



Becoming a Primary Caregiver as the Result of a Death

The impacts of a death on your daily life can be far reaching. This is especially true when you find yourself stepping into the role of primary caregiver to children and/or teens as a result. Our team is here for you as you make this adjustment. Use the information below as a guide and reach out to A Haven if you need additional support.

When caring for children whose parent or caregiver has died

Maybe your spouse, partner, or co-parent has died. Or maybe you find yourself grieving the death of your adult child or other relative while taking over the primary caregiving for their children. In both of these circumstances, the changes to your day to day life will be tremendous. You will be adjusting to your new role while also grieving and tending to the grief of children, *BE GENTLE* with yourself.

Caring for yourself is supportive, too

The children you are caring for will be looking to you to learn how to grieve and respond to this death - be intentional about taking good care of yourself and normalizing the emotional experience you are having. Truly the best way to care for the children and teens in your life is to ensure that **you** are well cared for. Reinforce frequently that they are safe and loved, and that it is okay for you all to grieve and establish your new normal together over time. Ask them how it feels to talk about the person who died - they may want to talk a lot or not at all. Both are okay. Check back in periodically, knowing that their answers may change with time. If they feel able to, choose together some photos of the person who died that you can display.

When a caregiver is alive but unable to function in their grief

It can be hard to know how to help following a death, or where the boundaries may lie. When there is concern over the wellbeing of children or teens, we can feel a sense of urgency in how to respond to or support a grieving family. First, be clear that you are supporting from a place of loving with no judgement and that you will provide love and support for as long as you are able (be clear if your availability is temporary).

Refrain from criticizing the grieving person directly or in front of their children.



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This is a big change for everyone

Remember that this transition will be frightening for the children or teens you are caring for - check in with them by asking how they are doing, what they may need, and by speaking clearly about what is going on. This may sound like, *"Your Dad is grieving deeply and having a hard time keeping up with schedules and daily tasks right now. You are safe with me while he works through this period of time. How are you feeling today? What do you need from me?"* And then listen. Know that the below guidance applies to you, too.

Our Brain in Grief

During times of high stress, our brain slows down in order to protect us. It is normal to feel foggy, forgetful, or just simply not quite yourself in the weeks and months following the death while you adjust to your new normal. **Utilize online calendars and alerts to help you keep track of the children's day to day scheduling items while you get accustomed to new routines.** Know that you **are** capable of adjusting to this new role and that it is normal for this adjustment to feel slow, frustrating, and overwhelming. Rest and nourish your body by getting adequate sleep and eating and hydrating well as best as you are able. Working to maintain these healthy habits for yourself will encourage the children in your care to do the same.

Establishing a Network of Support

As much as you are able, accept help that is offered or make specific asks of those around you. Maybe this is help with carpooling to and from school. Maybe you can accept dinner from a neighbor once each week when you otherwise would decline. **Accepting and requesting help reinforces to the children in your life that they are cared for and loved by a community of people.** Help them establish their own connections with those who may be a supportive presence, like a favorite teacher or guidance counselor, or a close friend's extended family.

You are not in this alone. We are here with you and want to be a resource to you.

Please contact us for more information, let us know how we can best support you.

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