

# HELPING CHILDREN THROUGH SUICIDE BEREAVEMENT: TOP 3 THINGS TO DO

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*“If a child  
is old  
enough to  
love, they  
are old  
enough to  
grieve.”*

Alan Wolfelt

***Facts*** ~ ***Explain*** ~ ***Remember***

In order to support your child after a loss to suicide and through their grieving process, it is important to

1) Provide your child with the facts about death, including the fact that the death was due to a suicide.

2) To explain to your child what grief is and to ensure they are given permission to grieve in their own way, and

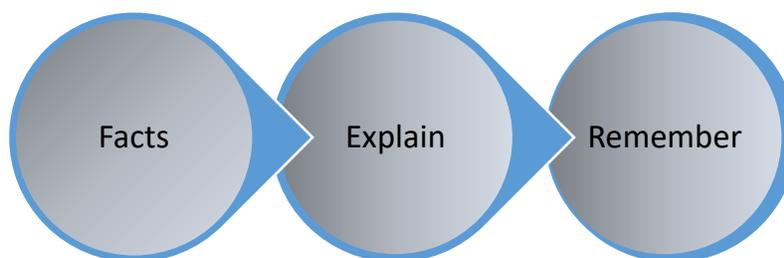
3) To help them keep the memory of their loved one alive within them. Together, these efforts will help your child feel supported and connected to those around them and to deal with their grief in a healthy way.

In this three-part series, the tasks outlined above will be explored in greater detail.

[Part 1 of 3 - Helping Children through Suicide Bereavement: Providing Facts and Explaining Suicide.](#)

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[Part 3 of 3 - Helping Children through Suicide Bereavement: Keeping the Memory of the Lost Loved One Alive.](#)



# Helping Children through Suicide Bereavement: Providing Truthful Facts & Explaining Suicide

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## *Part 1 of 3*



One of the first tasks of grieving is to accept the reality of death (Dr. J. William Worden, *Grief Counseling & Grief Therapy*, 2009). Providing facts to children, from the beginning and in a child-appropriate way, will help children with this task. Unfortunately, many adults assume that they are protecting their children by withholding the truth and that their children will not know that the truth is being withheld.

The reality is, however, that many children pick up that the story being told doesn't make sense. They can sense that there is something being withheld or that there is some kind of "secret" about the death. When the facts are withheld from children, they may notice and wonder why adults talk quietly about the loss or

even appear uncomfortable talking about the loss with them directly. Due to this secrecy, some children may begin to feel shame about their loss, even if they can't put words to their feelings. This can cause children to question what really happened; to question the adults around them, and to feel isolated in their grief and confusion. By providing the truth to your child, you are giving them permission to ask questions and to seek support from someone they love, rather than trying to sort out their feelings and questions on their own.

### Non-Disclosure & the “Re-Grieving Cycle”

Further, without accurate information and knowing the truth of the circumstances, children are at risk for what I call the “re-grieving cycle.” This occurs when children have already begun grieving their lost loved one, perhaps even begun to come in terms with some aspects of the loss, and then they are thrown into renewed emotional turmoil because they come across new factual information. Their grief is no longer about the impact of their loss and coming to terms with the death of their loved one, but is now reignited with confusion and attempts to take in the fact that their loved one died by suicide. Part of this “re-grieving cycle” often includes difficult questions such as, “Why wasn't I told?” and “How can I trust anyone if those I love die and those who are alive lie to me?” This can complicate your child's grief and add additional anguish, anger, and mistrust.

As stated above, when children are not told the truth, it is usually because of a deep desire to protect them from further pain and a mistaken belief that children are better off not knowing the truth. Often, surviving adults struggle not knowing what to say to children and fear saying the wrong things. Yet, children do better when they are told the truth and they can cope with the truth when it is delivered in a supportive and child-appropriate manner.

### Discretionary Disclosure

When disclosing suicide to your child, please know that you do not have to share *all* the details. It is best to provide the essential facts, such as the fact that their loved one died by suicide, but your child does not need to know the method, the

exact circumstances, or be given a visual picture of what occurred. The amount you disclose can be based on your own comfort level and the questions that your child specifically asks. This is what I call “discretionary disclosure.” At the minimum, discretionary disclosure and explaining suicide may sound like:

“Your mommy died by suicide. That means she made herself die and her body no longer works. Her brain was not working properly and it got confused. Her brain thought the only way to end her hurt was to die. It was not your fault and she loved you.”

