Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association

Families First

a newsletter for Nebraska Families

July / August 2023

N F A P A

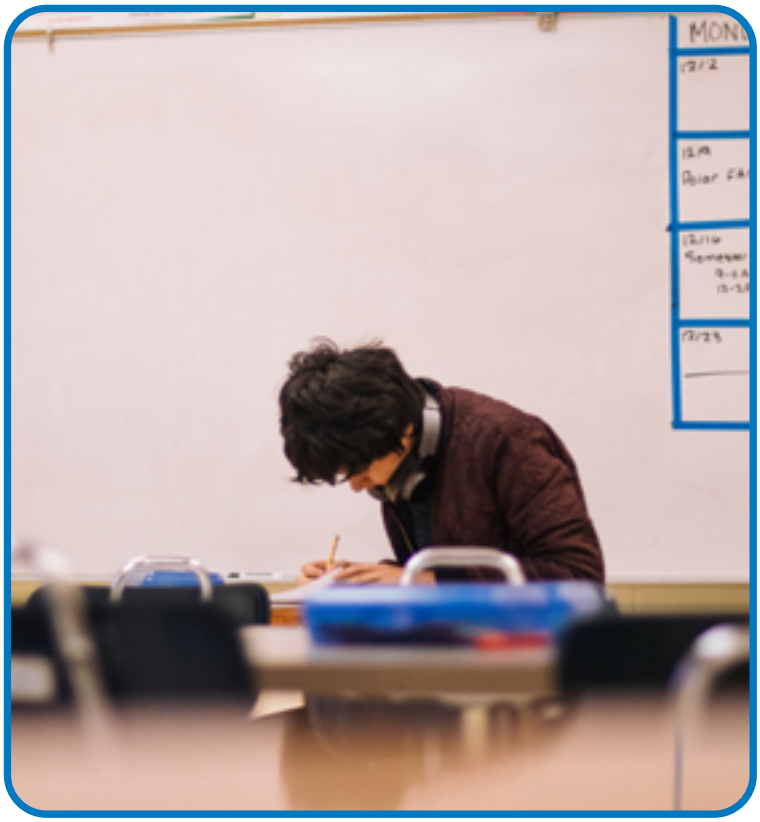
10 THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW BEFORE YOUR TEEN STARTS HIGH SCHOOL

by Hina Talib MD/Pediatrician

It might seem like yesterday when you were dropping your timid baby off in kindergarten as you tearfully walked away. And, here you are… in what seems like a blink of an eye, your now much bigger baby is headed off to high school.

The jump from middle to high school can be both exciting and scary for teens and parents alike. Not only is it more challenging academically, but throughout the next four years, your teen will grow and mature by leaps and bounds as they navigate the sometimes tumultuous waters of high school.

In my practice as a pediatrician specializing in adolescents, I've heard about many of the challenges parents face during these pivotal years with their kids. To help you better support your teen as they venture into the next big phase of their life, here are 10 things you should know before your teen starts high school.



10 Things You Should Know Before Your Teen Starts High School

#1 No Topic Should Be Off Limits

The high school years are challenging for teenagers. The vast majority of teens will face a host of obstacles, temptations and situations that will test their confidence, will and logic. Everything from being exposed to alcohol and drugs to feeling pressured to have sex – they're likely to experience it *all* in high school.

Talk to your teen *a lot*. Talk about the easy stuff *and* the hard stuff. Your teen needs to know that no topic is off-limits. The more you talk to your teen about the tough subjects like sex, drinking, drugs and pornography, the less likely they'll be to engage in risky behavior.

#2 Remember How Much You Wanted to Fit In – Help Them Learn How to Be a Good Friend

The high school years (*and* middle school years, too) are the only time in our kids' lives when they'll try to become their own person, all while striving to fit in. Try to be the support your teen needs during this tumultuous time in their lives. Remember what it felt like to be back in high school – the fear you had of not fitting in, of doing or saying something dumb and wanting to (at the very least) *not* be at the bottom of the popularity totem pole.

Help your teen shift their focus from "fitting in" to surrounding themselves with good friends who appreciate and love them exactly as they are. Talk with them about what it takes to be a good friend and encourage them to be kind, inclusive and empathetic toward others. In doing so, others will gravitate toward them and they *will* fit in.

(Continued on page 3)

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Attention Foster Parents!

Earn Your In-Service Hours While Getting the Chance to Win a Great Prize!

Answer these 10 questions correctly and you will not only earn .5 credits toward your in-service hours, but your name will also be put in a drawing for a prize. For this issue we are offering a $10 Walmart gift card.

There are a variety of ways to do this. You can email the information to ***Corinne@nfapa.org***, send the questionnaire to the NFAPA office at 3601 N. 25th Street, Suite D, Lincoln, NE 68521 or you can complete the questionnaire online at ***https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/May-June2023***
We will then enter your name in the drawing! We will also send you a certificate for training credit to turn in when it is time for relicensing. Good Luck!

1. True or False. Family practices are more important for teens than family structure.

2. Fill in the blanks. Messages about _____ _____ and knowledge are consistently related to positive outcomes for teens.

3. True or False. If we only focus on the outcome, kids may do whatever it takes, including cheating or lying, to get to the intended goal.

4. Fill in the Blanks. Praise can also create _____.

5. Fill in the Blanks. Wanting to protect a child from suffering is also the reason why some parents tend to be very poor _____.

6. Fill in the Blanks. Confidence comes from making the effort, from _____, from _____, and _____ ___.

7. True or False. Kids don't whine to intentionally irritate us—they whine because they have learned a positive, productive way to get our attention or have their needs met..

8. What are the 3 steps to stop whining?

9. List 3. Top Reasons Why Teenagers Lie?

10. 5 Ways to Encourage Honesty in Your Teen.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone #: _____

Families First Newsletter Issue: July / August 2023

(Continued from page 1)

#3 You Only Have One Shot at a First Reaction

Your son walks in the door after hanging out with friends on a Friday night and he confides in you that one of the guys he was with was smoking weed and drinking. You may not realize it, but your next move lays the foundation for future open dialogue with your son.

Overreact and he's likely to shut down and avoid telling you anything in the future. He may even begin lying to avoid the long lectures, yelling or fierce interrogations that he feels are sure to follow. A better option is to keep your cool and listen. The more approachable you are and the more low-key your reactions are, the more likely your teen will be to share the details of their life offering you more influence to guide them in the long run. If you blow it and overreact, (face it, we *all* do from time to time) apologize. Your child needs to hear it.

