

Families Fighting Flu Guide for Communities



Helping You Stay in the Game

Fall 2011





Welcome

Families Fighting Flu is dedicated to protecting all children against the flu and saving lives. We developed this toolkit so that you can help us to advance our mission and reduce the number of children affected by this devastating disease. Through this toolkit, we provide information to help:

1. Promote awareness and understanding of the serious nature of the flu;
2. Offer resources to educate others about flu prevention; and
3. Provide emotional support to families and communities who have experienced a loss from the flu.

We encourage you to use this toolkit to:

- Learn more about Families Fighting Flu;
- Answer your questions about the flu and dispel common myths;
- Cope with a loss in your family or community due to the flu;
- Explore opportunities for you to become more involved with Families Fighting Flu, and join the flu prevention fight; and
- Share valuable tools and resources with your family, friends, school and community.

Thank you for your time and support of Families Fighting Flu. Together, we can remind families across this country that the flu is just as preventable as it is serious.

Sincerely,

Laura Scott
Executive Director, Families Fighting Flu



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About Families Fighting Flu





About Families Fighting Flu

Families Fighting Flu (FFF) is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) volunteer-based advocacy organization dedicated to educating people about the severity of influenza and protecting the lives of children. Our members include families whose children have suffered serious medical complications or died from influenza, as well as health care practitioners and advocates committed to flu prevention. Looking for comfort and wanting to increase awareness about the importance of vaccinating children against the flu every year, we united in 2004 to form FFF.

Every year, influenza kills approximately 100 children under 5 years of age in the United States. These unnecessary losses impact not only parents, but everyone in our communities – including siblings, grandparents and schoolmates. In honor of our children, we work to increase awareness about the seriousness of the disease and to reduce the number of childhood hospitalizations and deaths caused by the flu each year. A major milestone was met in 2010 when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) revised its influenza vaccination recommendations to include all individuals 6 months of age and older. We are working to educate communities across the country about these recommendations for vaccination in the fight to stop the spread of flu.

Getting Involved

The successes of FFF are a reflection of the many men and women who volunteer their time and talents to support our mission.

Our organization consists of four main groups — Members, Advocates, Medical Advisors and Partners — each with an important role:

- **Members** of FFF include families whose lives have been forever changed by influenza. Their children have suffered serious medical complications or died due to influenza. Members honor their children by sharing their personal stories to help educate others about the seriousness of the disease and the importance of influenza prevention. Members strive to reduce the number of childhood hospitalizations and deaths caused by influenza each year. They are driven by a desire to ensure that no other family goes through a life altering experience with influenza.
- **Advocates** are individuals who strongly support the FFF goals to increase awareness about the seriousness of influenza, to increase annual vaccination rates among children and their families, and to reduce the number of childhood hospitalizations and deaths caused by the disease each year. Advocates may include the extended family, friends, teachers, doctors or community members of a family who had a child who suffered serious medical complications or died due to influenza.
- **Medical Advisors** of FFF include pediatricians, family practitioners, researchers and nurses with a special interest or focus on influenza. Medical Advisors provide guidance



and insight on the latest research and findings in the fight against influenza. More information about our Medical advisors is available at www.familiesfightingflu.org/about/medical-advisors/.

- **Partners** include other nonprofit organizations, corporations, medical facilities and health departments that support the FFF goals to increase awareness about the seriousness of influenza, to increase annual vaccination rates among children and their families, and to reduce the number of childhood hospitalizations and deaths caused by the disease each year. Partners also assist in promoting FFF as a resource for education and support.

If you are not yet a member, but would like to join FFF, submit your contact information at www.familiesfightingflu.org/join-now.



Donations to Families Fighting Flu

FFF operates solely on donations from organizations and people like you who support our mission and share our goals. Our educational campaigns and outreach activities cannot happen without your help. Your tax-deductible contribution to FFF will help save another child from being hospitalized or dying from this vaccine-preventable disease. By donating to FFF, you help educate millions of people about the seriousness of influenza and the importance of annual vaccination.

Donations may be made online at www.familiesfightingflu.org/donate/.

Alternatively, donations may be mailed by completing a mail-in contribution form (available at www.familiesfightingflu.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/contribution_form.pdf) and sending it along with a check or money order (payable to “Families Fighting Flu, Inc.”) to the address below. Donors are also encouraged to discuss match contributions with their employers. Matching contribution paperwork may be mailed to:

**Families Fighting Flu, Inc.
4201 Wilson Blvd., #110-702
Arlington, VA 22203**



Frequently Asked Questions

The flu is a serious but often misunderstood disease. Learn more and get your questions answered about:

- [Influenza – “the flu”](#)
- [The Flu Vaccine](#)
- [Families Fighting Flu](#)

Influenza

- **What is influenza?**
Influenza, or “the flu,” is a highly contagious viral infection of the respiratory tract (nose, throat and lungs). The flu is often confused with the common cold, but flu symptoms tend to develop quickly (usually one to four days after a person is exposed to the flu virus) and are usually more severe than the typical sneezing and congestion associated with a cold.
- **How widespread is the flu?**
Each year, between 10 and 20 percent of the U.S. population is infected with the virus.
- **Who is at risk for contracting the flu?**
Everyone is at risk for being infected with the influenza virus, and anyone can spread the disease to others. Additionally, children are two-to-three times more likely than adults to develop the flu because of their less-developed immune systems.
- **Is the flu a serious disease?**
Yes. The flu and its complications lead to more than 200,000 hospital stays per year and tens of thousands of deaths. About 20,000 of those hospitalized with the flu are children under the age of 5 — that’s more than four children per hour during flu season (October to April)!
- **How serious is the flu for children?**
Children have the highest chance of getting sick from the flu and often spread the germs throughout their communities. During bad flu seasons, about 30 percent of school-aged children get sick. Even though vaccines help cut down on flu-related missed school days by 47 to 56 percent, not enough children are vaccinated annually against the disease. As a result, children sick with the flu miss about 38 million school days every year.

