

THROUGH THE DARKNESS



WE'RE TEACHING THIS

Have you ever turned on the news only to wish you hadn't? Or answered a phone call only to wish you could un-hear the news on the other end? Whether it's a global disaster, a school shooting, our parents' divorce, or the death of a friend, there's nothing fun about tragedy. It can make us feel like we're walking around in total darkness—where nothing seems quite right and there are more questions than answers.

What do we say? What do we do? What happens next? And, how long will it take before things go back to normal? At some point, we'll all find ourselves in or around a tragedy, but *being there* doesn't mean we have to *stay there*. There's a way through the darkness to the other side, to healing—and we'll get there by trusting the One who is leading us.

THINK ABOUT THIS

By Kayla Lin, LAPC

Parents are fixers. We straighten teeth with braces, intervene with coaches, and help with homework (or at least find someone who can). Naturally, when our kids go through grief, our instinctive problem-solving tendencies spring into action. Although our intentions are good, these quick fixes don't equip our children with what they need to learn how to cope with grief. Instead, we need to guide our kids through, not around, the grieving process. So what does that mean exactly?

Avoid positive spins.

We have all experienced a time when we were mourning a loss and someone responded by putting a "positive spin" on the situation. Maybe someone said, "At least he's no longer suffering" or "Everything happens for a reason." These positive spins tend to dismiss and avoid the difficulty that a person is experiencing, and may even cause them to feel shame. This kind of response tells someone that he or she

shouldn't be feeling the way they do. It can be hard to know what to say and what not to say when your kid is experiencing a crisis. So, our friends at GoWeekly created a conversation guide for parents. It is included below.

Empathize with their reality.

If you want to guide your child through grief, it's important to understand what they are experiencing. Understanding how your child perceives the crisis allows you to empathize with them, whether you agree with their perception or not.

It is important to remember that even if you believe your child is wrong in what they see or how they feel, it is their reality. *When we empathize with their reality, we are building trust and our kids learn that they can share their feelings without judgment.* Empathy is extremely helpful during the grieving process because it creates a bridge and reduces isolation. Grief can lead to feelings of isolation or loneliness very

quickly, since many times people feel that they go through crisis alone. But empathy builds a bridge of connectedness, allowing people to heal faster.

Encourage self-care.

Another way you can help your child through grief is to show them how to take care of themselves. *Self-care activities can aid in healing.* But it's important to distinguish whether an activity is productive or simply a way to avoid the grief. Avoidance activities are activities that don't re-energize us when completed; productive self-care activities make us feel refreshed. For a teenager, a productive activity could be something as simple as reading, journaling, or listening to music. Helping your child identify what they need and making sure they take that time out for themselves is helpful for dealing with current and future times of grief.

Remind them of God's presence.

Lastly, it's important to remind your student that they're never alone. It can be helpful to ask how they feel about God's presence in the midst of tragedy. If they respond with questions or doubt, that's okay. These questions need to be *processed*, not answered immediately; *when they reach a conclusion on their own, it leads to stronger faith than an answer given to them.*

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Get connected to a wider community of parents at TheParentCue.org.

TRY THIS

It can be difficult as a parent to guide a child through grief. Grief is messy and rarely short-lived. In order to stay on track and keep the healing process moving, here are a couple resources and reminders that will help along the way.

- 1. Be available.** *Quantity* time creates *quality* time. Especially as time goes on, feelings of grief after the event can pop up randomly. Being available on a regular basis creates opportunities for helpful conversations to take place when those moments of grief happen. It is hard to force quality time out of short, scheduled segments in a day; rather, quality time emerges out of moments of availability.
- 2. Show empathy.** Showing empathy builds trust and encourages our kids to share what they're feeling. Watch this [2-minute video](#) by Brené Brown to learn how to show your kid empathy well as they process their grief.
- 3. Ask and guide.** This week, ask your kid what he or she needs. Ask them who they can talk to and trust. If this isn't you currently, that's okay. During the middle school years, your kid is going to need several trusted adult voices to reinforce what's true in their lives. And maybe one of the most helpful things you can do is help guide them toward those voices—such as a mentor, counselor, pastor, Small Group Leader, or trustworthy friend. Leading them to what or who they need also shows your kid that you are trustworthy and are there to guide them through whatever they're facing.