#4 There's Nothing Wrong with a "C" – Don't Make Perfection Your Standard

Ask any teenager who's made it through high school and they'll tell you, high school is *hard*. The expectations are higher, the demands greater and the classes more challenging. Not to mention the fact that high schoolers have to juggle school, extracurriculars, sports, internships, jobs, their social lives and responsibilities at home.

The bottom line is even typical straight "A" students can falter in high school. And, kids who may have struggled in middle school might find it even more difficult. Back off of perfectionistic standards and approach the high school years with realistic expectations of your teen's abilities.

#5 When They Mess Up, Don't Attack Their Character

They're growing up, learning how to become more independent, making decisions on their own and preparing to take on this world without you – your teen is *bound* to make mistakes.

As opposed to tossing out careless harsh comments that attack their character such as, *"If you weren't so lazy and irresponsible, maybe you'd get your homework in on time!"* stick to the facts and support and guide your teen to prevent them from making the same mistake twice.

#6 Their Behavior is Not a Reflection of How Good a Parent You Are

You've spent the better part of your child's life teaching them right from wrong, and yet, suddenly he's made a few poor choices, messed up royally or perhaps veered off path.

The road to adulthood is oftentimes filled with blind curves, potholes and detours. Just because your teen is experiencing a few bumps in the road surely doesn't mean they won't eventually find their way. Moreover, your teen's behavior is not a reflection of how good a parent you are. Nearly every parent struggles with their teen at one point or another.

#7 Consent Means More Than "No Means No"

According to the CDC, half of all teenagers have had sex by the time they're 18 years of age, yet one study found that far too many parents don't talk to their teens about sex.

Get in the trenches with your teen on this subject. Years of research have proven that open communication at home is the key to preventing teenagers from engaging in risky sexual behavior. Even if your teen gets embarrassed, dive into the rules of sexual consent, that "no" always means "no," that "no" can be conveyed non-verbally, "yes" can be withdrawn at any time and when alcohol and/or drugs are involved, it always muddies the water of consent.

#8 Stop Being the "Fixer"

By the time our kids reach high school, they don't always want or need our advice, insight or solutions. Sometimes, all they really want is a sounding board to vent, empathy so they don't feel alone and reassurance that our love is steadfast.

The next time your son or daughter walks in the door upset about something that happened during their day, resist the urge to jump in and be the "fixer." Offer them a cold drink or their favorite snack, sit beside them and listen if they're in the mood to talk. If not, let it go and revisit it later. Give them the space they need to figure out a few things on their own.

#9 Good Kids are Capable of Making Bad Decisions

Deep down inside, every parent wants their teen to be "a good kid." The kid who walks the straight and narrow, who follows the rules, does well in school and never makes poor decisions. However, that's not the narrative for the vast majority of teenagers. In fact, most teenagers make more than a few mistakes and poor decisions throughout high school.

Rather than setting the bar too high and *expecting* your child to be a "good kid" in high school, it's far better to have realistic expectations with the understanding that your child is likely to mess up, make a few poor choices and defy your rules from time to time. Good kids are capable of making bad decisions – it doesn't make them "bad" kids.

#10 Suicide is Real – Let Your Teen Know You'll Help Them Get Through Anything

While every parent would like to believe that their child isn't capable of suicide, the spike in teen suicide has spawned greater awareness and the harsh reality that suicide can happen to *any* child in *any* family.

Of all the things you should know before your teen starts high school, remember that your teen's mental health is fragile. Help them protect it. Teach them the importance of self-care, ways they can manage their stress, and the importance of

talking openly and honestly if they're struggling and reaching out for help should they need it. According to the Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide, "Once you acknowledge that suicide is as much of a risk factor for your child as not wearing a seatbelt while driving, using alcohol or drugs, or engaging in risky sexual behavior, you've taken the first step in prevention."

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https://raisingteenstoday.com/10-things-you-should-know-before-your-teen-starts-high-school/

SELF-SABOTAGE AS A TRAUMA RESPONSE IN CHILDREN AND HOW TO STOP IT

By Beth Tyson

Self-sabotage sometimes occurs throughout our lives regardless of the trauma we've endured. It's that night you ate a package of Oreos after working out all week. It's putting off studying for that important test until the night before. Or maybe it's breaking up with someone suitable for us and going after the "bad boy" type instead. In these instances, we are conscious of our choices but choose an option that is not best for us anyway. This can create anger and confusion towards ourselves if we don't see the meaning within our behavior. We ask ourselves, "Why do I keep doing this to myself?" I know from first-hand experience just how frustrating this can be.

There are also subconscious versions of self-sabotage. It looks like being so perfectionistic that we never publish that article or that book because it's "not ready yet," or starting fights with our partner the week before they leave for an extended work trip. Underneath the perfectionist behavior, maybe we believe what our mother said in 6th grade, "you'll never amount to anything." Subconscious self-sabotage keeps us from bringing our dreams to life and fulfilling our purpose on earth. Underneath those fights with our partner before a big trip might be our fear of abandonment from being separated from our biological family and put into foster care. The reasons vary, but it's clear what we experienced when we were developing our beliefs about the world is clouding how we behave with others and the world at large.

While self-sabotage happens in the general population, it tends to be more prevalent in people who experienced significant childhood and developmental trauma, which includes all types of abuse, neglect, and abandonment.

I will share a personal example:

As a trauma therapist, I would frequently hear:

"Michael was doing so well, his grades were improving, and he started helping around the house, then I caught him doing xyz and now he's grounded for a week."

Getting into trouble has several ***upsides*** when you've grown up in traumatic relationships.

1. The outcome is predictable. This reduces feelings of anxiety for the child. Having people angry at you is your norm. Familiarity equals safety for our nervous system.

2. The child learned during critical points in their brain development that relationships are scary and hurtful. Therefore, when they start to get close to someone, they feel fear instead of safety. This fear can motivate them to destroy the relationship if it is happening too fast.

3. Getting into trouble distracts the child from feeling their emotions. It's tough to focus on how you feel when you're always in trouble. Being grounded and having people angry with you takes you away from your sadness about what's happened to you.

4. Being angry and making others angry is a less vulnerable position for the child.

Vulnerability equals being unsafe to a child who has experienced trauma and abuse at the hands of adults who were supposed to protect them.

This may sound like a hopeless situation, but I take heart that our brains and nervous system are malleable over our entire lifespan. Our brains can change when we are eight or eighty, which is good news. In addition, adolescence is a critical time when a child's brain is in a rapid development process, similar to when we are a baby, and this creates fertile ground for healing and healthy change.