Influenza is also one of the leading causes of infectious disease hospitalizations among young children. Approximately 20,000 children under the age of 5 are hospitalized due to the flu each year. That equates to 870 empty classrooms. Infants and toddlers are



hospitalized as a result of influenza at rates similar to elderly people and at higher rates than people of all other ages. On average, approximately 100 children in the United States die from the flu and its complications every year.

- **How long does the flu last?**

A person infected with the flu virus will typically suffer from the disease for approximately seven to 10 days, with five to six days of limited activity and about three days of bed rest.

- **What are the symptoms of the flu?**

Influenza is often accompanied with:

- Fever
- Headache
- Extreme tiredness
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle aches
- Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea are also common symptoms in children.

- **Where can I learn more about the flu?**

To learn more about the flu and what you can do to help stop its spread, visit www.familiesfightingflu.org.



Influenza Vaccine

- **What is the flu vaccine?**

The flu vaccine is a type of vaccination administered annually to help protect the recipient from contracting and spreading the flu. The flu vaccine protects against three influenza virus strains that research indicates will be circulating during the upcoming flu season. There are two types of vaccines: an inactivated vaccine that contains the killed virus and can be administered as a “shot” with a needle, or a nasal spray containing a live, weakened flu virus.

- **Why should I get the flu vaccine?**

An annual flu vaccination can help prevent the spread of influenza between individuals and may help save the lives of those most at risk for severe and fatal complications from the flu. For this reason, the flu vaccine remains the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) top recommendation for influenza prevention for everyone 6 months of age and older.

- **Is the flu vaccine safe?**

Yes. Flu vaccines have been used for more than 50 years with very good safety records. The CDC and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) continuously monitor for unexpected adverse reactions related to the vaccine.

- **What are the side effects of the flu vaccine?**

Most people who get the flu shot have no reaction. Up to 25 percent may have some redness and slight swelling at the site of injection. The risk of a severe allergic reaction in those who are vaccinated is less than one in four million.

- **Can you get the flu from the flu vaccine?**

This is impossible. The flu vaccine does not actually carry a live virus; it contains inactivated or weakened organisms. Vaccine manufacturers grow the flu virus in eggs, then cleanse and chemically treat the virus to deactivate it.

- **How effective is the flu vaccine?**

The flu vaccine is safe and effective at preventing the spread of influenza, and according to the CDC, an annual vaccine is the first and most important step in protection against the flu.

Occasionally, the flu season can be more severe when a major circulating strain of influenza does not match any of the strains selected by world health organizations for the vaccine formulations. This is called a vaccine mismatch. Even in this case, the vaccine still offers some protection by making instances of the flu less severe.



- **Who should get vaccinated against the flu? Do healthy people need a flu vaccine?**

The CDC recommends that **everyone 6 months and older** get vaccinated against the flu every year. This recommendation is the same even during years when the vaccine composition (the viruses the vaccine protects against) remains unchanged from the previous season.

Infants younger than 6 months old are too young to be vaccinated. You can protect them by getting yourself, other children and family members, and close contacts vaccinated. This will help prevent spreading the virus to infants.

Healthy people need to also get vaccinated every year to protect themselves and those most at risk from severe and fatal complications. During the 2010-2011 flu season, roughly half of the kids who died from influenza had healthy medical histories.

- **Should pregnant women get the flu vaccine?**

Yes. The CDC recommends the flu shot for pregnant women as the safest and most important method for protecting a mother and her unborn child from the flu. Pregnant women are at risk for developing serious complications from the flu, which may include premature delivery and miscarriage. Research has found that not only do pregnant women who are vaccinated get the flu less often than pregnant women who are not vaccinated, but babies born to mothers who were vaccinated during pregnancy also get the flu less often.

The flu vaccine has been given to millions of pregnant women over many years and has not been shown to harm expectant mothers or their children.

- **Do children need to receive a flu vaccine?**

Yes. Children have the highest chance of getting sick from the flu and often spread the germs throughout their communities. During bad flu seasons, about 30 percent of school-aged children get sick. Even though vaccines help cut down on flu-related missed school days by 47 to 56 percent, not enough children are vaccinated annually against the disease. As a result, children sick with the flu miss about 38 million school days every year.

Influenza is also one of the leading causes of infectious disease hospitalizations among young children. Approximately 20,000 children under the age of 5 are hospitalized due to the flu each year — that's enough children to fill 870 average American classrooms. Infants and toddlers are hospitalized as a result of influenza at rates similar to elderly people and at higher rates than people of all other ages.



In addition, on average, approximately 100 children die in the United States from the flu and its complications every year.

- **Do I need to get a flu vaccination every year?**

Yes. The vaccine needs to be given every year. Because flu viruses are constantly changing, flu vaccines may be updated from one season to the next to protect against the most recent and most commonly circulating viruses. In addition, a person's immune protection from the vaccine declines over time; therefore, annual vaccination is needed for optimal protection.

- **When is the best time to get vaccinated?**

It is recommended that you get vaccinated as soon as the vaccine becomes available in your community. The virus tends to spread from October to May, with most cases occurring in January or later. However, vaccinations can be given at any time during the flu season; getting a vaccination later in the season (December through March) can still help protect you from the flu.

