

# A few dos and don'ts for talking with your children about grief



## DO

- Go first. As an adult, you are the leader.
- Tell the truth about how you feel. It will establish a tone of trust and safety.
- Recognize that grief is emotional, not intellectual, and sad or scared feelings are normal.
- Remember that each child is unique and has a unique relationship to what they hear and believe.
- Explain your values and beliefs clearly and openly to your children.
- Be patient. Give your child time to formulate opinions. Reassure them that what they're feeling is normal. That you love them. That it's okay to talk about all their feelings, even the uncomfortable ones.
- Listen with your heart, not your head. Allow all emotions to be expressed, without judgment or criticism.
- Decide how much your child sees and hears in the media. Balance the hard stuff with stories of hope.

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## **DON'T**

- Say "Don't feel scared." Fear is the most common response to threatening situations, for children and adults.
- Say "Don't feel sad." Sadness is a healthy and normal reaction to the events that are happening.
- Ask your children how they are feeling. Like adults, fearful of being judged, they will automatically say, "I'm fine," even though they are not.
- Act strong for your children. They will interpret your non-feeling as something they are supposed to copy.
- Compare their lives or situations to others in the world. Comparison always minimizes feelings.
- Make promises that you cannot keep. Instead of saying "Everything's going to be okay," say, "We'll do everything we can to be safe and help others."
- Forget that your children are very smart. Treat them and their feelings with respect and dignity.