How to interrupt the cycle of self-sabotage in children

- Help the child feel safe, seen, and heard by validating their trauma and loss. Adults tend to gloss over loss with children. Unfortunately, this is a protective measure that only makes things harder for the child and easier for the adult. Children need to know it's ok to grieve, feel sad, angry, scared, and all the emotions that follow a significant loss.
- Prioritize the child's need for safety in relationships above all else. When a child experiences abuse, neglect, and trauma, their foundation for security and trust has been severely damaged. Our job is to help the child rebuild their faith in the world around them. Feeling safe is a fundamental need that cannot be ignored or brushed aside. If we want to see children move forward after the trauma, we must do everything we can to help them feel safe and protected, even if it's not how we were raised.
- Be trustworthy and as honest as possible (in age-

appropriate terms) to establish a relationship built on trust. Young children need to hear the truth of their lives in small chunks over time. We don't have to give full details, but we can share that their parents could not keep them safe, and it's our job to keep them safe now. Or that mom has a problem with drinking too much alcohol to help her handle her feelings and needs to find a safer way to feel better. My rule is that if they are old enough to ask the question, they are old enough to hear the answer, but it should be done gently and with compassion. I do not share details or scary information that isn't necessary for the child to know. The time will come when they can learn more. For now, we keep it simple and basic while also being honest.

- Stay committed to the relationship regardless of the child's behavior. If they sense our love and commitment are conditional and based on their behavior, the child will not feel safe, and we will be experienced as just another adult who will abandon them. If they even slightly believe abandonment is possible, it is unlikely we will be able to develop a strong attachment with the child.
- Wrap as many committed people around the child as we can. Find a mentor, an extended family member, or someone in their life that genuinely cares about them, and foster that relationship. A committed, loving community is the fastest way to help children overcome trauma.
- Learn about *Positive Childhood Experiences* and how they mitigate the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences at PacesConnection.com. This research will blow your mind and give you HOPE for yourself and the children you take care of.
- Work on YOUR history of trauma so that you are not bringing your past wounds into the relationship with the child. Doing the work to heal yourself prevents you from being triggered by the child's behavior and allows you to stay present with their emotions when overwhelmed.
- When we inevitably mess up as a caregiver, admit it and apologize. As parents and caregivers, we are going to make mistakes. This is normal. We will lose our cool, break their trust, and say things we don't mean, but this doesn't mean we cannot repair the bond between us. Trustworthy relationships are based on rupture and repair. The golden opportunity is inherent in the repair process. How do we repair it? Admit our mistakes and say, "I don't like how I acted a few minutes ago. I am sorry. I am working to change my behavior. Can we start over?"

Of course, we may have tried all of this, and it's not helping. Please don't give up hope. Many types of family therapy can help you and the children you love stop self-sabotaging. I recommend EMDR Therapy, Play Therapy, and Family Systems Therapy for children who have experienced trauma and loss.

I hope this helps you see a child's behavior with fresh eyes today, and I wish you courage as you take steps toward rebuilding trust one day at a time with your child.

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https://www.bethtyson.com/post/the-ins-and-outs-of-self-sabotage-as-a-trauma-response-in-children

ANXIETY AT SCHOOL: WHEN TALKING AND DOING FEELS TOO BIG

by Karen Young

Children and teens with anxiety have so much to offer in the classroom, but too often, anxiety can keep this hidden. I often say that if you want to know what's happening, ask the anxious one in the room. Because of their need for safety, children who tilt more towards anxiety might be more likely to take things in, watch, notice things that might otherwise go unnoticed, as they try to get a sense of what it all means – but they won't always share their insight.

Too often though, that silence or lack of involvement can be misread. Sometimes silence means 'I don't have anything to say.' Sometimes it means, 'I have plenty to say but I don't want to share it right here and right now.' Whenever anxiety is fueling that silence, it's likely to mean, 'I don't feel safe enough – yet.' Of course, we want to move children towards taking safe risks and finding their voice in the classroom, but the more we rush this the more unsafe school is likely to feel, and the more we lose precious opportunities to help these kids and teens discover their potential.

Anxiety doesn't always mean, 'I'm not safe'. Often, it means, 'I don't feel safe enough yet.'

Anxiety is a felt sense of threat. It's not about what is actually safe, but about what the brain perceives. For kids and teens with anxiety, seemingly benign things might count as 'threat'. 'Threat' means different things for all of us. For kids with anxiety at school, asking questions, contributing to class discussions, asking for help, or trying something new might all count as 'threat'. It is not for us to question the rationality of their fears. We don't need to talk them out of how they feel. We couldn't if we wanted to. The truth is that they can feel anxious and be brave anyway – but only if they feel safe enough and held enough by the important adults beside them.

If anxiety is a felt sense of threat, the antidote to this is a felt sense of safety. For children, a felt sense of safety starts with the adult in the room, but this will take time. A child can have the safest, most loving, brilliant teacher, but until there is a felt sense of connection with that teacher (or another adult in the room), anxiety will interrupt learning, behaviour, and their capacity to show the very best of what they can do. And what they can do will often be surprising – insightful, important, beautiful things.

We have to be patient though. Relationships take time. Safety and trust take time. The teachers who take this time are the ones who will make the world feel safer for these children – all children, and change their world in important, enduring ways. This is when learning will happen. It's when we'll stop losing children who fly under the radar, or whose big behaviour takes them out of the classroom, or shifts the focus to the wrong things (behaviour, learning, avoidance, over relationships).

Why learning needs relationships.

The greatest way to support learning and behaviour is with safe, warm, loving relationships. It's just how it is, and there are no shortcuts. We can pour all the resources we want into learning support or behaviour management, but until children have a felt sense of safety and connection with the adult in the room, the 'thinking brain' won't be available. This is the frontal cortex, and it's the part of the brain needed for learning, deliberate decisions, thinking through consequences, rational thinking. During anxiety, it's sent offline. It can only ever be 'online' when there is a felt sense of safety.

This safety will only happen through relationship – not just any relationship, but one in which that child feels seen, held, and safe. This isn't a child thing or an anxiety thing. It's a human thing. We're wired to feel safest when we're connected to the people around us. There are a couple of reasons for this.