- **Where can I get a flu vaccine?**

Flu vaccines are readily available in a wide variety of locations, including doctors' offices, schools, workplaces, supermarkets, pharmacies, health departments and community centers. To find a flu clinic near you, visit www.familiesfightingflu.org and use our flu clinic locator.

- **Where can I learn more about flu vaccine recommendations?**

To learn more about flu vaccine recommendations, visit the CDC's website at www.cdc.gov/flu. You can learn more about the flu and what you can do to help stop its spread by further exploring our resources at www.familiesfightingflu.org/resources/.



Families Fighting Flu

- **What is Families Fighting Flu?**

FFF is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt, volunteer-based nonprofit established in 2004 in memory of children who died due to the influenza virus. Our organization is dedicated to educating people about the severity of the flu and protecting the lives of children.

- **Who are the members of Families Fighting Flu?**

Our members include families whose children have suffered serious medical complications or died from influenza, as well as health care practitioners and advocates committed to flu prevention. In honor of our children, we work to increase awareness about the seriousness of the disease and to reduce the number of childhood hospitalizations and deaths caused by the flu each year by increasing vaccination rates.

- **What is the mission of Families Fighting Flu?**

Our mission is to protect all children against the flu and save lives.

- **Is Families Fighting Flu a nonprofit organization?**

Yes. FFF is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. We rely on organizations and people like you to support our mission and share our goals.

- **Who determines the policies and activities of Families Fighting Flu?**

Our policies and activities are determined by the member families and medical experts that make up our Board of Directors.

- **What resources does Families Fighting Flu offer?**

FFF offers a wide variety of resources to the community to increase awareness about the seriousness of influenza and help promote annual flu vaccinations. Visit www.familiesfightingflu.org for videos from our member families, a flu clinic locator, posters, bookmarks and postcards, and other educational resources.

You can also sign up to receive our free e-newsletter at www.familiesfightingflu.org/newsletter/. And for even more information on flu news and flu media coverage, you can add yourself to our Daily Flu News distribution list at www.familiesfightingflu.org/subscribe-to-daily-flu-news/. These e-mails are sent daily September through April, and weekly during the late spring and summer months.

- **Does Families Fighting Flu endorse any specific flu vaccine?**

No. FFF does not endorse any specific flu vaccine, nor do we advocate on behalf of any flu vaccine manufacturer.



- **How can I get involved with Families Fighting Flu?**

There are several ways that you can help FFF achieve our goals. By making a donation to FFF, you may help save another child from being hospitalized or dying from this vaccine-preventable disease. Your donation will help us educate millions of people about the seriousness of the flu and the importance of getting vaccinated annually. For more information on making a donation, visit www.familiesfightingflu.org/donate/.

Additionally, joining our organization is a free and easy way to stay informed about the flu. To learn more about our membership tiers and joining our organization, visit www.familiesfightingflu.org/connect-with-us/.

- **Where can I learn more about Families Fighting Flu?**

To learn more about our organization and the work we do to promote awareness about the flu and influenza vaccines, visit www.familiesfightingflu.org. You can also follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/familiesfightingflu, or subscribe to our Twitter feed, www.twitter.com/famfightflu.



How Can I Protect My Family?

The following are some simple steps that you can take to help keep yourself, your child and your entire family healthy this flu season:

- **Get vaccinated.** According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), **influenza vaccination is safe and effective and is the single best way to help protect yourself and your family from the flu each year.**
- **Wash your hands.** Frequent hand washing keeps lots of germs out of our bodies. If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer.
- **Stay home if you don't feel well.** Should you become infected, keep the germs from spreading by staying home – and don't forget to take care of yourself!
- **Do the elbow cough.** Cough into elbows, not hands where it's more likely to spread bacteria and viruses through touch.



Fight the Flu with Facts

Knowledge and information are equally important to our fight against flu. Empower yourself through education and awareness against the many “flu myths” that are unfounded and untrue.

- **Myth #1: You can get the flu from the flu vaccine.**
FALSE: This is impossible. The flu vaccine does not actually carry a live virus; it contains inactivated or weakened organisms. Vaccine manufacturers grow the flu virus in eggs, then cleanse and chemically treat the virus to deactivate it.
- **Myth #2: The flu is just a bad cold.**
FALSE: The flu is a serious disease. It is a highly contagious viral infection of the respiratory tract (nose, throat and lungs). In the United States, about 200,000 people are hospitalized and tens of thousands of people die each year because of the flu. **The flu kills more Americans every year than all other vaccine-preventable diseases combined.**
- **Myth #3: It is not necessary for children to receive a flu vaccination.**
FALSE: Children are two-to-three times more likely to develop influenza than adults because of their less-developed immune systems. More than 20,000 children under the age of 5 are hospitalized due to the flu each year. In addition, the flu kills nearly 100 American children under 5 years of age every year.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone 6 months and older get vaccinated against the flu every year.
- **Myth #4: The side effects of the vaccine are worse than the flu itself.**
FALSE: Most people who get the flu shot have no reaction. Up to 25 percent may have some redness and slight swelling at the site of injection; the risk of a severe allergic reaction in those who receive a vaccine is less than one in four million.
- **Myth #5: You must be vaccinated in the fall to be protected against the flu.**
FALSE: It is recommended to get vaccinated as soon as the vaccine becomes available in your community. Typically, the flu virus tends to spread from October to May, with most cases occurring in January or February. However, vaccines can be given at any time during the flu season – even getting vaccinated later in the season (December through March) can still help protect you from the flu.
- **Myth #6: Only older people need the flu vaccine.**
FALSE: The CDC recommends that everyone 6 months and older get vaccinated against the flu every year.



