Supporting a Grieving Sibling

A one-page guide for adults helping a child or teen whose sibling died: honest words, listening, remembering together, and when to get more help.

Letter page · For grieving families, parents, caregivers, siblings

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When a brother or sister dies, children grieve too, and some hide it so they won't upset their parents (AAP). The Dougy Center calls it a "before-and-after" experience in childhood.

What helps

- [ ] Use simple, honest words like "died." Skip "lost," "passed away" or "went to sleep."
- [ ] Answer the same questions as often as they ask. Listen without judging; say back what you heard.
- [ ] Tell them they don't have to replace their brother or sister, or fill their role.
- [ ] If they feel guilty they're still here, reassure them. Celebrate who they are; avoid comparisons.
- [ ] Let them help decide how to honor their sibling, such as what to do on the birthday or anniversary.
- [ ] Keep meals and bedtimes steady, and let them still be kids: play, friends, mistakes.
- [ ] Tell teachers and coaches what happened (ask older kids first).

> ⓘ **Need to talk to someone now?**
>
> Call or text **988** to reach the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, free, confidential and open 24/7 (US). In an emergency, call **911**.

When to get more help: talk to your pediatrician if grief changes everyday life, such as a chatty child going quiet or a gentle child starting to hit. Children's grief groups and camps, often free, let kids talk without worrying about upsetting the family.

What you can do today: ask one open question, such as "What do you miss most?", and just listen. Read helping a child grieve a sibling and saying their name.

Sources

1. Support for Siblings Who Are Grieving (tip sheet), Dougy Center: The National Grief Center for Children & Families. https://www.dougy.org/assets/uploads/supporting-grieving-siblings.pdf
2. Grief & Loss in Childhood: How to Help Your Child Cope, American Academy of Pediatrics (HealthyChildren.org). https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Building-Resilience/Pages/Grieving-Whats-Normal-When-to-Worry.aspx
3. How Children Understand Death: What to Say When a Loved One Dies, American Academy of Pediatrics (HealthyChildren.org). https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Building-Resilience/Pages/How-Children-Understand-Death-What-You-Should-Say.aspx
4. Ten Tips for Supporting Children Who Are Grieving, Dougy Center: The National Grief Center for Children & Families. https://www.dougy.org/assets/uploads/Dougy-Center-Tips-for-Supporting-Grieving-Children2.0.pdf
5. 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (SAMHSA-funded). https://988lifeline.org/

Need to talk to someone now? Call or text 988 (988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, US). In an emergency, call 911.

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