The first is that relational safety is an instinctive need. Babies wouldn't survive if there wasn't an adult to take care of them, so children are wired to feel safest with an adult they feel close to, and threatened in the felt absence of one. It's why relationships are so key to anxiety. Parents can't be everywhere all the time – we were never meant to do this parenting thing alone. Another adult can provide a felt sense of safety in the parent's absence, as long as the relationship is safe, warm, and loving. Any adult in the child's community – teacher, coach, grandparent, aunt, uncle, family friend – has a profoundly important role to play in nurturing and growing that child, and opening up their world.

The second reason relationship is so important is because it can unlock the door to that child's world. When children feel safe, they will show us more clearly what they need, but more importantly, they will let us be the one that provides this in meaningful ways, whether it's validation, trust, confidence in their capacity to cope or do hard things, cues of safety.

Of course, we can offer all of these things from outside their world, but it might not hold as much heft until they let us in. Only then will they grant us enough authority to guide and influence them. When they open the door to us, they will be more likely to believe us when we tell them they are safe, that they are brave enough and strong enough, and that they can do hard things.

How can we build relationships at school that build brave behaviour?

Entry into their world only happens by invitation, and only when they're ready. We can't rush our way in, or force our way in, or talk our way in. It just doesn't work that way, for any of us. It takes time, a gentle hand, and an open heart. Here are some ways we can nurture this along.

1. Be curious.

To provide children with a felt sense of safety, we first need to understand how that child sees and experiences the world. This happens by being curious, and eventually being invited into their world – not to change it, but to understand it, strengthen it, and soften it where we can. From there, we will be more able to understand what that child needs, and provide it in meaningful ways.

2. Why, 'There's nothing to worry about,' doesn't work.

It's not enough to tell them not to worry. Think of it like this: Imagine that someone you don't know or don't trust enough is telling you to close your eyes and follow them across a roaring, bustling freeway, assuring you that it's safe. Would you feel safe enough? Now, what if it was someone you felt close to, and who you knew you really mattered to. You might still feel terrified, but you'd be more likely to feel 'okay enough'.

Children are no different to us. Just because an adult tells them they'll be okay, it doesn't mean they'll feel it or believe it. What they need is to be given time to actually experience the environment and the person as being safe, supportive and ready to catch them.

It's also important to remember that during anxiety, we're dealing with an amygdala (the seat of anxiety in the brain) that has registered threat, and recruited you for support. The amygdala doesn't care for rational conversation. It just needs to know that it's been heard, and that support it here. This is why validation is so important. Something like, 'I know how big this is for you. I really get it,' sends a message to the amygdala that it's done its job, support is here, and it can rest.

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  GPS for Kids on the Trauma Highway
  Barb Clark, North American Council on Adoptable Children
- **October 7, 2023**
  Minimal Facts
  Christy Prang, BraveBe Child Advocacy Center
- **November 4, 2023**
  Technology Safety
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2024

- **January 20, 2024**
  Core Components of Attachment & Co-Regulation in the Role of a Foster Parent
  Lindsey Ondrak, Nebraska Resource Project for Vulnerable Young Children

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3. 2 x 5 x 5

Building relationships takes time, but it doesn't have to take a lot of time, each time. If you are a teacher or any important adult in a child's world, frequent small conversations will can build a connection that is at least as strong infrequent big doses. Try for 2 minutes a day, 5 days a week, for 5 weeks. The conversation can be about anything, as long as it shows interest in their world – what they're reading, what they did on the weekend, what they had for breakfast, noticing something they've said or done, pets, sport, music practice – anything.

4. Find similarities.

Similarities build connection. It's the power of sports teams, and neighbourhoods, and communities. Notice similarities whenever you can: 'We're both wearing blue today!', or, 'You have a dog! So do I!'

5. Let your face light up when you see them.

When children walk into a room, they will be looking to the adult in the room for signs of safety. They will read nonverbals more than anything we say. Whenever you can, let your face and your voice make your intent clear. Neutral faces and monotone voices (which we often use as a 'calm' voice, but which isn't always 'calming') can register threat in an anxious brain because the intent isn't clear. Let your face light up when you see them, and mirror their feelings when they're feeling, and let your voice do the same.

6. Let them see their important adults speaking with big hearts about them.

If you are a parent, ask your child's teacher to let you know (maybe once a week) about anything significant – even if it's just a teeny bit significant. Then, share that with your child, 'Miss Kelly told me that you asked a really great question in class. She said she loved that you were brave enough to do that.' Then, let your child's teacher know little snippets that your child is happy for you to share, so it can be a point of connection between your child and the teacher.

7. Let your child see who has the baton.

For a while, some children might need to see who has the 'caring for me' baton. Until they feel safe enough, let them see the baton pass from the parent to the teacher. Some children will benefit from being 'handed over' to the same person at dropoff each day. This can be done through words, 'Mr James is going to take you for the day now. I know he's going to take really great care of you.' Then, Mr James says, 'I'm so pleased you're here! Do you have everything you need for today? …' For younger children, it might also involve a physical hand over where a parent takes the child's hands from theirs, and puts it into the hand of the teacher.

8. Any loving adult can fill the void, not only the classroom teacher.

Even for teachers with big hearts, and who undertand the importance of building an attachment relationship, it can be difficult when they have to split their attention between a room full of other children who need them. This is when another adult in the school can play a really important part in filling the void – as long as that adult is loving, warm, and willing to do the work to connect with that child. It might be the librarian, the school counsellor, the person in the office, a teacher aide. It doesn't matter who, as long as it is someone who can be available for that child at dropoff or when feelings or behaviour get big during the day, and who can do little check-ins (see the 2 x 5 x 5 strategy above) along the way.

And finally …

We all need certain things to feel safe enough to put ourselves into the world. Kids with anxiety are thoughtful, observant and insightful, and their wisdom will always have the potential to add something important to the world for all of us. Until they have a felt sense of safety though, we just won't see it.

Relationship is key – but honestly, isn't it for everything? The need for safety through relationship isn't an 'anxiety thing'. It's a 'human thing'. When we feel closer to the people around us, we can rise above the mountains that block our way. Even as adults, we never forget the ones from our childhood who took the time to let us know we matter. Sometimes it's not even about having someone believe that we can, but about knowing someone will still believe in us and care about us if we can't. A teacher, or any important adult in the life of a child, can make a lasting difference by asking, 'How do I build my relationship with this child so s/he trusts me when I say, 'I've got you, and I know you can do this.'

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HOW TO TALK TO KIDS ABOUT SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

Strategies for dealing with anxiety — your kids' and your own

by Rachel Ehmke

America. When something that once seemed unthinkable happens with some regularity, added to our feeling of horror that it's happened (again!) is another kind of alarm: Could this happen at my child's school?