- **Myth #7: Taking vitamin C or Echinacea will prevent the flu.**
FALSE: There is no conclusive evidence that these treatments are effective against the flu.
- **Myth #8: The flu vaccine is 100 percent effective in preventing the flu.**
FALSE: Although the flu vaccine is not 100 percent effective, it's important that everyone 6 months and older get vaccinated against the flu to help prevent illness and reduce the spread of the virus in the community. The more people who get vaccinated against the flu every year, the lower the risk of catching the disease.
- **Myth #9: Getting the flu vaccine every year isn't necessary.**
FALSE: The vaccine needs to be given every year. Because flu viruses are constantly changing, flu vaccines may be updated from one season to the next to protect against the most recent and most commonly circulating viruses. In addition, a person's immune protection from the vaccine declines over time; therefore, annual vaccination is needed for optimal protection.
- **Myth #10: Healthy people don't need a flu vaccine.**
FALSE: The CDC recommends that everyone 6 months and older get vaccinated against the flu every year.

Infants younger than 6 months old are too young to be vaccinated. Protect them by getting yourself, other children and family members, and close contacts vaccinated. This will help prevent spreading the virus to infants.

During the 2010-2011 flu season, roughly half of the kids who died from influenza had healthy medical histories.

- **Myth #11: Pregnant women can't get the flu vaccine.**
FALSE: The CDC recommends vaccination for pregnant women as the safest and most important method for protecting a mother and her unborn child from the flu. Pregnant women are at risk for developing serious complications from the flu, which may include premature delivery and miscarriage, or death. In fact, a study in the American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology found that babies born to moms who were vaccinated during pregnancy were up to 48 percent less likely to be hospitalized for the flu in the early months of life. The flu vaccine has been given to millions of pregnant women over many years and has not been shown to harm expectant mothers or their children. Flu protection is a critical, life-saving measure that every mother should take seriously each and every year.



Resources

Families Fighting Flu (FFF) offers a wide variety of resources and materials you can use to increase influenza awareness and promote flu vaccination in your community.

Videos

- Learn more about the flu and other member families by visiting the FFF YouTube page, www.youtube.com/user/FamiliesFightingFlu. From here, you can:
 - Watch member families share their stories.
 - Access public service announcements and an animation produced by FFF that highlights the importance of flu prevention.

Flu News

- Stay in-the-know on all things FFF! Sign-up to receive our newsletter, *Fighting Influenza – Official News from Families Fighting Flu*, at www.familiesfightingflu.org/newsletter/.
- Receive a report of top flu news from a variety of national and local news sources by visiting <http://www.familiesfightingflu.org/subscribe-to-daily-flu-news/>. These e-mails are sent daily September through at least April, and weekly during the late spring and summer months.

Outreach — Awareness Campaign Resources

- Use the flu clinic locator on our homepage, www.familiesfightingflu.org, to find a vaccine clinic near you.
- Send an e-card to friends and family at www.familiesfightingflu-ecard.org/ to encourage them to get vaccinated.
- Hang our posters in your community to help increase awareness about the flu vaccine.
- We offer brochures, postcards, bookmarks, fact sheets and frequently asked questions, and a variety of posters for different audiences. Download or order these materials at www.familiesfightingflu.org/flu-resources/flu-materials/.

Getting Involved

- “Like” us on Facebook, www.facebook.com/familiesfightingflu and encourage your friends and family to “Like” FFF, too!
- Follow us on Twitter, www.twitter.com/famfightflu and retweet our posts to share important updates with your friends and family.
- Joining our organization is free and is an easy way to stay informed about influenza. Together, we can educate others about the seriousness of influenza and the importance of annual flu vaccinations. To join, submit your contact information at www.familiesfightingflu.org/join-now/.



- FFF operates solely on donations from organizations and people like you who support our mission and share our goals. Donations may be made online at www.familiesfightingflu.org/donate/.
- Alternatively, donations may be mailed by completing a mail-in contribution form (available at www.familiesfightingflu.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/contribution_form.pdf) and sending it along with a check or money order payable to “Families Fighting Flu, Inc.” to the address below. Donors are also encouraged to discuss match contributions with their employers. Matching contribution paperwork may be mailed to:

**Families Fighting Flu, Inc.
4201 Wilson Blvd., #110-702
Arlington, VA 22203**



Grief & Emotional Support





Grief & Emotional Support

Losing a loved one is the most difficult thing a person ever goes through. Whether you are a parent or family member struggling with the loss of a child from the flu, or your community has been affected, dealing with your grief while also communicating with your children, friends and family presents its own set of challenges.

If you have suffered a personal loss, or your community has been affected by the flu, these emotional support materials will help you understand the bereavement process and how you can best support those around you, including your children.

If you are a parent whose child died, please read the [letter from Alissa Kanowitz](#), whose 4-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Amanda, died from the flu.

If your family or a family you know experienced the loss of a child, please read the [letter from John Vittas](#), grandfather of Emily Lastinger, a 3-and-a-half-year old who died from flu-related complications.



An Introduction for Parents—From Alissa Kanowitz

As a parent who lost a child to the flu, I know what it is like to feel such an incredible loss. After my daughter, Amanda, died I had few places to turn for support to help me cope with the unthinkable. That is why I co-founded Families Fighting Flu. I wanted to prevent other families from ever experiencing this pain, but for those who do, I wanted to let them know that they are not alone and to provide a lending hand.

After Amanda died, so many people tried to help me through my grief. I can't say enough about how much I appreciated this outpouring of support. However, it is hard to always know what to do in a situation like this. There are times when even a comment from a well-meaning friend can hurt. This Emotional Support guide has been created to serve you and others close to your child in your time of need. Families Fighting Flu is there for you, to listen and to help you get through this unbearable time, to answer questions you may have as you grieve, how to support your surviving children, and where to find additional resources.