Another example may be:

“Uncle died yesterday. He died by suicide, which means he made himself die. He was very sad and worried. He thought that dying was the only way to make his hurt go away. But there are always other ways to make our hurt go away, such as talking to someone and asking for help. If you are ever worried or don’t know how to make yourself feel better, you can always talk to me (or whoever you think is the best person to talk to). I will help you.”

### Explaining Suicide to Children

An example, taken from my book “Why Did Daddy End His Life: A Children’s Suicide Bereavement Book” explains that suicide is when:

*“Someone makes themselves die. They make their body stop breathing, their heart stop beating, and they can no longer walk, talk, or think. Death also means that the person will no longer get hungry, would not use the washroom or feel cold. Death means that we will not see our loved ones again.”*

If you are not comfortable giving the details of the suicide, for example,

*“He made himself die by shooting himself with a gun or by driving into a tree,”*

then you can simply state,

“I am not ready to share how he killed himself yet, other than he made himself die.”

### Answering the Difficult Question: “Why Suicide?”

After a death by suicide is disclosed, children may ask, “Why did she make herself die?” This is a very difficult question to answer, and unfortunately, there is no definitive answer. There are usually many factors that contribute to a suicidal act,



and sometimes, the surviving loved ones are not aware of all the factors. In my experience, even when suicide notes are left behind, the rationale or reasons provided for the suicide, or having access to what the person was thinking of just prior to the suicide, do not

always satisfy the relentless “why” that occurs for many surviving family and friends.

Although it will likely not satisfy the relentless search for understanding why a suicide occurred, there is one explanation that may partially answer the “why” question. People who die by suicide get to a point where their “psychic distress” becomes intense and intolerable and this distress was perceived as enduring rather than temporary.

People who survive an attempted suicide report that, at the time of their attempt, they believed that there was no other way to end the hurt and emotional pain they were experiencing. That it was an attempt to “flee” and run away from the pain they were experiencing or to relieve the perceived burden they were placing on their loved ones. Often, attempters do not see another option for reducing their distress, even when these other options existed.

Although the above explanation may be understood by a teen, it will likely be too abstract or confusing for a young child. Instead, a young child could be told,

*“I don’t know why she made herself die. We are all confused by this. My guess is she forgot or didn’t see that we wanted to help her. Maybe she forgot there were other ways to make her hurt go away, like asking for help. I wish I knew why, but I don’t.”*

### What to Avoid When Explaining Death or Suicide

This topic was also covered in my book “Why Did Daddy End His Life: A Children’s Suicide Bereavement Book.” When explaining death or suicide, it is best to avoid vague descriptions or euphemisms that may be taken literally by your child or cause further confusion. For example:

- “He has gone for a long, long sleep”
- “She is taking a long rest”
- “God or angels took him away (this explanation can be particularly confusing if your child is not familiar with these religious concepts prior to their loss)
- “She went away for a while”
- “He is in a better place and is happy now. There is no need to be sad”

Such explanations can create fear in the mind of children about things they do not fear, such as sleep or angels. Children may wonder why Earth was not a good enough place or why their loved one couldn’t be happy here with them.

If your child was previously taught about spiritual and religious concepts, however, then these concepts may serve to comfort your child. If you would like to use your spiritual or religious beliefs to support your child through his or her grief, then it may be helpful to explore this option with your spiritual leader(s) and receive guidance.

### How Many Details Should I Provide?

Generally, the rule I follow is to literally answer the question that is being asked and go no further.

If your child asks, “How did he make himself die?” You can respond with, “He drank a lot and then shot himself.”



Some children will be satisfied with this response, while other children may persist and ask more questions. If the latter occurs, then provide the answers your child is seeking, but no further. Your responses and explanations do not need to be lengthy. Just follow your child's lead and literally answer what they are asking and no more. Children will ask the questions, they are ready to hear the responses to. If you elaborate beyond their questions, you may introduce ideas or questions they had not yet thought of.

For example, if a child asks how their auntie died, you may explain:

“She took too many pills and the doctors couldn't get all the pills out in time. This made her body stop working.”

