



Helping Children Cope When Grandparents Experience Life-Changing Illness

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The most important thing you can do to help your child deal with dementia, physical disability, or the life threatening illness of a grandparent is to be willing to listen and communicate.

- Children need the opportunity to ask questions. Young children may not be able to take in too much information at one time. When answering questions, keep it simple and try to respond to their concerns at their level.
- Give children permission to say what they really feel. Let them know that you care and that you understand this is very difficult. Be open with any of your feelings that are appropriate to share with children.
- Children sometimes fear that their parents will become sick too. Reassure them and help them confront their worst fears. Ask them what they need from you to feel less afraid. Sometimes these fears may be unrealistic but are very real to children.
- Try to maintain as much family structure as possible- this helps give your child a feeling of security and self-confidence.
- Spend time with your child each day. Being the caregiver for an ailing parent is very time consuming. Children continue to need separate time where they are the focus of your attention.
- If you are the primary caregiver of a parent with difficulty, access respite care services to give both you and your family a break.
- Notify your child's teacher if there is a serious illness affecting a grandparent. Check in with the school periodically to see if your child is experiencing academic or behavior problems related to their concerns.