This will also be helpful for your friends, your family, your child's school and others affected by your loss. The resources included will not only help them understand what they might be able to do, but also what they should *not* do.

Unfortunately, there is nothing I can say to ease the loss of your child. But, I will let you know that there are others like you who have experienced a similar loss of a child from the flu. And, if and when you are ready, we are here for you.

Sincerely,

Alissa Kanowitz, Amanda's mom (1999-2004).



An Introduction for Family—From John Vittas

No one can ever be prepared to deal with the sudden loss of a loved one, especially when the loved one is just a child. As a father and a grandfather, the sudden loss of my granddaughter, Emily, to the flu was devastating. Once Emily left us, everything became different.

My daughter, Jennifer, and her husband, Joe, were facing the most devastating loss imaginable – the death of their child.

My wife and I were coping with our own loss while also trying to support those around us – our other children and grandchildren and other family members. While supporting our loved ones helped our grieving process more than we can say, the challenge was often overwhelming.

There were times when we felt helpless – pulled in many directions at once as we tried to navigate this terrible reality with our family.



We have dealt with our personal pain of losing Emily, as well as the pain of seeing our daughter suffering, in our own way. We have learned that every person's experience with grief and their path to getting better is different. This Emotional Support guide has been created to serve you and others close to you as you find your path. Just as I was able to find comfort from the other members of Families Fighting Flu, know that we are there for you too, to listen and to help you get through this unbearable time, to answer questions you may have about the bereavement process, how to support your family, and where to find additional resources.

This guide will also be helpful to your family, your friends and others affected by your loss. The resources included will not only help them to understand what they might be able to do in support, but also perhaps what they *shouldn't* say or do.

It is my hope that the resources included in this Emotional Support guide will not only help you cope with the loss of your child, but also help put you on a path which, over time, will lead you to realize that while things will never be the same, they can still be good.

Sincerely,

John Vittas, Emily's grandfather (2000-2004)



Understanding the Grieving Process — Parent to Parent

Losing a child forever changes the life of a parent, and while the wounds left by such a tragedy never fully heal, understanding and growing through the grief process can help you cope with the painful emotions associated with this tragedy.

Many psychologists and grief counselors often discuss the “five stages of grief,” and recognizing what they are and how you may experience them can help you address your feelings:

- The first stage of grief is marked by **denial** and shock at the loss of a loved one. You may wonder why such a tragedy occurred and how you can possibly move forward with your life. This is a natural response to loss that helps you process emotions.
- As you accept the reality of your loss, you may also experience **anger** and frustration with others and yourself. Often, this anger is caused by the pain of feeling lost or alone, and while your grief may at times seem endless, emotions like anger and sadness are active signs of the deep love you experienced for your child.
- Anger often leads to feelings of **hopelessness** where you begin to question why and how a tragedy occurred. This stage of grief is marked by reflections on the “What ifs” and “If onlys” associated with your loss. While these feelings can linger for quite some time, understanding that they are a natural response to pain will help you recognize that grief is not about assessing blame but rather about living in and through the memory of your loved one.
- **Depression**, the next stage of grief, moves you beyond thinking about the past and into a true acceptance of your loss. The realization that your loved is gone can leave you feeling empty and heartbroken. This, too, however is a reminder of the depth of your love and a natural step towards growth and healing.
- In the final stage of grief, you learn that it is OK to feel sad, lost and confused in the wake of a tragedy — this is what grief is all about! Recognizing the sincerity of these feelings comes with **accepting** that death does not bring an end to your love nor to the memory of your child. Both will continue to grow and evolve as you adjust to and embrace a new reality that is different but still meaningful.



Coping with Loss

While everyone grieves differently, the following tips and recommendations will help you to cope with some of the more challenging experiences associated with bereavement:

- Recognize that grief can be experienced in many different ways — socially, spiritually and even physically. Pay attention to your body's natural response to grief but don't be afraid to seek the help you need, especially if your health and well-being begin to deteriorate.
- Learning to live with the loss of a child affects you personally but it can also impact your relationships with others. When you feel comfortable doing so — and to the extent that you want to and can — share your feelings and concerns with your friends and family.
- Accepting encouragement and support from friends and family can be a tremendous source of strength and encouragement. It's important to remember, however, that the difficulties of fully understanding your loss may lead others to say or do the “wrong thing” for the “right reason.” Try not to let the well-intentioned mistakes of friends and family cause you pain or anger. Remember, they are also struggling to make sense of this new reality.
- Consider joining a grief support group with individuals who have experienced similar tragedies and understand the unique pain and sorrow you now face. Doing so will allow you to open up and share your feelings in a safe space where your feelings can be acknowledged and supported among friends. Families Fighting Flu (FFF) members are available to talk to you and understand the unique feelings you are experiencing as a parent who lost a child to the flu. If you would like to speak to a FFF member, please email us at contact@familiesfightingflu.org.
 - If you feel more comfortable sharing your feelings privately, consider speaking to a therapist, psychologist, counselor, cleric or friend who can give you the professional support you need to work through the grieving process.
 - There are a number of grief support guides and books that may help you to understand the unique difficulties of coping with the death of a child as a parent. Some examples include:
 - *Does the Soul Survive?*, by Elie Kaplan Spitz (ISBN 1580231659)
 - *I Wasn't Ready to Say Goodbye: Surviving, Coping and Healing After the Sudden Death of a Loved One*, by Brook Noel and Pamela Blair, Ph.D. (ISBN 1402212216)
 - *Children Die Too*, by Joy and Marv Johnson (ISBN 1561230294)
 - *The Colors of Grief: Understanding a Child's Journey through Loss from Birth to Adulthood*, by Janis DiCiacco (ISBN 1843108860)