If they don't ask, you don't need to tell them which pills, how many, what time, how long did it take before the ambulance arrived, how they tried to get the pills out, etc.

Naturally, many parents are hesitant in sharing details. The risk with not sharing the details being asked for, however, is that the doubtful child may persevere and get answers from someone else. They may reach out and ask another family

member, a neighbor, or a school friend and you will not be able to ensure this information is truthful, reliable, or delivered in an appropriate manner. If they have the knowhow, they may even research on the internet or use social media to find their answers. At the minimum, your child will be left wondering why they can't know and why is it being kept a secret.

### **What Should I Expect Once I Disclose the Suicide to My Child?**

Often, after a child is told that a parent has died, their next set of questions will revolve around concerns about their future safety and other people's well-being. They may ask, "Who will take care of me?" or "Where will we live now?" or "Will you die too?" Answer these questions as best as you can with the information you have. If you don't know, then simply say,

*"I do not know the answer to that question right now. I will try to find out and once I know, I will let you know."*

*Or*

*"I have good health right now and I expect to live for quite a while. If something does happen to me though, then we have Auntie or our friend Bob who are both able to take care of you."*

*Or*

*"The doctor is looking after my physical illness right now and we are working together to make sure I stay healthy. I expect to live for a while."*

The younger the child is, the less likely they will understand that death is permanent. Therefore, it is common for younger children to ask "when will mommy come back?" This can be hard for newly bereaved adults to hear, but it is not uncommon for children to struggle with concept of permanence. Simply answer these questions by repeating responses such as:

*"I wish she could back, but she will not be coming back. She is dead and her body will not move again."*

Depending on your spiritual beliefs, you can also explain:

“She won’t be coming back. We can talk to her through prayer and she can always hear us when we want to talk to her. But we will not see her body again”

These spiritual concepts will be harder for a child to understand if they were not previously aware of them. If these spiritual beliefs were a part of your child’s life before the death, then these beliefs will most likely provide some comfort and can be used to help support your child.

Keep your responses simple and short. Follow your child’s lead and answer the question they are actually asking without expanding further.



# Helping Children through Suicide Bereavement: Explaining Grief and its Unique Process to Everyone

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## *Part 2 of 3*



Understand that when you are supporting a grieving child, you are not trying to “fix” their grief. There is no way to make their grief “go away.” In fact, not grieving wouldn’t be a healthy response to an important loss, even if the relationship with the deceased was one filled with a history of disappointments or hurt. Grieving and mourning allows people, including children, to experience the impact of their loss, to adjust to the reality of their loss and learn how to move forward in life, and adjust to the changes that occur after such a loss.

However, don't be surprised if you notice your child moving in and out of their grief. This normal and natural process for children, often surprises parents as adults tend to get stuck or remain in grief for longer periods of time. If parents do not understand this, they may mistakenly believe that their child is not grieving deeply and thus, their child may not need the level of support required. Although it may not occur for your child, many children do appear to move in and out of their grief. This may look like angry or upset one moment and then playing quietly or laughing the next moment and enjoying a pleasurable moment.

Let your child know that if they find themselves having fun, laughing, or forgetting about their sadness for awhile, that this is okay and perfectly normal. Let your child know that they are allowed to feel whatever they are feeling and they are allowed to be sad, angry, upset or happy, to play, and to have fun. Moving through different reactions to grief and still experiencing the natural emotions and reactions of life is healthy and an adaptive behavior in children.

### What is Grief?

Grief is a combination of emotional, psychological, physical, and social reactions, such as sadness, confusion, stomach aches or appetite loss, and crying with others, which we experience when we lose something or someone important to us. It is a natural response and it can be very strong and sometimes overwhelming or scary. Although it may not be possible to ever completely "get over" a loss, the intensity of the loss often softens, if a person allows himself/herself to feel the reactions that occur during grief. In contrast, if a person tries to bury their reactions and not "feel" anything, then often these reactions can re-surface years later or get "triggered" unexpectedly at some point. If people allow themselves to fully experience their grief related reactions, then they often naturally move into being able to acknowledge and accept the reality of their loss.

