

# “Sad”

Proverbs 15:13 (LB) says, “A happy face means a glad heart; a sad face means a breaking heart.” As much as we would like to have a glad heart all the time, the reality is that sometimes we all feel sadness. As parents, seeing your sad child can bring on a slew of your own feelings. You’re worried something is wrong, especially if he/she hasn’t snapped out of it in a while. You’d rather see your child happy and chipper than sad and gloomy. Maybe you feel like you say the wrong things that only make them feel worse.

Maybe it’s a lost toy, a fight with a friend, or they watched a sad movie. Perhaps they did something wrong, didn’t get to do what they wanted, or missed you when you’re away at work. Perhaps it’s even bigger and longer-lasting, like going through a family separation, losing a loved one, or moving to a new school across the country.

And other times, you’re not even sure why your child is feeling sad in the first place. But over the last few days, your child has been extra quiet and down about things that would normally make him/her happy. What can you do? Here are 6 tips to help your child deal with sadness:

## 1. Don’t dismiss your child’s sadness.

My son and I were walking home from school when he accidentally

dropped a leaf as we were crossing the street. “We’ll get more,” I said. I was about to add, “It’s just a leaf,” when I realized that would dismiss his feelings. We don’t dismiss major losses like death,



# “Sad”

divorce, or a fight with a friend. It’s easy to think a broken toy or a forgotten leaf can cause sadness too, but it can. What seems silly to us can feel like genuine sadness to our kids. Brushing aside your child’s sadness makes her feel unimportant, as if these feelings aren’t as valid as someone else’s. Instead, **acknowledge sadness without judging it as petty or insignificant.** Admit that the feeling exists, even if it’s over a dropped leaf.

## 2. Label the feeling.

Words are powerful - the simple act of labeling feelings can help your child claim control over her sadness. To label and say, “It looks like you’re feeling sad,” can help your child identify sadness and reassure them that they are not alone in feeling this way. With labeling feelings, they will also understand that they don’t define him/her. They know they can feel sad without fearing that they’ll be a sad child all the time.

## 3. Explain that sadness is normal.

Your child might think they are the only one who feels sadness. Instead, explain that **everyone - including you - feels sad sometimes.** The more you explain how common sadness is, the less they will feel isolated and alone. Yes, it’s a difficult feeling, but one we all experience. Give an example of when you felt sad. You might share a recent disappointment you had, or even one you felt when you were a child. Not only will they know that everyone feels sad from time to time, but that we do so throughout our lives.



# “Sad”

## 4. Remind your sad child that the feeling will pass.

When we feel sad, it can seem like it'll never end. The heightened physical sensations don't help either, from a clenched stomach to tense muscles. But, as all feelings do, sadness will pass. Remind your child that sadness doesn't last forever - that they'll feel happy again. Think of feelings as seasons, and as all seasons do, they come and go, whether happy or difficult.

## 5. Don't rush your sad child out of her feelings.

One of the biggest parenting mistakes we make dealing with a sad child is trying to rush them out of their feelings. Understandably so because we don't want them to feel down, and sometimes, witnessing their difficult feelings is hard for us as well. It's much easier to spend time with them when they're happy than when they feel sad. But rushing your child out of their feelings actually delays or suppresses the feelings that need to pass. Yes, we can ease the feelings along, but trying to get it out of the way only makes it linger and doesn't address the initial problem.

## 6. Offer ways to ease out of sadness.

While you don't want to rush your child out of feelings, you can provide different ways for them not to feel sad anymore. Give them a warm hug and soothe with a kiss and/or reassuring words. Listen without judging and avoid belittling the things they are crying about. Instead of saying "It's just a leaf, we can always get another one," simply say, "You feel sad you lost that leaf, don't you? You really liked it and now it's gone." Then, once they are ready, suggest different



# “Sad”

ways to cope with sadness, like asking her if they want to talk about it, taking a walk to find another leaf, or playing a favorite game together. And encourage them to find simple pleasures in other ways, such as talking about how delicious their snack is, or that you’ll be going to the park later in the day. While these aren’t meant to erase or dismiss sadness, **simple pleasures can also remind them of other sources of joy in life.**

It’s easy for us to dismiss our children’s sadness as silly, or we tell them to snap out of it, to feel happy as soon as possible. Sadness doesn’t work that way, though. Don’t dismiss your child’s feelings as petty, inconvenient, or unpleasant. Instead, label the feelings so they know what they are. Explain that sadness is a normal and common feeling everyone goes through. Remind them that it’ll pass, just as all feelings do.

While your child feels sad, avoid rushing them out of their feelings. That said, offer ways to ease your child out of sadness, so they know what she can do to cope the next time. After all, feeling sad isn’t something to avoid, but to accept, experience, and eventually overcome.



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## Reference

Garcia, N. (2020). How to Help your Sad Child Deal with Their Feelings.

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**North American Division**

Family Ministries  
Children's Ministries

9705 Patuxent Woods Drive  
Columbia, MD 21046

Phone: 443-391-7200  
[www.nadfamily.org](http://www.nadfamily.org)  
[www.childmin.com](http://www.childmin.com)



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