

5 Tips for
GRIEVING WITH KIDS



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1. Give yourself and your kids permission to grieve. It's important for to cry with our children. When my husband died, I found great encouragement in the story of Lazarus' death. John 11:33 gives flesh to this story: Mary was grieving the loss of her brother, and when Jesus saw her weeping "he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled...Jesus wept." I love the way Jesus sees her tears and enters in. This gives me permission to grieve and cry with my kids. I can show them tears are normal and welcome on our grief journey.

2. Spend time talking about their questions. Kids are curious. They will naturally ask a lot of questions. My girls watched their dad's health decline very quickly as the cancer spread throughout his body. They saw how he suffered. They had lots of questions for me about Daddy's cancer. I let my kids know I didn't have all the answers but we went a treasure hunt together through the Scripture to find what it said about their questions. We read books on Heaven together (see resources list below). We imagined what Daddy might be doing in Heaven today. We prayed together about our questions.

3. Lean into the memories. Our human instinct is to want to avoid the pain and memories. When we try to avoid something hard, it will sneak up on us anyway. I encourage you to lean into the anniversaries, holidays, and memories with your kids. For example, we celebrate the day my husband graduated to Heaven in unique ways. We call it his Heaveniversary. This past year, we took a picnic to the cemetery with my mother-in-law and shared family stories. That evening we invited a group of his best friends over for dinner. I invited each of them to share something about his character that they loved. My girls jumped in to share. We shed some tears but there was also laughter in remembering his quirks and endearing qualities.

4. Plan for times of respite. In the midst of grief, we need to be intentional about carving out time for rest and rejuvenation. As a newly-single mama, I discovered we all needed some time for get away from our normal routine. Although I was hesitant to venture out without my husband, I planned some road trips with my daughters. We forged new memories. This time in the car away from home was important. We had time to talk through our grief and our fears. I am grateful for some dear friends who also took me on trips to the ocean while my parents watched my kids. I needed the freedom to grieve away from my kids as well.

5. Don't underestimate the power of prayer. Perhaps the most challenging part of being without my man was parenting. When he was alive, we were a great tag team. He would help put one girl to bed, while I prepped the other two. He would take them on a Daddy Date, while I got some writing done. When the girls acted out, we would discuss discipline together. When he was gone, I often found myself exhausted and unsure of my parenting. One day God reminded me of this verse in Isaiah 54:5: "For your Maker is your husband—the LORD Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth." God challenged me to pray whenever I wished my husband was there to help me. And He answered me with creativity and grace.

****More articles on grieving with kids at www.DorinaGilmore.com**

Activities to Help Kids Share Grief:

1. Create a memory box. This could be as simple as a cardboard box filled with special treasures from the person who died. You might include a special clothing item, photographs, collectibles, a treasured book or Bible. Let the children pick out these items and place them in the box. Talk about memories and why each item is important. If you want to get creative, let the child decorate the box and keep it in their room.

2. Sew a pillow. Select a button-down shirt worn by your loved one. Research “memory pillows” on Pinterest or other web sites and find a pattern. Have your child help make the pillow and create a special tag. Our tags say, “This is a shirt I used to wear. Whenever you hold it, know that I am there.” Give this pillow to your child to sleep with at night or hug when they are thinking about the person who died. Not into sewing? Commission a friend to help or buy a “memory pillow” on Etsy for your child.

3. Make a birthday cake. Have your child help you select a favorite family dessert or the kind of cake your loved one liked. Measure out the ingredients together and take time to talk about what your loved one might be doing in Heaven today. Serve up the cake to celebrate that person’s Heaveniversary or to remember them on their birthday or another holiday.

Resources to Share with Kids:

Books:

Heaven (for Kids) by Randy Alcorn

Picturing Heaven (a coloring devotional for kids & adults) by Randy Alcorn & Lizzie Preston

Tear Soup by Pat Schwiebert & Chuck DeKlyen

Saying Goodbye to Grandma

Fears, Doubts, Blues & Pouts by Norman Wright & Gary J. Oliver

The Invisible String by Patrice Karst

Heaven is For Real for Kids by Todd Burpo

God Gave Us Heaven by Lisa T. Bergren

Mama Does the Mambo by Katherine Leiner

Movies:

Inside Out

The Lion King

Finding Nemo

Cinderella

Voyage of the Dawn Treader

Up

Fly Away Home

***Do you have ideas for more resources to share with moms of grieving kids?*

Please contact me at www.DorinaGilmore.com and share your ideas.