

Respecting Each Other's Grief



When a loved one dies, the surviving family members can feel overwhelmed with grief. For most, grieving involves a prolonged period of sadness, anger, and feelings of helplessness, but the grief journey is unique for everyone. The way people grieve depends on many different factors, such as their personality and the relationship they had with the deceased.

Since family members may grieve differently in both time and manner, it's important to remember that there is no correct way to mourn. A death can bring out the best and the worst in families, but the worst can sometimes be avoided if family members respect one another and each other's grief journeys. Here are some suggestions on how you can show your family members that you respect their personal journeys:

- **Don't take sides.** Support all ways of grieving equally. Don't favor one person's journey or ways of expression.
- **Don't take anger personally.** Anger is a part of some people's grief journey. They can be angry at their family, the deceased, or the whole situation in general. Try not to take it personally if someone directs their anger at you, you're likely just the easiest target at the moment. However, if a child is expressing their anger in potentially hurtful ways or in a manner that goes against family rules about behavior, you can respect their anger while continuing to enforce consequences for unacceptable behavior. Maintaining structure, routine and consistent family rules are important parts of helping a child feel secure after a death in the family.
- **Don't pressure others to "be strong."** Asking anyone to put aside their grief to support a surviving parent, younger siblings, or other family members can make it seem like you care more about the others than you do about them. This behavior can send the message that they should hide their grief, which may keep them from seeking support or help when they need it.
- **Be open and honest.** Being honest with somebody, no matter how hard it is to do so, can be one of the greatest forms of respect. Showing others, especially your children, that you can express your thoughts, fears, and observations about what has happened may make them more willing to do the same.

Death and grief may be experienced as losing of control, which can be one of the most difficult aspects for a family to work through. Although it is difficult, respecting each other's grief and needs during times of mourning can help keep the lines of communication open. Communicating with each other about what you need to grieve effectively can help the entire family heal.

Further Reading:

- *Sad Isn't Bad* by Michaelene Mundy
- *How We Grieve: Relearning the World* by Thomas Attig
- *Weird Is Normal When Teenagers Grieve* by Jenny Lee Wheeler

References:

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