And many parents have begun to worry whether the news of school shootings, along with the active-shooter drills most schools are now conducting, are frightening children in a damaging way.

Responding to this concern, Jamie Howard, PhD, director of the Trauma and Resilience Service at the Child Mind

Institute, says that parents tend to worry about school shootings more than their children do. "Even though they're the ones going into school every day, I just don't hear a lot of kids worrying about it," she says. "When children are younger they're more egocentric. As they get to become teenagers this changes." This developmental selfishness is a quality that often protects younger children from the kind of anxiety that the adults around them are experiencing.

This is good news for parents who worry about their children feeling afraid. But kids are very good at picking up on the fears of their parents, and if they sense that Mom or Dad is afraid, they will take notice.

Unhealthy anxiety

Psychologists sometimes describe anxiety as the body's internal alarm system. You want your alarm system to go off if there is a threat nearby. But sometimes the alarm is triggered too easily and you are alerted when there isn't any danger at all. Or maybe there is a threat, but it doesn't actually warrant a full-fledged alarm response.

The way school shootings are covered on television and discussed on social media is intense. We can hear about the tragedy throughout our day, often for several days, whenever we look at a screen. Besides making us feel upset and frustrated, it can also make us feel less safe. "Because it's so horrific and scary and important it dominates the media and therefore our minds, and we think of it as a much bigger threat than it is, explains Dr. Howard. "The more you watch, the more it tricks your mind into thinking it's an increased probability of occurring."

School shootings actually are not very common, so while they are a threat, the likelihood that one will personally affect you is slim. In Dr. Howard's words, "some anxiety is warranted, debilitating anxiety is not." If you feel that you are more anxious than you should be, a good first step is always to take a break from any media that might be focusing your attention in an unhealthy direction.

Look for ways to be proactive

Because anxiety is meant to prepare us for action, it makes sense to channel the worries you are feeling into something proactive you can do. One of the things Dr. Howard recommends is forming a parent group at the school. Assessing what the school needs, getting involved in the planning process for drills, and having ongoing conversations about keeping the school safe can make worried parents feel better.

Likewise, participating in political activism or efforts to support mental health and wellness in your community can make you feel like you are making a difference. It also sets a good example for your children, who may want to get involved, too. Many of the students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School began lobbying lawmakers after the tragic shooting at their school, and they inspired students across the country to think about ways they might make their own voices heard. Participating in a school walkout or even just getting their opinion across in a conversation with a parent can make kids feel like their thoughts and values matter, which will feel reassuring.

Talk to your children

Parents are sometimes afraid to bring up school shootings with their children, because they don't want to scare them. But children will have often heard about a school shooting that is getting a lot of attention in the media, and bringing it up can actually alleviate any anxiety they might be feeling. Avoiding potentially scary topics can make them scarier to children.

These discussions are a chance for you to answer questions that they might have and provide some reassurance. While you can't promise that their school will never have a shooting, you can in good faith tell them that school shootings are actually very rare and remind them that they practice drills at school to keep them safe.

If you aren't sure what to say, you can always ask your kids if they have any questions. Use common sense about how much detail to go into, and try not to use euphemisms or fuzzy language, which can make a young child's imagination run wild.

You can also take this opportunity to share important messages that you want to communicate. For example, Dr. Howard suggests saying, "If a classmate of yours is struggling, we don't do nothing. We don't gossip about them. We tell a grownup so they can get help." Or if your child is a teenager, and another student says or writes something scary, the same advice holds: they should let an adult know.

Active shooter drills

Most schools today practice active shooter drills. The goal of these drills should never be to scare children. Just as we don't use fake smoke in fire drills, schools don't need to use fake guns during active shooter drills. Schools who try to make the drills as realistic as possible risk scaring students (and teachers), and miss the point of these drills in the first place.

Schools have active shooter drills to get everyone used to their safety plan. "The more you practice something, the more you rehearse it, you lay the mental tracks so that you decrease the tendency to freeze in the case of a real emergency and you can go quickly into action," explains Dr. Howard. "In the military you do realistic drills because you really will be in combat, but this is a low-probability event. You just need to lay the tracks so you decrease those few seconds of reaction time."

When teachers (and parents) talk about the drills, they should do it with a lot of confidence. They should make it clear that school shootings, just like fires, are unlikely, but, says Dr. Howard, "We are going to be ready if it happens. This is what we're going to do to stay safe."

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https://childmind.org/article/anxiety-school-shooting/

MINDFULNESS IN THE CLASSROOM

How it helps kids regulate behavior and focus on learning

by Juliann Garey

Carole Clancy, who supervises special education for the Lancaster, Pa., city schools, had a serious problem: She couldn't hold on to her teachers. The students in special ed classes were distracted and disruptive. "They had the reputation of being unmanageable and out of control," she says. But that was before they started learning mindfulness in the classroom.

When Wynne Kinder, lead instructor for the mindfulness program "Wellness Works in Schools," walks into Kristina Suter's special ed classroom at Lincoln Middle School in Lancaster, the group of sixth, seventh and eighth graders is already moving tables out of the way and spacing chairs out in rows for what the school refers to as "social skills" class.

"There are always one or two who are very reluctant to come and sit," says Kinder. "Transitions are hard for many of these kids. Very often I will start by sharing a personal story related to the topic—resilience, for example." The story draws the kids in. It's all about making a connection. Then she rings the chimes. "I ask them to notice what their mind does with the sound."

With their eyes closed, the students then focus on their posture. "I ask them to sit in seated mountain to add dignity and strength," she says. "I work with them on what your posture says to you about you and then what your posture says to the world." Many of Kinder's exercises relate to the subtleties of different kinds of attention. Attention to breath, to how different parts of their bodies feel, how their feet connect to the floor, their seats to their chairs.

Learning to control their attention

And all of it is very concrete and very much rooted in the present moment. "It's about developing attentional control," she says. Kinder ends every class with "deep quieting" because, she says, "if you can quiet yourself and get yourself to a place where your mind is settled, that is a great tool to have."

Suter is convinced that teaching mindfulness is helping her kids—particularly the ones who suffer from anxiety. And there are many. "Often they're worried about everything else that's going on," Suter says. "What's going to happen later. They have trouble focusing on the moment. The mindfulness brings them back into the present moment so they can learn."

