

# Siblings and Grief

After pregnancy and infant loss, including infertility, miscarriage, stillbirth, infant death, and ending a wanted pregnancy

Navigating grief with children whose sibling has died can be overwhelming. However much you are able, try to keep lines of communication open as you grieve together. Children are perceptive and will be aware of your feelings—being open and honest will help your child(ren) communicate how they are feeling, as well.

We hope the following information and suggestions will help guide you in supporting your child(ren) through their grief.

## What to Expect as Children Grieve

Children worry about mortality, both their own and that of those they love, when someone close to them dies.

### Be prepared for regressive behaviors.

- Difficulty sleeping, eating, or concentrating
- Difficulty going to school or getting back to a routine
- Clinging to one or both parents
- Withdrawing

### Siblings will grieve “what should have been.”

- Younger children may find it helpful to draw a picture of something he/she would have liked to do with their brother/sister.
- Older children may find it helpful to write about their brother/sister or write a letter to their sibling.

### Siblings will reprocess the loss as they mature and grow.

- Children need continued opportunities to talk about the loss as time passes.
- Continue to validate your child(ren)’s feelings about the loss as they grow up and develop into adulthood; *the loss will always be an important part of who they are* and how they perceive the world around them.
- Provide opportunities for your child(ren) to remember their sibling on birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries.

## How to Support Your Child’s Process

### Answer questions in an age appropriate manner.

- Children learn by asking questions. When they ask questions about death, it’s because there is something they don’t understand. Let them know that all questions are okay to ask.
- Younger children may not grasp that death is final and continue to ask about the whereabouts of their sibling—this is normal and not insensitive on their part.
- Older children may think they caused their sibling’s death; remind them it was nobody’s fault.
- Encourage children to ask questions and focus on answering the questions truthfully. Use concrete words like “died” and keep your answers in simple language.

### *Reassure your children that:*

- You love them.
- You love the sibling they lost (and that is why you are so sad).
- They didn’t do anything wrong (and they’re not the reason why you are sad).

### How to Support Your Child's Process

Talk to people in your children's lives.

- Reach out to your child's teacher or school counselor, explain what happened so that they will be able to help your child when they are in their care.

Allow children to grieve in their own way.

- Give grieving children choices whenever possible. Having choices allows children to grieve death in a way that feels right for them.
- Children may have a limited amount of tolerance for uncomfortable feelings and may want to be with their friends sooner than you'd expect—they're coping the best they can, and this does not mean that they aren't sad or experiencing grief.
- Allow your child(ren) to choose how and when to grieve (e.g., ask if they would like to hold their baby brother/sister who died)—do not force anything on them.
- Provide your child(ren) with opportunities to share their feelings; children may not want to talk about the loss with their parent for fear of making their parent sadder.
- It may be helpful to find a grief counselor who works specifically with children.
- Art and play therapy can be helpful in facilitating communication about their grief.
- Pet therapy can be a soothing relief to your child(ren).

#### CONSIDER PARTICIPATING IN A REMEMBRANCE WALK.

Being around other children who have lost a sibling can be a comfort and help them to not feel so alone.



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