

# helping children remember a grandparent

for many children, a grandparent is the first person they ever lose. it can be confusing, frightening, and strangely quiet, children often grieve in bursts, between play and laughter, in a way that can fool the adults around them. this page is for the parent, aunt, or carer helping a young one through it. you do not have to have the perfect words. you only have to stay close, and tell the truth gently.

a child who is allowed to grieve openly, and to keep loving the person who died, learns that loss can be survived. that is a gift you can give them now.

## HOW CHILDREN GRIEVE

in waves, sobbing one moment, asking to play the next. this is healthy, not heartless.

through questions, sometimes the same one many times. they are checking the world is still steady.

in their bodies, tummy aches, clinginess, trouble sleeping, a return to younger habits.

through worry, that they caused it, that you might die too. they need plain, kind reassurance.

## GENTLE WAYS TO HELP

use clear, true words. say “died,” gently, rather than “lost” or “gone to sleep,” which can confuse or frighten. children take us literally.

let them see you grieve. your tears teach them that sadness is safe and allowed. you do not have to be a stone for them.

make a remembering together. a memory box, a photo on the wall, a candle at dinner, drawing a picture for granny or grandpa. children grieve well through making things.

keep the person in the conversation. say their name. tell the funny stories. “granny would have loved this” keeps the bond warm rather than sealing it away.

answer the question they actually asked. small, honest answers are better than long ones. “where is grandpa now?” can be met with your own gentle truth, and “i wonder that too” is always allowed.

let every feeling have room, theirs and yours. children can hold sadness and silliness in the same afternoon. none of it means they loved any less.

IF THE DAYS FEEL UNBEARABLE

if you are struggling to carry on, please reach out. you should not have to hold this alone.

SADAG (South African Depression and Anxiety Group): 0800 567 567

Lifeline South Africa: 0861 322 322

what they held can still be saved.

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