

Coping with Loss in General

There are other kinds of loss that may not involve death but can lead to grief anyway. Some examples include a friend moving away, a grandparent getting dementia and not seeming like the same person they once were, a major change in routine like one parent starting to work a night shift, or missing out on important events because of the pandemic or other circumstances.

What to say to kids: “It probably feels really awful that you’re missing out on X and things will never be the same again. I can only imagine how hard it must be for you because I know how hard you worked/how wonderful the time was you spent together/etc. If that makes you feel angry, sad, lonely, or any other yucky way, I totally get it! I’m always here for you if you want to talk, share memories, do a kickboxing video, or just wallow and watch a movie together.” Remember that even though no one has actually died, your child deserves to feel real grief and take time and space to work through the difficult situation. These ambiguous types of loss can be challenging to deal with because there’s less of a sense of closure. So you might be able to help your child create a sense of closure, so that they can move on to the next stage. You could help your child make a list of positive things they have gained from the friendship, relationship, or other unfinished business. Don’t gloss over the negative feelings they may have, but point out that these positive things can continue to give them strength forever—they don’t have to be lost just because they’re over. Or, encourage your child to write a heartfelt letter—even if the person or thing can’t or won’t receive it. Writing (or even telling you what to write down) is a great way to process their feelings, and a goodbye/thank you letter can also provide some mental closure for the situation. If it’s an ongoing situation, the letter-writing could continue as long as it still seems to help.

How to Talk to Kids about Death, Loss, & Hard News

REGULATE
YOURSELF FIRST

USE A CALM AND
EVEN TONE OF VOICE
IN A QUIET SPACE

USE SIMPLE &
CLEAR WORDS

@kindmindstherapy

PAUSE TO ALLOW FOR
PROCESSING AND
ENCOURAGE QUESTIONS

ANSWER QUESTIONS
HONESTLY &
DIRECTLY

VALIDATE &
NORMALIZE
FEELINGS

REMIND THEM
IT IS NOT THEIR
FAULT

PREPARE YOUR
CHILD FOR WHAT
COMES NEXT

USE BOOKS,
VIDEOS, & PLAY TO
OPEN DIALOGUE

<https://www.kindmindstherapynyc.com/post/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-death-loss-and-hard-news>

Other resources free and available:

<https://www.onwardthebook.com/meditations/>

<https://parents-together.org/script-for-how-to-talk-to-kids-about-grief/>