Grieving is a normal and healthy response to loss. The way each person experiences grief, however, may be different. These differences are partly due to personality differences, previous experiences of loss or the lack of, perceived sense of support and safety after a loss, and the different tolerance levels people have which allow them to feel and express their feelings and thoughts after loss. The

grief your child experiences will also be heavily shaped by the type of relationship your child had with the deceased and the circumstances surrounding the loss.

### How is Grief Different from Mourning or Bereavement?

Grieving is different than mourning, which is the process of adapting to life after the loss and often includes the public display of grief. Mourning, often a longer process than grieving, is the process someone takes to deal with the impact of their loss and to heal through it. It is the process of adapting to life without the person (or thing) who is lost; sometimes requiring changes in routines, roles, and life circumstances. Mourning is often seen as the public display of the personal experience of grief. Often, grieving and mourning will intertwine with each other while someone comes to terms with their loss. Both grief and mourning are processes, rather than one-time events or states. For simplicity sake, grief can be viewed as the beginning stages of mourning (Therese A. Rando).

Bereavement, on the other hand, is the state of loss and the time period that comes after a loss. It includes the time spent in grief and in mourning. The length of time that bereavement lasts for people can differ and could range from months to years.

### Explaining Grief to Children

Explain to your child that grieving has many emotions, different thoughts, and can change depending on the way our bodies feel. Some people may be mostly sad and cry a lot. They may sit in a chair or lie in their bed for long hours. Other people may get angry, not wanting to talk to others, or they may want to keep to themselves. Other people may just get really busy, preferring to act like nothing happened and that they are doing “just fine.”

Some children might find it difficult to say “goodbye” to people after visiting them or that they no longer want to be left alone. They may find it hard to go to school for awhile and prefer to stay home with a trusted family member or friends. They may find that they think about or miss their loved one mostly at bedtime, when they are doing nothing to keep their minds busy, or when they have to do an activity they used to share with their lost loved one. They may find that they begin to have bad or scary dreams; sometimes dreams that seem random and unrelated

to the loss. Some children may not want to eat much or they may eat way more than what is normal for them. Other children may lose interest in playing with their friends and doing things they used to enjoy, feel tired, or feel like they no longer have any energy. They may find it difficult to get along with their siblings or friends, becoming easily angered or tearful. For awhile, some children may even find that they “feel nothing,” like they have no emotions or feel numb.

Explain to your child that there are lots of ways that grief can make people feel and that as long as they are following the rules and being safe, they are allowed to grieve in their own way. Also, that they do not need to grieve like mom or dad, or their sibling, or how anyone says they should be grieving.

### [Give Your Child Permission to Grieve in Their Own Way](#)



Giving your child permission to grieve in their own way, while also maintaining established rules and expectations, will help your child to feel supported and have a sense of continued safety and predictability in their lives. It is not uncommon for leniency and reduced expectations to occur with some hitherto laid out rules and expectations shortly after the loss. This is usually due to caregivers and parents having enough to manage, without also needing to ensure rules and expectations are adhered to. For example, it is usually acceptable to allow a child to stay in their pajamas for a few days and not go to school for awhile, but eventually, the

expectation to get dressed, to bathe, and to attend school would need to be re-established. Another example may be that more patience is temporarily given to a grieving child and that their irritability and slightly rude comments are not immediately disciplined. Eventually, however, previous rules and expectations will need to be re-established.

Alternatively, some children may not want to go to bed on time or sleep alone, but eventually, a return to old routines, or the establishment of new routines that will work for the family, will need to happen. For example, some surviving parents may allow their grieving child to sleep with them in their bed for awhile. But after some time, due to the disturbance in sleep and their own need for privacy, the parent may decide that their child needs to return to their own bed again.

There is no definitive right or wrong way to decide which rules and expectations should be maintained and which ones should be granted more leniency. For some families, it is easier to reduce extracurricular activities or expectations on homework completion. For other families, it is easier to maintain these, but allow co-sleeping or less school attendance for a short time-frame. Having said that, the greater the adherence to structure and routine that can be maintained while respecting the limitations of each family member, the more predictable the child's environment. This will help to maintain some sense of safety and predictability for your grieving child, which will help them to move through their grief and mourning process with greater ease.