Rick Kinder, Wynne's father, is the cofounder of "Wellness Works in Schools" and he has been bringing the mindfulness program to Lancaster County's low-income, inner-city schools for 11 years. "We're being hired where the need is the greatest," he says, "in classes where there are kids who have ADHD, who've suffered from trauma, or are on the autism spectrum.

"Once the kids feel that they can actually calm themselves even just through breathing it's like the 'wow' moment," he adds. "The ultimate goal is self-awareness and self-regulation."

Creating calmness in the classroom

Kinder was one of the first to bring mindfulness to a school setting. But he learned early on not to use the terms yoga and meditation, both closely associated with mindfulness, in schools Kinder Associates serves. "I don't think it's understood, the word 'mindfulness.' It does have its roots in Buddhism but you go into a principal's office and say, 'I'm bringing yoga in here,' and they say, 'Not in my school.' "

Whatever he calls, it, the results of Kinder's program speak for themselves, educators say. "It creates a calmness in those classes," says Clancy. "Students learn how to self-regulate their behaviors. They are avoiding conflict, avoiding situations that might get them into trouble."

Two different studies done by Cheryl Desmond, PhD, and Laurie Hanich, PhD, of middle school children who had taken the "Wellness Works in Schools" course showed significant gains in self-regulation and executive function. And Lisa Flook, PhD, a researcher at the Center for Investigating Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin, has found that kids who have the most difficulty with self-regulation are the ones who most benefit from a mindfulness-based program.

Helping kids manage stress

"If we can get the kids who have the most trouble," says Randy Fernando of Mindful Schools, the Oakland, California-based program that brings mindfulness classes to grades K-5 in mostly low-income schools, "it helps them, it helps the teachers, and for a lot of these kids it's the first time they've felt peace."

That doesn't mean, however, that mindfulness can't be enormously helpful to children and adolescents in the general population for dealing with the everyday difficulties of today's super-charged, highly stressful kid-life.

Mindfulness reached the tiny island of Nantucket (permanent population approximately 10,000) just a few years ago when it was introduced to the Nantucket New School, an independent day school that goes from pre-K through grade 8. It was in part that tight-knit community's effort to respond in a meaningful way to four teenage suicides that had occurred in less than two years. "We realized we could help kids gain tools for stress management at an early age that would transfer into teenage years and adulthood," says Lori Corry, the school's business manager and a passionate proponent of

mindfulness. After researching several different programs, a committee devoted to student wellness at the school chose the Hawn Foundation's MindUP, a mindfulness-based social and emotional learning curriculum. "The hope is to help kids manage their own stress as they turn into grownups."

Clearing your pre-frontal cortex

If second grader Sally Laurencelle is any indication, the MindUP program is making headway. One night not long ago Sally, her brother Addie Jr., 11, sister Gabrielle, 9 and Sally's parents were sitting at the dinner table when Sally's brother and sister started bickering. "It escalated and Gabrielle just lost it," says Sally's dad, Addie. "She was screaming and crying. It was a real melt down." Until Sally stepped in. "I almost fell out of my chair," Addie says. "Cool as can be Sally said, 'Gabrielle, you need to take a deep breath and clear your pre-frontal cortex. You'll feel much better.' And the thing is she totally understood what she was talking about. She said, 'We talk about it at school all the time.' It was jaw-dropping."

All the teachers at the school are trained in the program and they practice mindfulness themselves during the school day. "Our faculty meetings all start with three minutes of quiet breathing," says Dennie Doran, head of the Upper School at the Nantucket New School and a teacher there."Our head of school rings the chime and we just all relax and take some deep breaths and stop what we're doing and then we start the faculty meeting." She also has the same mindful app—"Take a Chill"—on her phone that she recommends to her students.

Discipline problems become teachable moments

Doran, who has been at the school for nine years, says she definitely sees a "before" and "after" effect since they began teaching mindfulness. "We have a common language from the 3-year-olds to the 14-year-olds. 'Was that a mindful decision?' 'Did you think about your choice?' 'Stop and take a breath.' So that by the time the lower school gets to the upper school we're dealing with teachable moments instead of discipline problems. They're learning

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Foster Parent Resource: A View from the Bench

The Nebraska Court Improvement Project has a new video where Nebraska Judges share their advice for foster parents.

See it on the **Through the Eye of the Child Initiative** YouTube Channel.
(Scan QR code to visit their YouTube Channel).

THE BEST CONVERSATIONS ALWAYS SEEM TO HAPPEN IN THE CAR

How it helps kids regulate behavior and focus on learning
by Jen Gregory

Raising teens isn't a "one size fits all" experience. If you've met one parent raising one teen, you've met… one parent raising one teen. But there are a few universal truths on which most of us can agree. Your spoons will disappear, it does go by fast, and the car is a great place for conversation.

Something about being in a vehicle erodes fear, unleashes curiosity, and compels otherwise uncommunicative teens to spill the tea. In close quarters with minimal direct eye contact, thoughts drip from their typically tight-lipped mouths.

One of my favorite recent car conversations with my 13-year-old son started with this humdinger: "I'm not into modern feminism." *Um…* Another memorable exchange happened on the drive to weekly appointments at a medical building that housed a birthing center. Several of the parking spaces were reserved for expectant mothers, which resulted in many colorful conversations about babies. My 16-year-old son often asks, "Do you remember when we used to talk about vaginas in the car?" *You betcha!*

As far back as the crushed Goldfish under the booster seat days, my boys have hammered me with complicated and sometimes existential car ride questions. These days, there are fewer orange crumbs involved and the voices doing the

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Foster parenting is hard. You face challenges as you parent children and youth with a trauma history that your friends and family do not understand. Support groups can provide informal mutual support and opportunities to discuss parenting joys, challenges and strategies as you navigate the life of a foster parent

Live Virtual Support Group

- First Tuesday at 6:30pm (MT)
- RSVP required: Contact Jolie, (308) 672-3658 or Tammy, (402) 989-2197

LGBTQIA+ Virtual Support Group

- Check our website calendar for the registration link and date/time of our next meeting.

Faces: Online Foster Parent Support Group Chat on Facebook

- Meets Tuesday nights at 9:00 (CT).
- Contact Robbi at 402-853-1091. You must have a Facebook account.

Parenting Across Color Lines

- Fourth Monday of the month — for multi-racial families
- 6:15pm at Connection Point, Lincoln
- RSVP required — Contact Felicia, (402) 476-2273

talking are deeper, but the vibe is still the same.

