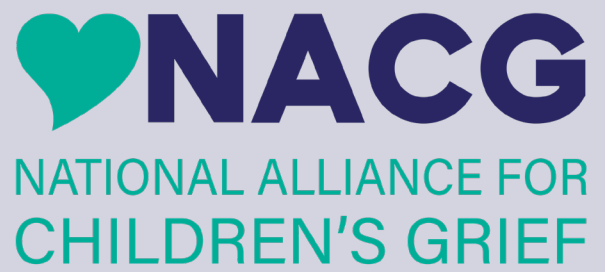


A GUIDE  
FROM  
NACG



# Listening on Repeat



Supporting a child who is grieving can mean many things, but listening is critical. Committing to listen over time supports the child as they adapt to life after loss – listening on repeat! This toolkit will support you through tools and strategies in being an effective listener to children who are grieving.

Remember to allow the child to lead the conversation. They get to choose who they talk to about the death and what they share. For example, asking “Is this a good time for you to check in?”. Remember to watch for non-verbal cues. You may not even need to ask the question...they may already be telling you.

## Qualities of a Good Listener

- Pays attention to non-verbal signals
- Creates a safe space for the child’s story to be told out loud.
- Does not interrupt as they understand its impacts on the child’s process.
- Knows their limits in listening.
- Is humble.
- Has self-compassion. Understands that we will not always get it right. Forgives themselves in the moment and understands there will be another opportunity to get it right.
- Commits to showing up over time...listening on repeat.

Listening returns power to the child or teen in a moment when they can feel powerless. It gives them agency over their story, validates their experience, and is grounding. Active listening is an incredible gift.

–Dr. Tashel Bordere

## Skills of an Active Listener

- **Are Attentive.** Give the child your full attention. Make eye contact and use nonverbal signals to show you are listening.
- **Doesn’t Interrupt.** Let them speak without interrupting and park your assumptions and judgments.
- **Clarifies & Summarizes.** This shows you paid attention and are trying to make sure you understand.
- **Listens on Repeat.** Thank them for sharing and tell them you are there to listen on repeat.

### REMINDER

Children of all abilities grieve. Just because a child cannot express themselves using words does not mean they do not need us to listen and witness their grief. It is important to consider how we can listen when there are no words.

## Barriers to Listening

In preparing to listen, we need to understand what may hinder our ability to be a good listener. Think about if you can identify with any of these:



### The Rehearser

More focused on preparing their response instead of listening.



### The Filterer

Focused on what they expect to hear instead of listening to all of what is being said.



### The Advisor

In problem-solving mode, trying to fix. (Spoiler alert: There is no fix for natural grief responses).



### The Talker

Fills in the quiet spaces.

Many behaviors that limit our ability to Listen on Repeat come from a place of good intention. This good intention is responsible for the difficulty in changing behaviors. If we understood what we were saying was harmful, we would stop. But we know from children and teens that it is more hurtful to them when they are not heard.

## Common Misconceptions

*The silences will be awkward.* – While it may feel a little awkward initially for there to be silence, you can help by naming that...“It is quiet right now, and that is okay.”

*I don't want to make them cry?* – Crying is not a bad thing, and in fact, listening often permits them to be safe and release the tears they may be holding in.

*The story is always going to be a sad one.* – Although sometimes the story can be difficult to hear, it doesn't mean it's always sad. Listening allows them to share all of their different emotions and memories of the person who died.

**“Through active and sustained listening we create space for children to share their experience and process the death of someone significant to them.”**

## Starting the Conversation

It can be hard to know how to start a conversation when supporting a child who is grieving. These prompts below may help in initiating the conversation and letting a child know you are there to listen.

Hey there, do you have a minute? I just wanted to let you know that I heard about (name of deceased)'s death.

Things like this can be really hard to talk about, but I want you to know that you can always talk to me about this.

I care about you and want to support you. I am here to listen today and any time you need it.

I remember you saying that Thanksgiving was your Dad's favorite holiday.

With Thanksgiving coming up next week, I wanted to check in with you. I care about you and want to support you. I am here to listen today and any time you need it.

## Taking Care of Yourself as a Listener

Listening can be difficult, and listening on repeat means also taking care of yourself. Children who are grieving do better when they have healthy adults providing support and understanding to them. Commit to taking care of yourself as you listen, below are some ways to practice self-care.

- Taking a moment after listening and being present to breathe and reflect.
- Showing up in small, consistent, and manageable ways.
- Identifying people who will support you when listening is hard.
- Taking on only what you can comfortably manage.

## Coloring Page

Click on the image below to download and print.



### REMINDER

Starting the conversation doesn't have to be hard - it can be as simple as "I am here to listen if you want to talk".

## Resources to Support Listening

The inclusion of any organization or resource in this Resource List does not imply or constitute an endorsement or recommendation, nor does exclusion imply disapproval.

### Elementary Age

- The Rabbit Listened by Cori Doerffeld ([Watch the book reading here.](#))
- I Have a Little Problem, Said the Bear by Heinz Janisch

### Middle School Age

- The Thing About Jellyfish by Ali Benjamin
- Everything Sad is Untrue by Daniel Nayeri
- The Line Tender by Kate Allen
- The Truth As Told by Mason Buttle by Leslie Connor

### Teen

- Sunny G's Series of Rash Decisions by Navdeep Dhillon
- The Words We Keep by Erin Stewart
- We Are Okay by Nina LaCour

### Adult Support

- Speaking Grief ([speakinggrief.org](https://speakinggrief.org))
- Put listening into Practice with StoryCorps Road to Resilience Series ([storycorps.org/discover/road-to-resilience](https://storycorps.org/discover/road-to-resilience))

### For Professionals

- Childhood Bereavement: Understanding Prevalence by Cause of Death with Judi's House
- NACG "No Child Grieves Alone" Conference Playback



**"The silence of listening is love out loud."**

## NACG Grief Talks on Listening

Click on their name to watch their Grief Talk.

- [David Kessler](#), *grief.com*
- [Tashel Bordere, PhD](#), *University of Missouri - Columbia*
- [Lindsey Whissel Fenton](#), *Speaking Grief*
- [Cori Doerffeld](#), *Author of Rabbit Listened*
- [Adam Carter, PhD](#), *Spaces Between Counseling, LLC*

This document was developed as a part of the 2022 Children's Grief Awareness Month "Listen on Repeat" Campaign. The NACG has a variety of free resources available on our website to support professionals and caregivers. You can access them at [www.nacg.org/resources](https://www.nacg.org/resources).