

What Should We Say?

- *Keep the focus on the child who is grieving and give them plenty of space and time to talk.*
- *Be present and authentic.*
- *Listen more, talk less.*
- *Allow emotional expression.*
- *Demonstrate empathy.*
- *Stop harmful reactions when safety is a concern.*
- *Children need to feel safe in accepting and expressing the full range of their intense emotions.*
- *Always be mindful that your words and actions can make a difference and must be chosen carefully .*

Don't Say This:	Why?	Say This Instead:
I know just what you're going through.	<i>You cannot know this.</i>	Can you tell me more about what this has been like for you?
You must be incredibly angry.	<i>It is not helpful to tell people how they are feeling. It is better to ask.</i>	Most people have strong feelings when something like this happens. What has this been like for you?
It's important to remember the good things in life.	<i>A grieving child should be allowed to express whatever feelings he/she is having.</i>	What kinds of memories do you have about the person who died?
My dog died last week. I know how you must be feeling.	<i>It is not helpful to compare losses.</i>	I know how I've felt when someone I loved died, but I don't know how you're feeling. Can you tell me?
You'll need to be strong now for your family.	<i>Grieving children shouldn't be told not to express their feelings. This keeps them from learning how to cope.</i>	How is your family doing? What kinds of concerns do you have about them?
I know this must be difficult, but it's important to remember the good things in life as well.	<i>Your desire to cheer up a grieving student is understandable, but it may quiet their expressions of grief.</i>	Most people have strong feelings when something like this happens. What has this been like for you?

Dr. David Schonfeld, author of The Grieving Student: A Teacher's Guide, says teachers are often afraid to say the wrong thing when a child is grieving. He says that saying nothing says a lot — it communicates to children that you are unaware or unconcerned about their loss, or that you are unable or unwilling to help them. Your silence may also convey that you believe there is nothing you (or other adults) can do to help them adjust to their loss. It is important that we help children feel supported.