



GRIEF TALKING POINTS

Inspired by the widely popular Disney UP, this tip sheet is designed to share suggestions on how to have open conversations with children about death and grief.

General tips to keep in mind:

- When you think there is a teachable moment that can be made, consider your child's age and developmental understanding. Certain topics may not be appropriate for every child or warrant a conversation. Gauge their understanding by paying attention to their reactions and asking open-ended questions like "I wonder what you think happened?" or "I wonder why you think they are (insert feeling)?"
- Use simple, concrete terms when talking about death. Very young children struggle to understand euphemisms the way we do as adults. Use words like "dead", "died", and "dying". While these words may seem blunt, they help children begin to understand basic concepts around death and dying, are less confusing, and help normalize the conversation.
- Look for opportunities to discuss feelings and be open about your feelings, as well. Give feelings a name and discuss healthy ways to cope with feelings.
- Don't put too much pressure on the conversation. You know your child best. Follow their lead and answer their questions honestly. Don't worry about having all the answers to their questions. In fact, it is

perfectly okay to admit you don't know the answer. If it's a question you can explore together, we'd suggest doing so! Remember, it's okay for us to struggle with questions and feelings. When we offer opportunities for kids to share with us, we send the message that they don't have to struggle alone.

UP talking points:

- The movie UP is a story of adventure and reminds us that many of life's most important adventures are possible because of our relationships with others. This theme offers an opportunity to talk about your family's adventure with grief and the relationship we had and can still have with our person who died. Encourage your child to explore what their experience with grief has been like so far and create a safe space for them to speak openly and honestly about the ups and downs that they have encountered. Talk to them about how sometimes we may learn that our relationships with others have grown stronger as a result of the death and help them consider how they can still have a different kind of relationship with their person who died. Share examples to help

shape their understanding and encourage them to share their thoughts and feelings.

- In the beginning of the movie, we see Carl and Ellie's love story unfold. This scene provides an excellent opportunity to share about the life and history of someone who has died in your family. Children often appreciate the opportunity to learn about their person. These conversations become especially significant as children are growing and making more sense about the death and its implications. They may have philosophical questions about who their person was, what was important to them, and what their morals and values were. While these discussions generally happen naturally over time, you can use this scene to start a conversation about what you know and remember about their person from when they were younger. You can also talk about important milestones their person encountered in their life and about times they overcame challenges.
- Carl and Ellie's dream is to travel to Paradise Falls together. As a family, you can talk about things you wish you could have done with your person who died or places you wish you could have gone to. You could also talk about plans to still do some of those things as a special way to honor your person.
- There are many times throughout the movie that we witness characters amid their grief. We see Ellie's grief after her baby dies in utero, we see Carl grieving Ellie during and after she dies of illness, and we even see Russell express his grief for his father through the divorce and separation of his family. All of these moments offer opportunities for us

to explore our child's understanding of what is happening and how the characters might be feeling. Perhaps your family has experienced one or any of the mentioned examples. If applicable, talk about how the characters situations may be relatable in the context of your family's or child's experience. Allow for questions and answer them honestly. Even if your family hasn't experienced a death, you can still have developmentally appropriate conversations about grief and loss. Avoiding these conversations can lead to children receiving misinformation, silently wondering, feeling guilty or ashamed, or feeling left alone to explore difficult questions. Instead, we can build resiliency by normalizing these kinds of conversations and preparing children with tools to cope. It can be helpful to remember that these conversations don't have to happen all at once and the intention is not to divulge every detail; but rather, open the door for conversation and help them understand that they can trust you to help them navigate big questions and feelings.



- While Russell's dad is still alive, we can see the very real grief he is experiencing. Oftentimes, we may think about grief only in the context of someone dying. However, grief is the result of any meaningful loss to someone. We can talk about the many kinds of losses we have experienced in our lives. Maybe it was moving homes, switching schools, a separation due to incarceration or military leave, etc. There are also many secondary losses that occur after a death. When we give permission to have these conversations and validate their feelings, we help children understand that their experiences are normal and can help them identify supports and healthy ways of coping.
- While Carl is initially resistant to embrace his relationship with Russell, he eventually opens his heart to him. Explore with your child if it has been difficult for them to invest in their relationships with others after the death. Help them find ways to work through their feelings and to take steps towards feeling safe to open up to others and express themselves.
- In the end, Carl becomes a significant person in Russell's life, and vice versa. UP helps us remember how impactful it can be for a child to have at least one supportive and loving adult in their life and can help us

as adults consider how we can show up for the children in our lives. Erin's House is here to offers ideas of how to support grieving children and help families find ways to grieve together.



We hope that this tip sheet provides you with the support you need to open up conversation with your child about feelings of grief they may be experiencing. Feel free to adapt these suggestions to fit the needs of your child.

If you need additional support, please contact Erin's House:

- **By phone:** 260.423.2466
- **By email:** Info@ErinsHouse.org
- **Online:** ErinsHouse.org



OUR MISSION

Erin's House provides support to children, teens, and their families who have experienced a death.

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