they thought her stocking would make me more sad, but I explained that I bought that stocking thirty years earlier for the first Christmas we celebrated as husband and wife. Even though she was no longer with us I wanted that stocking out and in the same place it had been on past holidays. I think it was my way of reminding the family that Annie was not going to be forgotten or ignored."

- *Talk about the loss.* Let your pain spill over into words. Share your feelings with a trusted friend, and you will feel better. Be guided by Shakespeare's wisdom: "Give sorrow words...."

- *Guard your health.* "Eat a balanced diet. Get some exercise. Try your best to take good care of yourself. Remember: Neglecting your health does not honor the memory of your loved one," writes Rabbi Earl Grollman in his book, *Living with Loss, Healing with Hope*.

- *Plant a tree.* When there has been a death, many find it helpful to balance that loss with something living and growing. Consider planting a tree in memory of your loved one.

- *Be tolerant of your limits.* Grieving is hard work and takes its toll emotionally, mentally and physically. Don't overextend yourself. Eliminate stresses and strains when you can. "The first year after Don died, I just didn't have the energy to address and mail out the three hundred Christmas cards we normally sent," remembers one widow.

"So, I cut down the list and sent cards only to some eighty people, all of whom lived in other parts of the country and were people I would not be seeing. Since most of them did not know of Don's death, I used the card as an occasion to let them know."

• *Spend time with supportive people.* Not everyone understands the pain of grief. Identify people in whose company you feel better. Then spend more time with them during the holiday. The power of friendship is commended in Scripture:

“Two people can accomplish more than twice as much as one.... If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But people who are alone when they fall are in real trouble” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, New Living Translation).

• *Talk about your deceased loved one.* Often a family will engage in a conspiracy of silence believing you will be better served if no one brings up your deceased loved one. Most grievers find such silence only adds to their pain and confusion. Include the deceased person’s name in your holiday conversations. As

you speak candidly about him or her, others will recognize your need to remember that special individual and will also talk about that person.

• *Express and explore your faith.* Death often raises theological issues, especially

at the holidays. This can be a grand opportunity to renew and deepen your faith. Speak with your pastor or a mature believer you trust. You will find him or her approachable, supportive and helpful.

• *Don’t let the greeting “Happy Holidays” upset you.* Many grievers are disturbed when someone says “Happy holidays” to them. Rather than let it upset you, receive it as a wish of good will from a stranger or colleague. Respond simply and kindly by saying: “Thank you.” Or, “Happy holidays to you as well.”

• *Help others.* Take the focus off of your own pain and your troubles by investing yourself by helping others. Volunteer at a downtown mis-

*“Peace I leave with you;
my peace I give you....
Do not let your hearts
be troubled and do
not be afraid.”
John 14:27*

sion, feed the hungry, visit a lonely person, invite someone who is alone to share a meal with you.

• *Let your tears flow.* If you have just suffered a loss there is no doubt that the holidays will be an emotional time. When you feel the need to cry, let the tears flow. You’ve lost someone you love, and crying is a perfectly normal response to the loss. Tears are an honest expression of grief.

• *Memorialize your loved one during the holiday.* Consider sending a donation to a cause or an organization which was important to your loved one. Making a contribution is an effective way to both honor the memory of your loved one and to continue his or her commitment.

• *Join a grief support group.* “Joining or re-entering a support group may be the single most important step you can take as you struggle with grief during the holidays,” says Dr. Kenneth J. Doka, an author and grief educator. “Support groups provide members with the opportunity to share the pain of grief with others who are also finding the holidays a struggle.”

• *Embrace your treasure of memories.* “Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved,” notes Dr. Alan D. Wolfelt, Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition in Fort Collins, Colorado. “And holidays always make you think about times past. Instead of ignoring these memories, share them with your family and friends. Keep in mind that memories are tinged with both happiness and sadness. If your memories bring laughter, smile. If your memories bring sadness, it’s all right to cry. Memories that were made in love—no one can ever take them away from you.”