- Though grief can at times be overwhelming, try to maintain a sense of structure and purpose by remaining active. Identify activities that you enjoy — even for short periods at a time — that will give you a reason to get out of bed. Consider channeling your grief and emotions creatively through writing, painting or music. Volunteering with meaningful organizations like FFF is also a wonderful way to commemorate the memory of your child while also building a support network of other families who understand what you have experienced.
- Be prepared for tough questions. Just as you will wrestle with difficult issues as you process your grief, so too will your friends, family and even acquaintances who want to know more about what happened and how you are coping.
 - Even a seemingly mild question from a stranger or acquaintance like “How many kids do you have?” or “Who is your oldest child?” can throw you for a loop. Know that you will be asked these types of questions and reflect beforehand on how you feel most comfortable responding.
- Be aware that those around you may be afraid to use colloquial phrases like “I’m dying” or “I’m going to kill you.” Remember that these expressions are certainly not meant to cause you pain.
- Remember that you will probably experience a heightened sense of pain and loss during milestones like birthdays, holidays, family gatherings, the anniversary of your child’s death, or even the first day of school. Having a plan for these days and creating new rituals can help alleviate some of the anxiety with those milestones. Create commemorations and memorials — if and when you feel comfortable doing so.
- Life will go on. This may be impossible to grasp at first. Eventually, after the tremendous pain of acute grief subsides and you gradually come to terms with the permanence of your loss, you will move forward. Life will never be the same, but you must remember, it can still be good. Try to allow yourself to enjoy experiences that make you happy without feeling guilty. Your happiness was an essential part of your relationship with your child; continue to embrace what makes you *you*. Your child would want for you to be happy again and enjoy life.
- As time passes, distance can and will make your grief easier to manage. At the same time, however, you may also feel like you are moving further and further away from your child. Remember, nothing — including death — will ever diminish the love you and your child share. You were, are and will always be a loving and devoted parent.



For Friends, Family & Community Members: Supporting Those Who Are Grieving

When someone you care about is grieving, it can be tough to know what to say or do. It's common to feel helpless, awkward or unsure. You may be afraid of intruding, saying the wrong thing, or making the person feel even worse. Or maybe you feel there's little you can do to make things better. You are also dealing with your own grief, and the need to heal.

While you can't take away the pain of the loss, you can provide much-needed comfort and support. There are many ways to help a grieving family member or friend, starting with letting the person know you care. Consider sharing these suggestions with other family members, friends, neighbors, or members of the community who may appreciate guidance in supporting a grieving family.

Understanding the Bereavement Process

The better your understanding of grief and the process someone is going through, the better equipped you'll be to help a bereaved family member or friend:

- **There is no right or wrong way to grieve.** Grief does not always unfold in orderly, predictable stages. It can be an emotional rollercoaster, with unpredictable highs, lows and setbacks. Everyone grieves differently, so avoid telling the bereaved what they "should" be feeling or doing.
- **Grief may involve extreme emotions and behaviors.** Feelings of guilt, anger, despair and fear are common. A grieving person may yell to the heavens, obsess about the death, lash out at loved ones, or cry for hours on end. Don't judge them or take their grief reactions personally.
- **There is no set timetable for grieving.** For many people, grief after bereavement typically takes 18 to 24 months, but for others, the grieving process may be longer or shorter. Don't pressure the bereaved to move on or make them feel like they've been grieving too long. This can actually slow their healing.

Listen With Compassion

Almost everyone worries about what to say to people who are grieving. But knowing how to listen is much more important. Often, well-meaning people avoid talking about the death or mentioning the deceased person. However, the bereaved need to feel that their loss is acknowledged, that it's not too terrible to talk about, and that their loved one won't be forgotten.

While you should never try to force someone to open up, it's important to let the bereaved know they have permission to talk about the loss. Talk candidly about the person who died and don't steer away from the subject if the deceased's name comes up. Invite the grieving person to openly express his or her feelings. Try simply saying, "I'm here if you want to talk."



- **Accept and acknowledge all feelings.** Let the grieving person know that it's okay to cry in front of you, to get angry, or to break down.
- **Be willing to sit in silence.** Don't press if the grieving person doesn't feel like talking. You can offer comfort and support with your silent presence. If you can't think of something to say, just offer eye contact, a squeeze of the hand, or a reassuring hug.
- **Let the bereaved talk about how their loved one died.** People who are grieving may need to tell the story over and over again, sometimes in minute detail. Be patient. Repeating the story is a way of processing and accepting the death for some.
- **Offer comfort and reassurance without minimizing the loss.** Tell the bereaved that what they are feeling is okay. If you've gone through a similar loss, share your own experience if you think it would help. However, don't give unsolicited advice, claim to "know" what the person is feeling, or compare your grief to theirs.
- **It's OK to cry with the grieving person.**



Supporting a Grieving Child

Young children feel the pain of bereavement, but they learn how to express their grief by watching the adults around them. After a loss – particularly of a sibling – children need support, stability and honesty. They also need extra reassurance that they will be cared for and kept safe. As an adult, you can support children through the grieving process by demonstrating that it's okay to be sad and helping them make sense of the loss.

Answer any questions children may have as truthfully as you can. Use very simple, honest and concrete terms when explaining death to a child. Children, especially young children, may blame themselves for what happened and the truth helps them see they are not at fault.

Open communication will smooth the way for a child to express distressing feelings. Children often express themselves through stories, games and artwork — encourage this self-expression, and look for clues in those activities about how they are coping.