Even though a return to normalcy as much as possible is important, some expectations and routines may not be re-established for quite some time. For example, your child may not want to go near the site of death even if it was a place that the family frequently used to go to. Or, your child may have no interest in continuing with sports or extracurricular activities for awhile, preferring to stay home instead. Respecting the personal needs of your child and allowing leniency with some expectations, will be an important element in supporting your child while they are grieving.

The important thing is to ensure that there are not many changes that occur after the loss and that some of the familiar and daily routines continue. This will help

reduce the confusion your child may feel if “*everything* changed” after the loss. It will also help keep a sense of normalcy during a very difficult time.

### Different Emotions that can Occur During Grief

The primary emotion people associate with grief is sadness. However, there are many emotions that can occur for a child (or anyone for that matter) while they are grieving. Sometimes these emotions can come on quite quickly or intensely.

- Anger (they may be angry that the death happened or that they were left behind)
- Hate (they may feel hatred towards the deceased for the pain caused by their death or for actions that occurred while they were living)
- Anguish
- Denial (not accepting the reality of the death)
- Confusion
- Numbness (not feeling anything)
- Worry (“what will happen next?”)
- Relief (especially if their loved one was sick or struggling for a long time)
- Guilt (“Could I have stopped it?” or “Am I to be blamed?”)
- Fear (“what will happen to me?”)
- Shock / Disbelief
- Loneliness (especially if a lot of time was spent with the deceased)

### Different Thoughts that can Occur During Grief

When a child is grieving, they may notice a lot of different thoughts and questions arising. They may wonder what they could have done to stop the suicide or if they were to be blamed. They may wonder if they will lose someone else too. You can refer to Part 1 of this 3-Part series for example responses to difficult questions following a loss to suicide.

### Different Physical Reactions During Grief

- Headaches
- Stomach aches
- Nightmares or flashbacks
- Needing more sleep or disrupted sleep

- Needing more physical contact, touch, or cuddles.
- Becoming easily tired or fatigued.
- Panic or increased anxiety
- Difficulty sitting still or agitation
- Tightness in chest
- Difficulty breathing well
- Getting sick more often (being more susceptible to getting sick)
- Becoming aggressive due to increased irritability or anger
- Increase or decrease in appetite
- Difficulty relaxing
- Difficulty with concentration

You can also refer to the Dougy's Centre Bill of Rights. Read these rights to your child and explain that you understand them and that you will respect them. Use the Bill of Rights to begin a conversation of what your child needs. If your child does not want to talk or withdraws when you raise the topic of their loss, then simply provide them this Bill of Rights and invite them to go over it with you when they are ready.

# Helping Children through Suicide Bereavement: Keeping the Memory of the Lost Loved One Alive

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## Part 3 of 3



### Supporting Your Child's Process of Mourning

As your child moves from the initial impact of the loss and intense grief reactions, they will begin to move into a period of mourning. As mentioned in Part 1 of this 3-part series, grief is a combination of emotional, , psychological, physical, and social reactions to a loss and mourning is the process of accepting and healing from the loss and adapting to the changes that result from it. Grief is often seen as the personal experience of loss and mourning is often seen as the public display of grief. Grief and mourning often intertwine with each other and there is no distinct end point for either. Both could last several months or years.

Some of the ways to support your child during grief and mourning include the following:

- Help reduce the sense of helplessness or powerlessness your child may be experiencing with activities that create a sense of mastery or accomplishment, personal worth, or a sense of connection with supportive others (Therese A. Rando).
- Regulate the intensity and duration of your child's intense emotions by using "healthy distractions." This does not mean keeping your child distracted at all costs, but rather, to ease the intensity of their pain after they have sat with it for awhile so that their pain stays within their personal limits of tolerance. For example, after talking about their lost loved one for a bit, you may notice that your child is getting tired or physically upset so you may gently suggest going for a walk or sitting outside for a bit.
- When appropriate, help your child reconnect to life with new activities or interests. Arrange play dates or trips with friends so your child can begin to channel their energy and attention into re-engaging with life again. Initially, this may need to be done in small doses for some children, especially if they mention feeling very tired or disinterested afterwards.
- Use movement to facilitate healing. It may be the last thing either you or your child feels like doing, but engaging in any form of exercise, even light walking, will help alleviate heavy emotions and energy through the body.
- Consider enrolling your child in a children's bereavement group, preferably one that focuses on suicide bereavement. Such groups can help your child feel connected to other children and people who understand what they have gone through and with the creation of a healthy and adaptive story about their loss and its meaning. They can also help your child see themselves beyond their loss and who they are outside of the loss they have experienced.