• *Ask for help when you need it.* Do you need someone to be with? A shoulder to cry on? Someone to talk to? Help with something your loved one always did for you at the holiday? Reach out and ask for help.

• *Get outside.* Don’t stay cooped up in your home or apartment. Get outside. Enjoy some fresh air. Engage in some outdoor exercise—walking, jogging, biking.

“After my 23-year-old son died, my grief and depression was almost more than I could bear in December. But, I managed to survive by getting outside and taking a long, long walk every day during the month,” says one bereaved father.

- *Create a special holiday tribute for your loved one.* Some ways to do this include: lighting a special candle each evening; putting together a bowl of colorful ornaments and placing them in a visible location in your home; reciting a daily prayer expressing gratitude for the gift of your loved one; creating a picture display of your loved one on a small table.

- *Finally, choose life in every way you can.* Be among people who vitalize and energize you. Practice disciplines which bring you hope, peace, comfort, joy and love. Engage in activities which bring you meaning and satisfaction.

TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT DEATH

On most days at four o'clock Michael and his grandfather could be seen walking down the street, hand in hand, to the corner store. It was a daily ritual for the little boy and the elderly man. Although separated by decades, the two enjoyed a precious common bond. They shared a two-family house in an outlying section of New York City. The grandfather lived in the upstairs unit. Michael and his family lived downstairs. It had been that way since Michael's birth.

When Michael turned seven, his family moved to Long Island, leaving the grandfather back in the city. “See you on Thanksgiving!” they all said. Thanksgiving came and went. They did not see the grandfather. The same thing happened at Christmas.

“Grandpa's away for awhile,” Michael's parents explained. “Don't worry about it.” Months went by and Michael waited. When his birthday came and went and there was no card from his grandfather, Michael became concerned, wondering what he could have done to make the elderly man not love him anymore.

It was nearly two years before Michael's parents told him the truth: his beloved grandfather died shortly after they moved to Long Island. “I know they thought they were doing

the right thing,” Michael says, “but it was a terrible time for me. They certainly didn’t spare me any pain while I was wondering what had happened. And then when they finally told me the truth, I still had to deal with the feeling of losing Grandpa.”

That true but unfortunate story is reported by funeral director Dan Schaefer and Christine Lyons in their excellent book, *How Do We Tell The Children? A Step-by-Step Guide For Helping Children Cope When Someone Dies*.

Every day of the year children lose someone they love to death: a parent, grandparent, sibling, friend, relative. Like Michael’s family, parents may try to shield the child from the blow.

However, when death is improperly explained and responded to, it prevents a child from experiencing the loss, expressing their grief, sharing in the family mourning and moving on toward recovery. Children have the same need as adults to process what has happened and to mourn.

Here are some basic do’s and don’ts when talking to children about death:

DO be honest about the death. Although you may find it difficult to speak with your child about death, keep in mind honesty is the best policy. There is nothing worse for a child than being the last to know and to accidentally discover the “secret” and then be given the excuse: “We thought it was best not to tell you.”

As soon as you learn about a death, inform your child simply and directly: “Honey, a very sad thing happened this afternoon. Grandmother died.” Once you have given your child this information, gently make sure he or she understands what you’ve just said.

DON’T use euphemisms. When her aunt died, a six-year-old girl was told that “Aunt Ellen went away on a long trip.” Because her aunt never returned from that trip, the little girl was terrified when her family announced that they

were all going on a “trip” for their summer vacation.

“When you’re talking with your child, avoid euphemisms,” say Schaefer and Lyons. “Use simple words like dead, stopped working, and wore out—simple words to establish the fact that the body is biologically dead.”

If your child asks, “What does dead mean?” respond simply by stating: “Dead means a person’s body has stopped working and won’t work anymore.” Or, if your child asks: “Is death like sleeping?” a good response is to state simply: “When someone dies, their body stops working. It is not resting. Its job is over.”

