

The Zones of Grief Response

GREEN ZONE: Typical Grief Responses

- Sadness, tears, irritability
- Trouble sleeping or eating
- Asking questions about death
- Moments of play, laughter, or distraction
- Wanting more hugs or reassurance

YELLOW ZONE: Extra Support May be Needed

- Persistent withdrawal from family/friends
- Ongoing decline in school performance
- Frequent physical complaints (headaches, stomachaches)
- Big emotions that don't seem to ease over time
- School or activity avoidance
- Frequent reassurance seeking
- Significant changes in personality

RED ZONE: Seek Extra Support

- Talking about wanting to die or not be here
- Dangerous or reckless behavior
- Skipping school frequently or withdrawing completely
- Substance use
- Intense hopelessness or despair lasting weeks
- No interest in previously enjoyed activities

Conversation Starters & Compassionate Responses

Conversation Starters:

- “What’s been on your mind today?”
- “What do you miss most about ____?”
- “What helps you when you’re feeling sad?”
- “Do you want to talk, or would you rather I just sit with you right now?”
- “Do you ever feel worried or scared since what happened?”

Supportive Responses (instead of trying to fix):

- “It makes sense you feel that way.”
- “I’m glad you told me.”
- “I don’t have all the answers, but I’m here.”
- “It’s okay to feel sad/angry/confused/numb/nothing.”

Ways to Help Children Express Grief:

- Journaling or drawing
- Playing music
- Playing sports or other physical activity
- Dancing or other types of movement
- Making a memory box or photo album
- Writing a letter to the person who died
- Lighting a candle
- Creating small remembrance rituals
- Doing an activity the deceased person loved