In the span of 9 minutes from our driveway to tennis practice, my boys will blurt out explosives like, "I think I was a bad friend today," "I want to study film in college," or "How do you know if you're ready to have sex?" Nine minutes isn't nearly long enough to unpack any of these grenades, but you can bet I lighten my foot on the gas pedal and try.

Now that I have a student driver, my adoration of car conversation has grown exponentially.

Something miraculous happens when my teen sits in the driver's seat. Maybe it's a maturity he's embracing as he works toward a new phase of independence or that he's distracted by the newness of driving, but he somehow forgets it's me in the passenger seat. Instead of talking about big stuff with his mother, he banters casually about small stuff with a friend.

Listening to and responding to these seemingly mundane tidbits of his days—an awkward conversation with a teacher, a group project ruined by a bossy classmate, or the stash of snacks he and his friends have hidden in the percussion room—is a treasure trove of information.

When your main job as a parent of a teen is to send them out into the world to have experiences and relationships independent of you, having a window into these tiny slices of their lives is priceless.

Waiting at a red light on the car ride home from school, my teen driver asks, "Do you remember when we were little and you would let us unfasten our seatbelts at the last stop sign before the house?"

"I do," I say from the passenger seat. My heart swells at the idea that he remembers this fun little ritual.

"Can we do it now?" he asks with a mischievous smile.

"Absolutely not," I say incredulously. "That was a quiet neighborhood street, this is a busy road, and you, my friend, do not have a driver's license."

"It was my favorite part of every day," he says. The car grows quiet as he navigates the changing traffic light and left turn.

"Do you have fond memories of your childhood?" I ask him.

We briefly make eye contact.

"Definitely," he says.

"Me, too," I say.

To the parents of soon-to-be teenage drivers, you're going to love parenting from the passenger seat. Trust me. Buckle up and enjoy the ride.

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https://raisingteenstoday.com/parenting-from-the-passenger-seat-one-colorful-conversation-at-a-time/

Foster Parents: Driver's License for Foster Youth

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https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NEfosteryouthdriverslicense

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https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Foster-Parent-Exit-Survey

WHEN CHILDREN GRIEVE: 7 STRATEGIES TO HELP THEM COPE

by Amy McCready

From the moment we first hear their cries, we want to shield our children from life's sorrows.

We know we can't do this entirely, but we do what we can. We make sure they have fun, we keep them from getting hurt, and we tell them not to worry–*"everything will be okay."*

Even so, tragedy, loss, and suffering inevitably hit home.

It could be the death of a close relative or friend. Maybe there was a fire and you lost your home. It could even be your ten-year-old golden retriever that just lost a battle with cancer.

The amount of pain, heartbreak, angst, and uncertainty we feel in the wake of a loss–or the anxiety we experience as we prepare to say our final good-byes to a loved one–is too much for any heart to handle. Then, as we're managing our own grief, we need to help an innocent child process his or her grief, too.

We know we can't control everything in life–especially loss and death. But here are 7 things we can control to help grieving children.

1. Offering Safety Through Normal Boundaries & Routines

When a child's world is turned upside down through loss, we can provide consistency wherever possible.

By maintaining a normal schedule with familiar structure, we give our kids a sense of security and let them know, *"You can count on me."* Unless they request otherwise, keep taking your son to soccer practice and attending your daughter's pottery class.

While your gut instinct may say *"he's going through a hard time, I'm going to let him off the hook,"* fight against this urge. It's actually more helpful to retain a family's normal rules and consequences than to let your child call the shots.

Clear expectations provide kids a great deal of comfort. They love knowing that someone is looking out for their progress and protection–even if they protest it.

If there is an abnormal amount of pushback, consider that your child might need a little more flexibility based on the circumstances. But in general, maintain as much consistency as you can manage.

2. Love & Attention

Here at Positive Parenting Solutions, our core belief–based on Adlerian Psychology–is that all children need to feel a sense of belonging within the family unit and need to feel significant.

As you can imagine, grief may take this need for belonging and significance and turn it up a few notches. If your son just lost a parent or a relative he heavily relied on, loved, and looked up to, imagine how he might question the new family dynamic or his new place in the world.

We need to focus on daily one-on-one time with grieving children, doing something they care about and want to do. It could be going to a trampoline park and briefly distracting your daughter from her grief, or answering all her questions about death. We recommend this one-on-one time for all parents and children–but for a grieving child, it is especially crucial.

Intellectually, we understand that our child's sadness should be combated with extra doses of love, affection, and attention. But if we ourselves are buried in grief, these needs can be easily overlooked or unintentionally pushed aside.

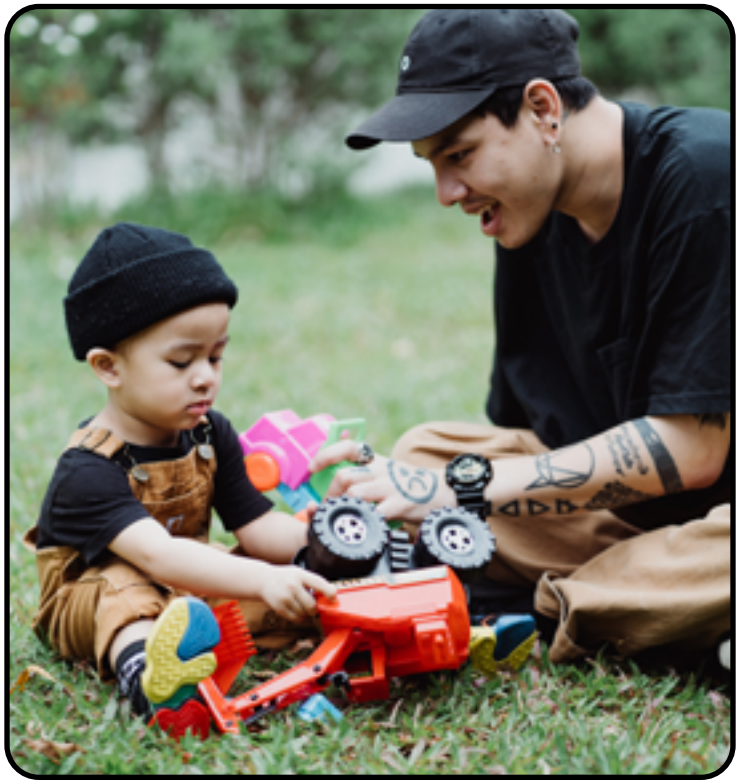
Please Note: We should follow a child's lead during the grieving process. If he wants to be left alone more than usual, allow this too. Just make sure your child knows that when he's ready, you are available to shower as much love and attention as he'd like.