DO help children express their thoughts and feelings. Encourage children to cry out their grief and talk out their thoughts and feelings over the death. Be aware that children are often verbally limited when it comes to stating their feelings.

Children often express their grief in a variety of nonverbal ways such as sleeplessness, nightmares, clinging behavior and school difficulties. Because of their verbal limitations, you, as the parent or an important adult, may have to take the initiative in getting your children to ventilate grief.

One effective way of doing this is to pick up on a child’s feelings and say: “I know you miss Daddy very much. I miss him too.” A simple statement like that is often enough to have children open up.

DON’T tell a child how to feel. Some parents unwisely tell children: “Be brave.” “Be strong, you’re the man in the family now.” “Don’t cry, it was the will of God.” Rather, let a child experience and express grief.

DO offer continuous love and assurance. “In the early stages of mourning, a child needs reassurance that he is loved. This will make him feel more secure.

Parents cannot shield their children from painful feelings, but they can help the child to bear them.

“So, openly express your caring—show him in many ways that you love him,” writes psychologist Charles E. Schaefer, Ph.D. in his book, *How to Talk to Your Kids About Really Important Things*. Dr. Schaefer also says one of the best ways a parent can show care is by being readily present and available during the difficult months of grieving.

DON’T hide your grief from your children. Be open with your own grief and emotions. It’s all right if your children see you crying or feeling sad. Your open grieving gives a child permission to grieve as well. By seeing you grieve a child will know that it’s normal and healthy to cry and feel sad after a death.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”
Matthew 11:28

“A child takes his cue from the adult,” says Sacramento, California family therapist Jerri Smock, Ph.D. “You need to handle your own emotions—anger, hurt, griev-

ing, tears, whatever—and you need to be vulnerable and you need to be able to express and identify your feelings so a child can do the same with his or her own feelings.”

DO enlist outside help. Tap into the spiritual resources available from your church. Enlist the help of your child’s Sunday School teacher, youth minister, pastor or other spiritual leader who can minister to grieving children. Often someone outside the family can provide much needed additional comfort, concern and care.

DON’T assume that children will just get over it. “The idea that children are more adaptable, that death is less traumatic to them, is a myth,” say authors Candy Lightner and Nancy Hathaway in their book, *Giving Sorrow Words*.

“The fact is that children are in many ways most affected by a death, for unlike adults, whose identities are formed, they must brave a further challenge: growing up in the face of loss.

Whether the death takes place during their infancy or their adolescence, whether the person who dies is a relative or a friend, the impact can last for the rest of their lives.” Do not assume your child will get over the death naturally and on his own. Be proactive—providing all the comfort and consolation you can.

DO be a good listener. Like adults, children need to talk about the loss and their feelings connected to it. That means they need adults who will take the time to listen carefully and compassionately.

“Listening to the child is an effective way of putting care into action,” writes grief authority Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D., in his book *Helping Children Cope With Grief*. “Listening requires hearing not only the content of what the child is saying but also hearing the content of that which is only being hinted. The child may need help in terms of being able to put thoughts and feelings into words. While you will certainly want to listen with your ears and see through your eyes, you will also want to hear and respond with your heart.”

DO nurture faith, but **DON’T** blame God. Some parents unwittingly create future spiritual problems for children by incorrectly assigning blame to God for a death. This is done when a child hears an adult say: *God needed Daddy. It was God’s will. God loved your sister so much he took her.*

Rather than speak of God “taking” a loved one, convey to your child that God has “received” a beloved family member and that God is also sad over the tragedy. Remind your child that “God shares our pain and will help us get through the crisis.”

An excellent biblical verse to share with your child is Psalm 147:3. “He heals the brokenhearted, binding up their wounds” (New Living Translation). Pray for wisdom, asking God to direct you in the best ways of responding to your child.