## Helping Your Child Keep the Memory of the Lost Loved One Alive

In time, after you have taught your child about grief and the variety of reactions they may experience, you may begin to notice a need for honoring or remembering their lost loved one by building special routines or rituals that help them to remain connected with the lost loved one. These same rituals and routines also help children to come to terms with the death, to accept the loss and its impact, and to begin to integrate it into their ongoing lives.

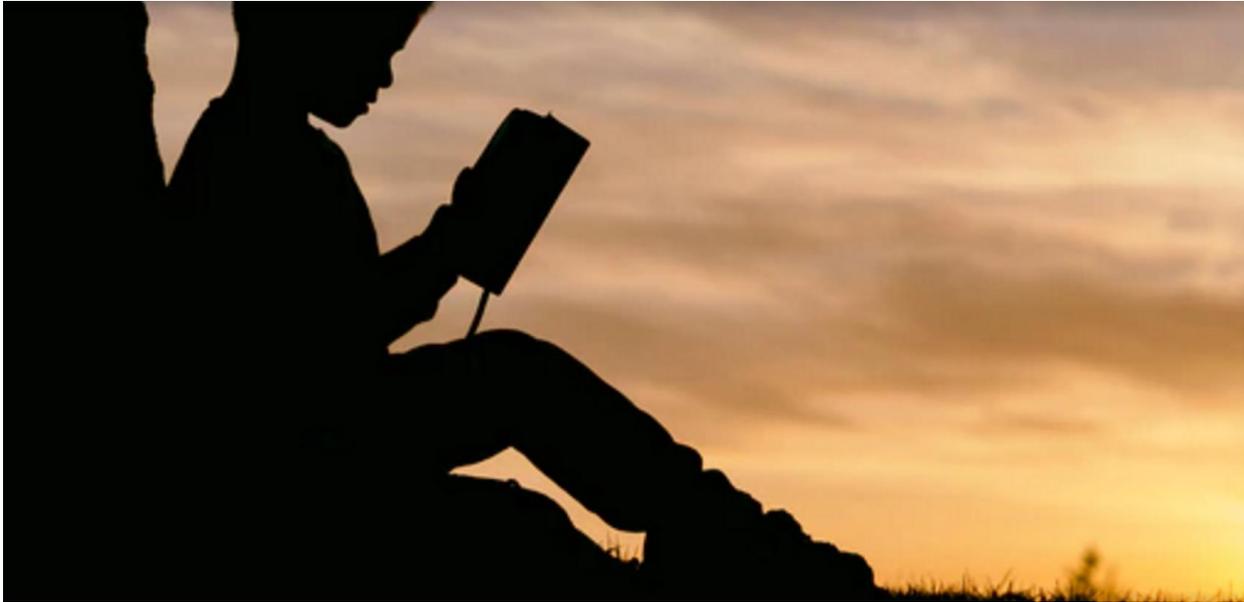
This need may appear with simple rituals, such as saying good-night to the deceased after reading bedtime stories. It may include hanging a stocking up for them at Christmas or writing letters to them on important occasions. Or it could include always saying “Hi” when getting dressed in the morning. What rituals and routines are put into place really does not matter. It will vary among families and each child will have different preferences, even within the same family. What’s more important is that children are supported in creating these rituals or are provided guidance in creating them as life begins to move along again.

One of the most common fears children have as life begins to move forward is: “What if I begin to forget things about them?” Having these rituals and routines in place can help children feel assured that they will not forget everything about their lost loved one. These rituals will also help children to feel like their lost loved one will not be forgotten, but that the memory of their loved one will be carried forward into their lives. This adaptation to life without the deceased and integrating the loss back into their lives is the process of mourning.

Some ways of helping your child to build rituals and routines and to keep the memory of their lost loved one alive within them are to:

- Talk about the lost loved one. Use the deceased’s name. Share some of your personal memories and specific experiences of the lost loved one.
- Talk about what the lost loved one looked like, how they walked, how they talked, what types of clothes they liked to wear, and how they wore their hair.

