

Helping Your Child with Sadness

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We hate to see our children sad, but we also know there are many griefs to come, so now is a rich opportunity to help our children grow in the midst of sorrow. Many of us wish we had the same opportunity when we were younger to learn about how Jesus helps us in our sadness.

Henry has experienced loss. In the story, he lost a pet ladybug, but the loss could be a friendship, a friend, a relative, a precious toy, or even a blanket that has been a lifelong comfort. Grief and sadness are our natural response to losing something important to us. Here are some truths from the Bible to share as you talk with your child about loss.

1. The Lord never minimizes our loss and grief.

God never tells us our sadness is unimportant. While it is true we can love things on earth more than we love Jesus, you simply will not find any Scripture that minimizes a loss. The Lord does not adjust his compassion based on its street value, as if plastic toys receive 20 percent of his compassion and comfort, small pets 40 percent, large pets 60 percent, and family members 100 percent. His compassion is not based on the merits of the item lost, but on his love for the person who grieves. Psalm 104:14 says, “God, you see the problems of people in trouble. You take note of their pain. You do something about it” (NRIV).

2. Speak of your own sadness, invite your child to speak, and be patient.

You feel your child’s loss because you love him or her. And since grief is intended to be spoken, you will put your sadness into words. That is how relationships work in God’s family. We speak our grief to him, and we speak it to those we love and who love us. So many of the psalms teach us how to speak our troubles to the Lord rather than keep them to ourselves. “O my people, trust in him at all times. Pour out your heart to him, for God is our refuge” (Psalm 62:8).

Children might need time before they can talk about their feelings. Grief can feel very alone at first—no one, it seems, could ever understand. Words seem to fail. But be patient. You can probably remember times when you wanted to be alone with your grief, at least for a little while. Along the way you can speak a few words, like the psalms, that could help your child find words for the swirling feelings within.

3. Why?

A younger child might not ask this question, but older children do, and you probably do. There are many ways to answer it, yet no answer will fully satisfy. It is better to rephrase the question into one that is even more important: “Does God care?” Now we get to the very heart of God’s response to grief. Remind your child of the following truths (and yourself as well).

4. God is close.

He is not a distant king who hears reports from his ambassadors. He is the one who personally comes close to us by his Spirit. Remind your child of these promises:

“Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5)

“The LORD is close to the brokenhearted. He saves those whose spirits have been crushed.” (Psalm 34:18 ICB)

God hears and remembers. His greatness is such that he is attentive to each individual sheep, and what he hears he remembers. “You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book” (Psalm 56:8). This verse is a request, but it is a request based on God’s promise that he hears and remembers. Our tears themselves are placed in the royal records, never erased from the King’s attention. He will remember long after grief fades.

God comforts. Adults can be close. They can hear and remember, but they don’t necessarily have the power to do too much. God, however, acts. When he hears, he is doing something. When he remembers, he is busy on our behalf. It is Jesus himself who will comfort. He is the one who knows grief. He is the God of compassion and mercy (Exodus 34:6). He is the Lamb who attends to our grief. “For the Lamb on the throne will be their Shepherd. He will lead them to springs of life-giving water. And God will wipe every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 7:17). That’s a picture of our heavenly future for all who trust in Jesus. But, right now Jesus is joining heaven and earth in himself, so we should expect features of heaven to break through into today. With this in mind, keep a look out for how and when Jesus wipes away some of our tears. The image is beautiful—Jesus is close, listening, filled with compassion—so close he touches and wipes away tears in a way that relieves some of the pain of loss. All this is a result of how he has forgiven our sin in his death, and we, in response, have said, “Thank you,” and put our trust in him. Now there is nothing that can separate us from him. Remind your child of this great truth. Invite him or her to trust Jesus. Let your child see you living a life of trust in Jesus as you face your own losses.

5. We comfort.

As tears subside and children know a little more of God’s comfort, they have a growing soft spot for other people who are sad and grieved. Now they can do something. They can express their sorrow for someone’s loss. They can remind others of God’s comfort, just as Henry did with Halle at the end of the book. Paul puts it like this, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is the Father who is full of mercy. And he is the God of all comfort. He comforts us every time we have trouble, so that we can comfort others when they have trouble. We can comfort them with the same comfort that God gives us. We share in the many sufferings of Christ. In the same way, much comfort comes to us through Christ” (2 Corinthians 1:3-5 ICB).

6. Keep heaven in view.

When we trust in Jesus and ask him for forgiveness for our sins, heaven comes into view. There will be a day when sadness, crying, and death is ended. This is how the Bible describes that day, “I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, ‘Look, God’s home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe

every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.' And the one sitting on the throne said, 'Look, I am making everything new!' (Revelation 21:3-5). As you walk with your children through sadness and loss, keep heaven in view and remember together that a day is coming when there will be no more tears and sorrow. Share the gospel with your children and invite them to turn from going their own way and put their trust in Jesus. Then, even at a young age, they can become ambassadors who pray and care for others. Even children can taste something of the sufferings of Jesus, participate in his comfort, and share the hope of heaven and the good news of Jesus with their friends.