How Parents Can Help a Grieving Child

- As soon as possible after the death, set time aside to talk to your child.
- Provide professional support for your child; talk to your family doctor or your child's school counselor for a referral to a child therapist.
- Give your child the facts in a simple manner – be careful not to go into too much detail. Your child will ask more questions as they come up in his/her mind.
 - The explanation that worked best for some of our members with young children was that death occurs when someone's body stops working, with reassurance that this will not happen to them and that it usually happens when people are very old.
- Allow your child, however young, to attend the funeral if he or she wants to.
- Convey your spiritual values about life and death with your child.
- Meet regularly as a family to find out how everyone is coping. Talk about feelings, such as: sad, angry, feeling responsible, scared, tearful, depressed, worried, etc.
- Use the given name of the deceased when speaking of him or her.
- Be willing to hear and discuss your child's feelings and encourage him or her to talk about the person who died. Recalling memories (both good ones and not so good ones)



might have great value to one child while others might not be ready to talk about the person. Be conscious of their response.

- Write down memories of the child because every single memory you have will be treasured.
- Help children find ways to symbolize and memorialize the deceased person.
- Keep your child's daily routine as normal as possible.
- Pay attention to the way a child plays; this can be one of a child's primary ways of communicating.
- Watch out for "bad dreams." Are they occurring often? Talk about the dreams.
- Watch for behavioral changes in your child both at home or at school.

What Not to Do

- Don't force a child to publicly mourn if he or she doesn't want to.
- Don't give false or confusing messages, like "Sally went to sleep."
- Don't tell a child to stop crying because others might get upset.
- Don't try to shield a child from the loss. Children pick up on much more than adults realize. Including them in the grieving process will help them adapt and heal.
- Don't stifle your tears; by crying in front of your child, you send the message that it's okay for him or her to express feelings, too. At the same time, try not to sob or lose control in front of your child; it's too scary for him or her.
- Don't turn your child into your personal confidante. Rely on another adult or a support group instead.
- Don't tell a child they have grieved too long or to "get over it."



What to Say to Someone Who Has Lost a Loved One

It is common to feel awkward when trying to comfort someone who is grieving. Many people do not know what to say or do. The following are suggestions to use as a guide:

- Acknowledge the situation and express your concern. Example: “I heard about [child’s name] and I’m sorry.” Or “I just wanted to say I was sorry about [child’s name].”
- Use the child’s name as this helps keep their memory alive.
- Be genuine in your communication and don’t hide your feelings. Example: “I’m not sure what to say, but I want you to know I care.” Remember, caring thoughts and hugs may make the person cry, but tears are part of the healing process.
- Offer your support, and be specific. Example: “I would like to help you and your family; can I pick up your children from school this week?”
- Don’t assume you know how the bereaved person feels on any given day.
- Remember that a smile and “It’s good to see you” can make any person’s day a little brighter.

Comments to Avoid When Comforting a Bereaved Parent:

Even though you have the best intentions when comforting someone who has experienced a loss, these often common phrases can be hurtful and aggravating to hear. Try not use the following sentiments:

- **“I know how you feel.”** Instead, say that “I’m sorry, I can’t even imagine what you’re going through.”
- **“It’s part of God’s plan.”** Faith is very personal and the bereaved may not share your beliefs. It’s also not uncommon for people to question their faith during times like these.
- **“Look at what you have to be thankful for” or “At least you have your other children.”** They know they have things to be thankful for, but right now they are not important. And one child certainly does not replace another.
- **“At least you had your child for X years.”** When this was said to one of our members, she thought to herself, “And what year would you choose for your own child to die?”



- **“He’s in a better place now.”** It’s hard for any parent to believe that there is a better place for their child than with them.
- **“This is behind you now.”** The loss of a child is never behind a parent. It will always be a part of them.
- **“You’ll get over it.”** Although a parent will eventually move beyond acute grief, losing a child is not something a parent ever gets over.
- **Statements that begin with “You should” or “You will.”** These statements are too directive. Instead you could begin your comments with: “Have you thought about...” or “You might...”
- **“You can have another baby.”** One child cannot replace another.

How to Help a Grieving Child

When a child in your life is experiencing grief, there are things you can do to help as a family member, family friend, or community member.

- Speak to parents or guardians first before speaking to children. Make sure you understand and respect what the child knows, what they don’t know, and how you can best support them in their time of need.
- Use the given name of the deceased when speaking of him or her.
- Be willing to hear and discuss a child’s feelings and encourage him or her to talk about the person who died. Recalling memories (both good ones and trouble-making ones) might have great value to one child while others might not be ready to talk about the person. Be conscious of their response and encourage the child to share with his or her parents whenever possible.
- Set aside time to check-in with the family regularly to see how they are coping. Respect information that a child may share with you in confidence but always remember that you have a responsibility to protect the child’s physical and emotional wellbeing; you may need to share some information with a parent or guardian.
- Give children facts in a simple manner – be careful not to go into too much detail. Children will ask more questions when they are ready to do so.
- Keep your involvement in the child’s daily life as routine as possible.



- Pay attention to the child's actions and behavior. Respect family boundaries but let the child's parents know if you notice a change that worries you.
- What not to do:
 - Don't force a child to publicly mourn if he or she doesn't want to.
 - Don't give false or confusing messages, like "Sally went to sleep."
 - Don't tell a child to stop crying because others might get upset.
 - Don't try to shield a child from the loss. Children pick up on much more than adults realize. Including them in the grieving process will help them adapt and heal.
 - Don't stifle your tears; by crying in front of your child, you send the message that it's okay for him or her to express feelings, too. At the same time, try not to sob in front of your child; it's too scary for him or her.
 - Don't turn your child into your personal confidante. Rely on another adult or a support group instead.
 - Don't tell a child they have grieved too long or to "get over it."

