

SOME GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS: HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD THROUGH GRIEF

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Note to all parents or caregivers: The best thing you can do for your grieving children is to offer loving support. Hugs and touch are so healing. Listen to the child in your care and really hear what he/she is saying. And create times for your children to feel safe to talk about whatever might be on their minds. The following will also be of help:

- **As soon as possible after the death, set time aside to talk to your child.**
- **Give your child the facts in a simple manner - be careful not to go into too much detail. Your child will ask more questions as they come up in his/her mind.**
- **If you can't answer their questions, it's OK to say, "I don't know how to answer that, but perhaps we can find someone to help us."**
- **Be direct in your language – state that the person has died or passed away. Avoid phrases such as “He’s sleeping.” Or “She went away.”**
- **Talk to your child about God, if appropriate, and what happens to people after they die. It is a time to teach your child the religious beliefs you want to instill in him or her.**
- **Ask your child questions to better understand what he/she may be thinking or feeling. "What are you feeling?" "What have you heard from your friends?" "What do you think happened?"**
- **Explain your feelings to your child, especially if you are crying. Give him/her permission to cry too. We are children’s role models and it's appropriate for children to see our sadness and to share our feelings with them.**
- **Use the given name of the deceased when speaking of him or her.**
- **Understand the age and level of comprehension of your child. Speak to that level.**
- **Talk about feelings, such as: sad, angry, feeling responsible, scared, tearful, depressed, worried, etc. Discuss ways to express those feelings.**
- **Read a book on childhood grief so you have a better understanding of what your child may be experiencing.**

- **Read a book on death to your child. Take time to discuss what you have read and relate it to what is happening to you.**
- **Before taking your child to the funeral, talk about the rituals of the viewing and funeral. Explain what happens at these events and find out if your child wants to attend.**
- **Think about ways your child can say "good-bye" to the person who has died.**
- **Invite your child to come back to you if he or she has more questions or has heard rumors - This will help you get the correct information.**
- **Talk about memories, good ones and ones not so good.**
- **Watch out for "bad dreams." Are they occurring often? Talk about the dreams or even draw a picture of them.**
- **Watch for behavioral changes in your child both at home or at school.**
- **Friends, family, schoolmates, etc., frequently find solace and comfort in doing something in the name of the person who died – particular rituals or a memorial.**

You might see some of the following:

- 1. Significant crying and irritability**
- 2. Clinging**
- 3. Frequent whining**
- 4. Somatic complaints**
- 5. Loss of concentration**

The material in this booklet is for informational purposes only and does not constitute medical opinion or professional counseling. Any concerns about the demeanor or behavior of a grieving child should be discussed with a qualified mental health professional.

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