



When I Remember, the Tears Come

A Note for Parents, Caregivers, and Educators



When someone dies, the impact of their life and death is felt by everyone around them. Children feel that impact just as deeply as adults do. Knowing that grief can be an isolating experience, it is our hope that when you read *When I Remember, the Tears Come* together it will be a way for you both to feel less alone.

Reading books about death, dying, and grief with your child is one way to communicate safety, trust, and permission to talk about hard things. It can help you and your child process the difficult emotions that come along with grief, provide a bonding experience with a trusted adult, and ultimately help them feel understood as they recognize themselves in the story.

Children are fully capable of navigating the grief experience when they have communication and support from trusted caregivers, friends, and family. Talking about death with your child, and specifically the death of someone they know, will take more than one conversation. In fact, your child will have a lifetime of conversations and experiences as they learn over time how to understand, process, and express their grief. In addition to your caring presence and reading, here are some more ways to support your child:

Talk and listen. It's important to listen without judging or jumping in to fix the situation. Let your child have space and time to talk. Reflect back what you're hearing: "When that happened, it made you feel really sad..." or "It sounds like this was really tough for you."

It's ok to cry and be upset in front of your child. It helps children feel safer to know they are not the only ones feeling sad, hopeless, angry, or confused. Sharing your own grief tells them it's ok to have difficult feelings and that you understand. Also, reach out for support for yourself.

Remember children express grief in different ways. In fact, everyone grieves differently. Children's grief may look different from adults, but also from child to child. Some children, often in the same family, will want to talk while others want to be left alone. Some want to stay busy and return to life as it was before the death, while others may want to stay home more and withdraw. These are all normal reactions to grief.

When necessary, seek professional help for self-harm, suicidal thoughts, panic attacks that interfere with social and school life, or out of control behaviors like reckless behaviors and/or substance use.

Encourage play. Children process their feelings through play, art, music, dance, physical activity and pretending, both independently and with caregivers and peers. Being creative helps us all express our grief, release some stress, and sometimes make meaning from the losses in our lives.

Continue to share stories and remember your person. Children often worry that talking about the person who died will upset others, but it can also bring comfort. To stay connected, families might say their name, make their favorite food, or visit meaningful places. Remind children that while their loved one is gone, their bond remains.

