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Opinion

## Honesty is Key when Helping Children Deal with Loss

How can we teach our children to handle tough situations?

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I lost my mother from a life-threatening illness when I was only 20 years old, so I often wonder how I would help my children if someone they love were to become ill.

How do you help a child come to terms with situations that you may not fully understand yourself?

### Therapeutic Yoga

I wanted to share with you the work of Kula for Karma, a non-profit organization that I have just started working with. I am truly amazed by their mission of harnessing the power of therapeutic yoga, mindfulness meditation and the selfless service of passionate volunteers to relieve suffering and promote wellness among society's most vulnerable populations — those who have been challenged by illness, disabilities, violence and other traumas.

Kula for Karma partners with hospitals, social service agencies and schools to create custom-tailored programs within New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania.

I spoke to Geri Topfer, founder and president of Kula for Karma about helping children cope with such issues as life-threatening illnesses.

"Depression and anxiety are both manifestations of trauma in children," said Topfer. "Effective tools for managing trauma-related stress and mood are yogic storytelling, walking or food meditations, guided visualization and calming centering breathing practices with the use of, for example, beanie babies."

One of the four arms of Kula for Karma is TeenKula, an organization for teens dedicated to turning passion into action through activity based volunteer work and community outreach.

Through the art of yoga, TeenKula works towards healing the broken spirits of teen victims of illness, abuse, neglect, addiction and other life obstacles. "TeenKula motivates and inspires teens to develop their individual potential and provides an environment for teens to be themselves while giving back to the community," said Topfer.

With programs like the Extreme Kula Adventures and the Be U campaign, scheduled for an August 28 launch, TeenKula creates change while encouraging a positive mental attitude. The programs raise awareness for social issues such as poverty, the value of mentorship and education while encouraging volunteers to develop themselves and to try something new. Activities such as rock-climbing and snowboarding are great ways to set personal goals and targets in helping to believe in one's self. Visit [www.teenkula.org](http://www.teenkula.org).

### Open Communication

I came across an interesting article on the Sesame Workshop website. Sesame Workshop's Vice President of Outreach and Educational Practices Dr. Jeanette Betancourt explains there are many children who face life-threatening illnesses and they want to talk about it. But they did find that many children are afraid to talk with parents because they don't want to make the adults scared and they try to protect us.

I never got chance to say a final goodbye to my mother — though I knew she had been suffering from a life-threatening disease, I was protected by my family. I understand why my family initially kept it from me that she had tragically lost her battle, but I'm not sure that was the right thing to do.

We must be honest with our children. Talk to them no matter how serious the illness or situation may be and look at ways to help release feelings of depression and anxiety, by taking part in activities such as therapeutic yoga.

I've been practicing for 11 years since my loss, but I wish I had found it before.