



[Starting Conversations about Death and Grief](#)

I've spoken with several surviving parents, or care givers that have one thing in common: the wish that their child, or children, will find a place to talk about their loss and share their feelings. I have heard this in numerous ways: "He keeps his feelings bottled up inside." "She freezes up when I try to talk about Daddy." "She just refuses to talk about it with me."

Intuitively, we know being able to talk about our loss is healing in some way, but often, it is not easy to talk about it ourselves, or to get our children to talk about it.

Below are a few things that you, as parent or guardian, might try. Remember, if and when they do talk, listen. Repeat what they say and validate any feelings they might share. Also, be aware that the conversation may well surface feelings of your own. It is OK to cry together, be angry together, be sad together, and be confused together. That's part of the healing journey.

A few ways to help your child talk about their loss:

Make a picture album together and talk about what is going on in each picture, even if they were too young at the time to know. Children often fear their memories will fade as time passes and an album can not only be a conversation starter, but a memory preserver.

Visit a fun place where you as a family visited. Talk about what fun it was and how mom, dad, sister or brother responded.

Create a new family ritual associated with the person you lost. On their birthday you might purchase helium balloons, attach a written message to the string and release them together. Ask your children if they'd like to share what they wrote to their loved one. If they don't, make it OK to not share.

Visit the cemetery or place where the ashes were scattered each season and spend a quiet time in silent memory. On the way home, share your thoughts, but leave it to them to offer theirs.

Look for small light colored pebbles about 1 to 1.5 inches long, and together, think of feeling words. Use a permanent fine marker to write the words on them. Make sure there are positive feelings as well as negative ones (sad, glad, angry, confused, happy, lonely, joyful, peaceful, fearful, etc.). Your children (and yourself), can use these pebbles to place in a bowl somewhere prominent in the house any time they want to let others to know how they are feeling that day or moment. It can be an opportunity to talk and listen, but sometimes it's just a way to let others know without having to say anything.

Make a soundtrack in memory of your family member. Music and song are powerful stimulants to feelings especially when we link them to the person we lost. Listening together can be a powerful experience, but just make sure you are ready for it. Ask each family member why they chose the songs that they did. This could become a yearly ritual.

What have you done with your family to help open conversation? Please share your experiences and suggestions as comments below.