- Talk about the lost loved one's favorite activities, what sports they liked, books they liked to read, their favorite things (such as items and colors), and how they spent their free time.
- Talk about times your child shared these activities with their loved one, such as going to the mall to buy a team jersey or going on family bike rides.
- Share stories from their lost loved one's childhood, if you know them. Talk about the neighborhood(s) they grew up in or the school(s) they went to. If your child is comfortable doing so, go visit places that were important to their lost loved one.
- Have other family members or friends write down and share some of their favorite memories or provide copies of some of their favorite photos.
- Talk about the type of work their loved one did, how they got into the line of work, and if they enjoyed it or not.
- Talk about the dreams and hopes their loved one had.
- Display photos and personal items in places that feel right for you and your child. For some children, they may want these items in a box, in a particular room away from everyday activity, or right out in the open.
- Celebrate the deceased's birthday or other important dates. Include your child in the planning and ask how they would prefer to celebrate or recognize important dates. Your child's preferences for celebrating may change as time passes.
- Mention the deceased's name during important family events and times that are important to the child. Create an artwork that represents the life of the lost loved one, his/her interests, or shared moments. This can be done together at home or by signing up for an art class.
- Visit the local library and sign out books appropriate for their age that address topics such as death, grief, mourning, unexpected deaths, and suicide.



### Helping Your Child Remember their Lost Loved One in a Realistic Way

Personally, I do not think children benefit from hearing only the positive aspects of their lost loved ones. Therefore, I also suggest sharing some of the disappointments their lost loved one had or some of their annoying traits or personal faults. Sharing this information may be difficult for some families as culturally, many people would want to honor the people who have passed away by sharing only their positive characteristics.

Sharing negative qualities or disappointments also needs to be done when children are old enough to take this information in. This is usually around the ages of 10-12 years, but will depend on the maturity of the child. Very young children need to see the adults in their lives in a positive light; especially any adults in a parental role. Children have an instinctual need to be able to rely on anyone in parental role, and seeing parental figures in a positive light helps in preserving the belief that their needs will be met.

Sharing the less positive aspects of your child's lost loved one, in a gentle and respectful way can help your child get a better sense of who their lost loved one was. Using a gentle and respectful approach can be done even when there were some very negative characteristics, such as severe alcohol or drug abuse, gambling, or violent behavior, to name a few. The sharing of this less positive

information maintains the principle of truth telling that I believe is so important after a loss to death and can help prevent the lost loved one from becoming this “figure on a pedestal,” almost “God-like” or “above human.”

For example, a gentle way of sharing less positive aspects would be,

*“No sweetie, he did not like his job much and he struggled going there every day. He found it very soul-crushing and often complained about. If he had another chance, I suspect that he would have decided to go into \_\_\_\_\_ instead. He always had interests in that type of stuff and probably would have been good at it.*

*Or*

*“He never got married to the girl he loved. They had a fight and broke up. He tried dating a few other people, but he never really loved them the same way he loved her. Perhaps in time, if he was still here, he would have eventually met someone.”*

*Or*

*“She did get angry pretty easy didn’t she? I remember how she would say, “urghhh, screw this” and walk away. She never really liked to talk about it afterwards either, remember? If I were to do it again, I think I would learn how to keep things a bit more calm and help her talk about things more. I’m not sure how I would do that, but I would like to.”*

*Or*

*“He was actually always quite a shy guy and kept to himself a lot. He never really had a lot of friends. I think he struggled with this, but got used to it as he got older. He preferred smaller gatherings and he would often not want to attend large gatherings, like family reunions. He was usually okay when it was just a few of us visiting, even though he complained about this a bit, near the end.”*

If the deceased had more negative behaviors such as addiction issues, then this can be shared by saying something similar to,

*“She had a lot of struggles. I only knew of some of them and can’t pretend I knew everything she was struggling with. She did drink and many of us thought she drank too much. This meant that she was not around as much as we wished she could have been. I know her heart was hurting and if she could have gotten the help she needed, she would have likely stopped drinking and been around more.”*

Or

*“He got into drugs and it scared all of us. He became a different person, so it was like we lost him for a few years before we really lost him. I wish I knew back then what I could have done to help him. I really miss him, but I don’t miss that part of him. That part was really tough for us.”*

Supporting your child in the above ways will help your child to adjust far better than if they are left to figure it out on their own. Understand that your child will not grieve and then get over it. Their grief will be lifelong and experienced in different ways as they reach different milestones in life, such as university, marriage, or a major trip. Help your child to remember their deceased parent/family member through stories and by sharing pieces of information, even seemingly unimportant details. Children love these details and they help children to get a better sense of who their lost loved one was.