3. Letting Go of Certain Expectations

Grief is as varied as the children it affects.

While one child may relish getting lost in algebra equations, another may start failing in geometry class.

Your son may want to talk incessantly about his deceased cousin, while your daughter yells at you any time you mention it.



Although we want to be consistent with rules and routines, we also need to be flexible in our expectations. Changes in a child's progress at school, sleep and appetite disturbances, dramatic fluctuations in mood, and even apathy are all common reactions to grief.

It's also normal to see behavioral regression. A 4-year-old that's been potty trained for two years might start having accidents. A 7-year-old might start throwing toddler-like tantrums.

It's hard not knowing what response to expect from a grieving child at any given moment, or what seemingly harmless activity could trigger an emotional reaction. Just try to remember that your child's out-of-character behavior doesn't mean you're in for a future of defiance and power struggles–it's probably just the grief that's talking.

Please Note: Although we should let compassion and patience be our guides during this process, if we do see signs of violence or other extreme types of behavior from a grieving child, we should seek professional help immediately.

4. Modeling–but Managing–Your Emotions

If we fail to express our grief, our children may not feel inclined to express their grief, either.

Modeling emotions teaches our kids that they aren't alone in their feelings. It does help though, to limit catastrophic speech like *"oh, how will we ever feel better,"* or, *"I just can't handle this pain."* This can justifiably scare children and cause them additional stress.

Instead of saying, *"I'm really sad today,"* we can try saying *"I'm having a sad moment."* Or, instead of, *"I feel really lonely without our (loved one),"* we can say, *"I'm thinking about and remembering our (loved one) a lot today."*

We should feel free to acknowledge pain, but we also want to show grieving children that it's possible to manage pain, too–no matter how unbelievable that may seem at times.

We also need to help them find healthy ways to express their grief.

5. Finding Grief Outlets

Anger-Relief

Sometimes in life, we need to scream into a pillow or pummel a punching bag. In particular, (just like adults) kids can experience anger and other big emotions during the grieving process.

When grief, anxiety, and anger become unbearable, it's helpful to suggest safe and effective ways for children to vent.

We can take a ten-year-old to a karate class or give a toddler some old newspapers and boxes to stomp on, tear up, and destroy. We can put in earplugs while our teenager listens to Metallica on full blast. In essence, we shouldn't be afraid to let our kids scream and steam like an old metal teapot (even if that means driving them somewhere isolated and quite literally letting them scream.)

Play

Young children often make sense of their grief through play. This means you may find your daughter in the middle

of a nurse Barbie reenactment after her time in hospice with grandma, or encounter your son making a funeral procession with his toy cars.

Embrace this sweet manner of processing loss, and play along if they invite you to–even if the tears roll down your face (after all, it could be therapeutic for you, too).

Communication

A child may want to talk at length about grief, or she may not want to discuss it at all. However, communication is always a healthy outlet.

If talking about death or loss is important to your child but is too hard for you to talk about just yet, encourage her to talk to a counselor or someone that's willing to discuss it more openly (see Seeking Outside Resources below).

Creativity

Whether it's writing daily in a journal, finger painting, or marching and playing in the high school band, creative expression is an excellent outlet for grief.

You can argue that many of the most brilliant, creative minds in history have worked through tragedy. Frida Kahlo, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Eminem…they all had to wrestle with some form of grief. Creativity arguably gave them that outlet.

Creative flow can be an almost out-of-body, meditative experience. We can even forget about ourselves and our pain for a brief moment. We can also help make peace with something tragic.

Encourage kids to turn their sorrow into something meaningful and beautiful. If they have pursuits they're passionate about, like basketball, dance, or even LEGO robotics club, we can suggest they focus on these activities and pour their emotions into their practice.

If your child seems interested, she can even create something out of an article of clothing or special item that belonged to a deceased loved one. If your teenage daughter wants to take Grandma's favorite dress and sew it into a blanket, you can assist her in the process. Even if your son wants to keep his cat's ashes and paint them into a meaningful picture, that's okay.

The bottom line is, no creativity is too bizarre–especially if it gives grief some meaning.

Funerals & Rituals

People debate whether or not it's appropriate to bring children to funerals. Again, we want to protect our children from pain. Depending on their age, we may also question whether or not they can fully handle and/or understand death and grief.

If so, we are underestimating a child's strength and emotional intelligence.

Children may be innocent, but they are also fairly resilient. Even though funerals and other after-death rituals can be painful to attend, they are an important way to celebrate the lives of those that have passed. They also offer a chance for family members to express their grief together and to say goodbye to the deceased. Children deserve this chance as much as everyone else. They also learn about humanity from these rituals and processes.

"In respectful loss, we pass to children a reverence for the irreplaceable gift of each human life."

– Sharon Holbrook, The Washington Post

Please Note: Don't force your child to attend a funeral if they'd rather not, but don't keep them from one, either. Your child can decide how involved she'd like to be.

6. Relieving Kids of Guilt

Whether it's a divorce or a parent's or friend's untimely death, many children feel responsible for loss.

Misplaced guilt is common for anyone dealing with grief. We blame ourselves and may spend years trying to understand that it wasn't actually our fault.

Children are no different. They need to be informed, perhaps repeatedly, that there is no way that they could have caused the loss. Even if your teenager's friend died in a car crash on her way to your house–after your daughter invited her over–she needs to understand that she didn't make that car crash. It's not her fault.

7. Seeking Outside Resources

No matter what grief your child is facing, I highly encourage you to find outside resources for help. It could be a counselor, psychologist, support group, or spiritual leader. The National Alliance for Grieving Children is a great place to find a grief support program or counselor near you.

While I hope I've given you helpful and tangible advice in this little article, I also know it is incredibly important to seek out people in your own circle who can be your hands and feet during this time.

Relatives and friends can provide extra nurturing and support–especially adults and friends your child is close to and trusts. Anyone that might make your child feel less alone in the grieving process is a helping hand for you both.

Final Thoughts

Sorrow has at least one positive side effect, besides making us stronger and inspiring creative masterpieces; it reminds us what really matters in this life.

With these coping strategies, we can focus on the grieving children that matter more than anything and that need us so desperately right now.

It's not going to be pretty, or easy, no matter what we do. It will also take time–who knows how long–and a small part of the grief may never go away. But it's important to remind yourself that your child will smile again, laugh again, and flourish again.

And so will you.

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