



SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOURSELF AFTER AN OVERDOSE DEATH

According to a 2019 Pew Charitable Trusts survey, nearly 3 in 10 Philadelphia residents – 29% – personally know someone who has died because of opioid use. In 2018, the city recorded 1,116 overdose deaths, 84% from opioids. Below are some tips to help you cope after the death of someone you love due to drug addiction.

Don't blame yourself. Those who have experienced the death of a loved one due to addiction oftentimes feel they could have done something to prevent the death. Children can struggle with self-blame and not know how to process those difficult feelings. It is important to understand that addiction is a powerful, yet often a hidden disease which causes those afflicted to do things they would not typically do. No matter how much they may want to stop using or what you do to help them stop, the addiction is too powerful and not in anyone's control.

Look for support groups specifically for addiction-related deaths. Uplift offers in-school grief support groups for overdose loss as well as bi-weekly groups for families. On-line support groups are available for those who may not feel comfortable expressing their grief in person. Finding a therapist can also be helpful in sorting out big feelings associated with grief.

Recognize that children deal with death differently than adults. Children may need special help processing the death of a loved one, especially if they are not aware that their person had a drug problem. Using age direct and age-appropriate language to explain what happened is important. Children may not talk about their feelings and may seem as if they are not grieving, but that is because they express feelings in different ways than adults. Remember, children are not just small adults.

Frequently reassure children that they are safe and cared for. Keeping routines while recognizing the importance of flexibility is important. Children need to know that their basic needs will still be met, especially after a death. Children can also be worried that other people they love will die. It is best to reassure in the present without offering false hope for the future.

Acknowledge all your child's feelings and that it is okay to feel sad, mad, or however they feel. Allow questions and provide honest age appropriate answers. It is okay to not have all of the answers and to acknowledge that. Recognize that it is okay and even helpful to continue to talk about the loved one who died. Finding ways to remember them and stay connected to them is a healthy part of grieving for adults and children alike.

Allow your child to attend a grief group made up of their peers so they can share their feelings in a safe space. Grief support groups for children help minimize the isolation and loneliness they may feel. A group specifically for children who have lost someone to drug addiction can help reduce shame and guilt often experienced by this type of death.



Each child will respond to grief differently and at different times. There is no timeline for your child's grief. What is most important is being available for your child to come to you when they are ready and being accepting of their feelings. Likewise, it is important to validate your own feelings and realize that grief is a journey and a lifelong process. We do not "get over" our grief, but rather find ways to live with it and move forward.

Use and model healthy coping skills that have worked for you and your child in the past. Think of how you have dealt with big feelings in the past and utilize those same skills now. Help your child identify how they have coped before with tough times and encourage them to do the same now. Avoid relying on substances or other harmful methods to cope -- this is an opportunity to model healthy coping for your child.

OUR MISSION:

Uplift Center for Grieving Children helps children grieving a death to heal and grow through their grief while strengthening families, communities and professionals' understanding of how best to respond to their needs.

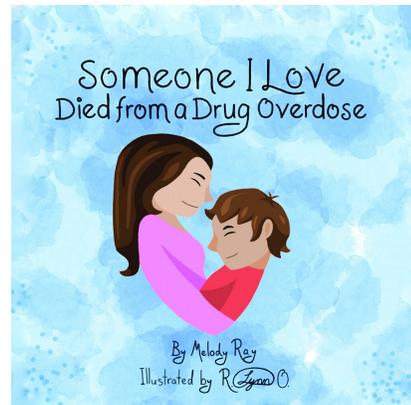
Need more information? Contact us.

**Sarah Sweda, MS, NCC
Post-Crisis Intervention Coordinator
Email: sarah@upliftphilly.org
Phone: 267-437-3123 x 1003**

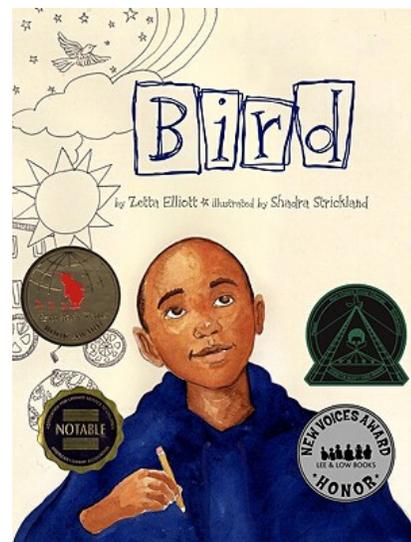
Additional resources:

[www.newbeginningsdrugrehab.org/
guide-to-dealing-with-death-of-addict](http://www.newbeginningsdrugrehab.org/guide-to-dealing-with-death-of-addict)
Author:
New Beginnings Drug and Alcohol
Rehabilitation

Books to Read to Your Children:



Someone I Love Died from a Drug Overdose
Author: Melody Ray



Bird
Author: Zetta Elliott