## Final Thoughts

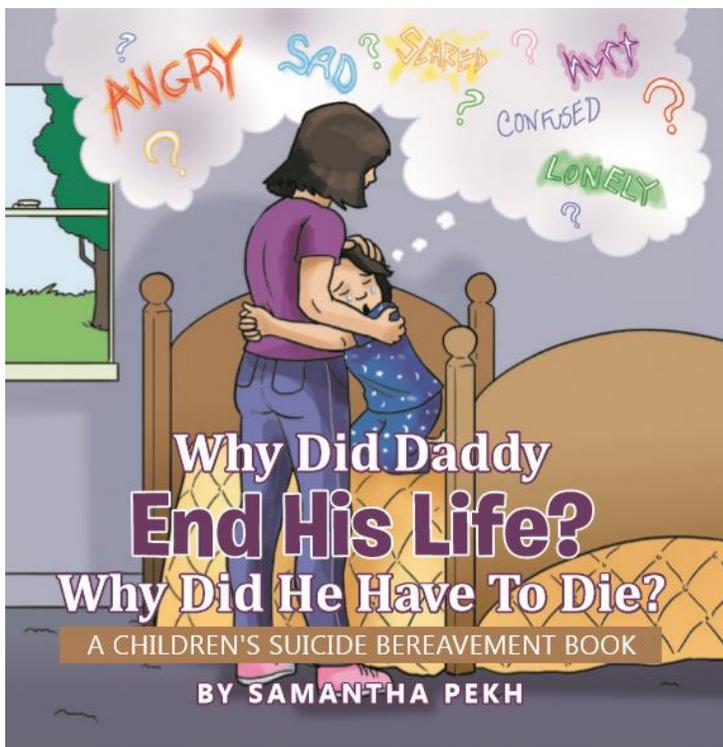


If you are struggling with your own grief or in being able to support your child through their grief, then please consider joining a local suicide bereavement support group for children and their parents. Such a group is offered through PsychSolutions (Edmonton, Alberta) and you can contact us directly to indicate your interest in joining the Suicide Bereavement Group and to inquire about dates. If there are no suicide bereavement support groups in your local area, then please consider joining a more general bereavement support group.

Loss to suicide can feel quite different than loss due to other causes of death. Connecting with others who are grieving a loss to death (even if not by suicide), however, can help meet the basic needs of being amongst people who understand what you are experiencing and help build a supportive community around you that you can reach out to when needed. If you are not ready for group work or you would prefer individual support, then please contact me directly by visiting the website, [PsychSolutions.ca](http://PsychSolutions.ca), or by emailing us at [admin@psychsolutions.ca](mailto:admin@psychsolutions.ca).

## About the Author

Samantha Pekh, M.A., is a Registered Psychologist, a Certified Traumatologist, and an Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) practitioner. As a trauma therapist, Samantha supports children, adults, and families through their losses and painful experiences. She helps individuals who are at risk of suicide by guiding them back to mental wellness while also respecting their individual needs. She works primarily in the areas of trauma, bipolar, and suicide prevention/bereavement.



Her award-winning book, “Why Did Daddy End His Life? Why Did He Have to Die: A Children’s Suicide Bereavement Book,” is written from the perspective of a child. This illustrated story provides a fictional character for children to relate to. The story guides children through the difficult emotions they may feel, but often find difficult to express. It ends by reassuring children that they can survive the pain of their loss, even though it currently feels unbearable. This

book was informed and inspired by the experiences of the many people Samantha has had the privilege to support. To learn more about the book, visit [psychsolutions.ca](http://psychsolutions.ca)

For more information, view Samantha’s educational videos and articles by visiting [psychsolutions.ca](http://psychsolutions.ca).