Children grieve deaths in their own ways much like adults. But unlike adults, *children and teens don’t have the vocabulary or experience to quantify their emotions*.

* Children may act out, scream, throw objects, or seem “out of control”.
* Teens may begin doing riskier behaviors or act out with inappropriate language, often because they’re the worst words they can think of.

A picture containing person, indoor, posing

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Death for children and teens is hard enough under “normal” circumstances, such as the passing of an elderly grandparent or a relative or friend from a serious illness. Even car crashes, which are by nature violent, are somewhat normalized in our culture as a “normal” death.

But death from trauma or violence, such as a shooting or a beating, changes how kids grieve. Youth who haven’t experienced death before are already experiencing extreme and unfamiliar emotions. Death because of a violent crime often causes more trauma, PTSD, and other reactions.

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| **Recognize**: offering advice may not be the best place to start | |
| Parents and caregivers often want to “fix” whatever barriers or problems a child has. That’s a perfectly normal reaction to a tough homework assignment or loss to a game.  But death and trauma are not normal situations. You may be quick to give advice, opinions, or offer judgment on the situation, but remember that nothing about violence ever makes sense. | * **What’s most helpful** is to listen without judging, over-thinking, or interpreting their words. * **“Reflect” their words** by repeating their sentiment. For instance, if they said, “I miss mom,” you could say, “I miss her, too.” This helps children know you share similar feelings. |

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| **Talk**: about the person who died openly and honestly | |
| You’ll have to use your best judgment about your child’s mental fitness, but it’s rarely a good idea to hide the death or cause of death from the child.  They will learn about it eventually and if you’ve tried to hide it from them—assuming they weren’t a witness to the crime—they may come to resent you later for not disclosing as much as was appropriate.  Remember, too, they might also be able to find details online, through social media, or local news reports.  **Icon  Description automatically generated****If you need help thinking of things to say, talk to a physician, counselor, or your Victim Advocate.** | * **Avoid metaphors and euphemisms** like they’re on a long work trip or visiting someone out of town. Doctors know to use direct words like “She died.” Do the same for your children. * **Use their name or pronoun**, such as “Your dad” or “Your sister Liz” or “Coach Brewer”. By bringing them up from time to time, such as when a favorite song or dish is around, it allows children to associate memories. * **Consider making copies of print photos**. Some children grieve by seeing a person as they were. And there’s value in having photos on a wall or locker and not buried in a phone’s photo library. * **Involve them in memorials or celebrations** such as birthdays, and holidays. That could include going to a gravesite, favorite place, restaurant, or sharing memories via text. |
| **Know**: grief follows no pattern or schedule | |
| You may think grief follows the pattern of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.  But many people follow some or none of those emotions. It would not be unusual for a child to feel anger for months afterward or be depressed for years.  Others may be in denial briefly or for a while and then accept the reality. | * **Talk to a counselor**. A Victim Advocate at your local CAC can help you find someone to talk to. Remember to find time for yourself. * **Provide consistency**, which can help create safety and predictability. A child may need flexibility for a while. Homework still has to be done, but maybe tonight we take a break and get back to it tomorrow. * **Children may want to create things**, so give them the flexibility to draw and try new experiences like art classes or sports teams. |