There are many practical ways you can help a grieving person. You can offer to:

- Shop for groceries or run errands.
- Ask what the family likes to eat and offer to drop off a prearranged meal on a specific day. Best of all is to arrange a schedule for friends/neighbors to do the same.
- Help with funeral arrangements.
- Buy stamps and offer to make labels for acknowledgment cards.
- Help set up an event, memorial and/or charitable fund for the family.
- Stay in their home to take phone calls and receive guests.
- Help with insurance forms or bills.
- Take care of housework, such as cleaning or laundry.
- Watch their children or pick them up from school.
- Drive them wherever they need to go.
- Look after their pets.
- Go with them to a support group meeting.
- Accompany them on a walk.
- Arrange to take them to lunch or a movie with the understanding that it may be cancelled if the person is not up to it that day.
- Share an enjoyable activity (game, puzzle, art project).



Supporting Grieving Schools

Teachers, counselors and administrators play an important role in the lives of children, and have many opportunities to help children after a death occurs. Schools should have a crisis response plan to rely upon in the event a student experiences a loss or there is a student death. In addition to the information in this Grief & Emotional Support section on how to support a child, the plan should consider the following:

- How and when teachers will share information with their classes.
- Educating students on how grief affects people, what their fellow classmate(s) may be experiencing and how they can help.
- Consider the various religious and cultural backgrounds of the students and how that may impact the situation.
- Special considerations for high-risk students.
- Support for teachers in grief, including offering substitute teachers.
- General information on how children and teens grieve and what behavior changes can be expected.
- A policy on handling media inquiries and a designated spokesperson who can handle interviews, if appropriate.
- Support for grieving students upon their return to class.
- Professional counseling for students and faculty.
- How the school will memorialize or remember the student who has died. Ideas for commemoration include planting a tree on school grounds, fundraising for a scholarship in honor of the student's favorite activity, dedicating a page in the yearbook to the student, or holding a community memorial service.



Additional Support Resources

- Caring for Surviving Children (Compassionate Friends)
www.compassionatefriends.org/brochures/caring_for_surviving_children.aspx
- The Grieving Teen (American Hospice Foundation)
www.americanhospice.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=70&Itemid=8
- Helping Children Cope with Loss, Death and Grief: Tips for Parents and Teachers (National Association of School Psychologists)
www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/griefwar.pdf
- Writing a Condolence Note (Compassionate Friends)
www.americanhospice.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=95&Itemid=8
- When a Co-Worker is Grieving the Death of a Child (Compassionate Friends)
www.compassionatefriends.org/brochures/when_an_employee_is_grieving.aspx
- When Death Impacts Your School (The Dougy Center)
www.dougy.org/grief-resources/death-impacts-your-school/
- When an Employee is Grieving the Death of a Child (Compassionate Friends)
www.compassionatefriends.org/brochures/when_an_employee_is_grieving.aspx



Sources

- www.americanhospice.org/
- www.cancer.org/
- www.dougy.org/
- www.funeralplan.com/
- www.helpguide.org/
- www.nasponline.org/
- www.sidscenter.org/



How to Make a Difference





Each year, influenza hospitalizes more than 20,000 children in the United States under the age of 5, and nearly 100 children die from the disease. Thankfully, the flu is just as preventable as it is serious — and prevention begins with you! Big or small, your actions can protect the health and well-being of your family, friends and community. Get started protecting the ones you love today!

Encourage Your Family and Friends to Get Vaccinated

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone 6 months of age and older get vaccinated against the influenza virus each year. Protect infants younger than 6 months by getting yourself, other children and family members vaccinated.
- Contact the Visiting Nurse Associations of America at www.vnaa.org or Maxim Health Systems at www.maximwellness.com to organize a flu vaccination clinic at a location of your choice.
- Ask your local doctors' offices, pharmacies, schools, businesses and community centers to hang posters and share information about flu prevention and local vaccination clinics. Download or order materials for free at www.familiesfightingflu.org/flu-resources/flu-materials/.
- Share the flu clinic locator at www.familiesfightingflu.org through email, Facebook and Twitter.

Empower Others Through Education & Awareness

- Families Fighting Flu (FFF) members are eager to share their stories and promote flu prevention in your community. To arrange a speaker at your event, contact **Laura Scott, FFF Executive Director**, at lscott@familiesfightingflu.org or 703-533-7313.
- FFF offers a variety of free resources and materials that you can use to increase influenza awareness in your community. Visit <http://www.familiesfightingflu.org/resources/flu-materials/>.
- FFF offers emotional support materials for communities affected by the flu. If you know someone who would benefit from these resources, direct them to our website, www.familiesfightingflu.org.



Getting Involved with Families Fighting Flu

- If you are not yet a member, but would like to join FFF, submit your contact information at www.familiesfightingflu.org/join-now. Together we can educate communities about the seriousness of influenza and the importance of annual flu vaccinations – and save lives!
- As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, FFF relies on donations from organizations and people like you who support our mission and share our goals. Fundraising is a great way to honor those children and families personally affected by the flu.
 - Organize a FFF fundraiser – it can be as simple as posting links to our online donation form (www.familiesfightingflu.org/donate) on your Facebook or Twitter page, or hosting an event with the proceeds donated to FFF. If you would like additional information on hosting a fundraiser, contact Laura Scott.
- “Like” the FFF Facebook page at www.facebook.com/familiesfightingflu and follow FFF on Twitter at www.twitter.com/famfightflu to stay informed and help promote our mission. Repost, re-tweet and “Like” posts from FFF to show your support.

For more information about these and other ways to support FFF and protecting your community, visit www.familiesfightingflu.org.