



## Understanding Grief and Loss: A Mentor's Toolkit

For a child, losing a parent is life changing. This outcome is true whether the loss is due to death, incarceration, deportation, or divorce. As a mentor, supporting a mentee through a loss takes patience and time. This fragile topic was the focus of the January mentor training, facilitated by Brooke Anderson, an AISD social worker and counselor. After a practical overview of grief, mentors were given thoughtful and low stress activities to share with their mentee if and when needed.

The expression of grief can be different for any individual. Loss is most often accompanied by sadness, anxiety, abandonment, and a sense of powerlessness. These difficult emotions can be on-going or hit hard at certain times. While there are natural stages of grief and loss, there is no convenient time limit or pattern to rely on.

The process of understanding and accepting loss looks different through the eyes of a child and can be categorized by their development. For a more detailed overview of how a young person processes loss in the different developmental ages, [click here](#)

The most important thing to remember is, it is okay to talk about the loss if your mentee brings it up or shares feelings about their grief. While your mentee may not seem sad at present, it could surface at any time. Talking about grief and loss is often uncomfortable, and many well-meaning sentiments shut down the conversation. Due to our own discomfort around the subject or fear of “digging too deep” sometimes we say things that fall short of helping our mentee process their feelings. Things like “all things happen for a reason,” or “God only gives you what you can handle.” Instead, offering “I am so sorry for your loss,” “I am here for you if you want to talk,” or “I want you to know you are important to me and I care about you” communicates your openness to listen and genuine regard for what they might be experiencing. To learn more about what a grieving child needs, [click here](#)

Mentors are not expected to bring up the topic of grief and loss, but rather to be mindful of when and if it is an appropriate time to talk about it. The following activities are thoughtful ways to encourage sharing and offer support to your mentee. [Click here for activities](#)  
For the “how to” of each activity, [click here](#)