

## **GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS TO HELP THEIR CHILDREN THROUGH GRIEF**

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 your child's questions, it's okay to say, "I don't know how to answer that, but perhaps we can find someone to help us."

Use the correct language – say the word "dead" etc. Do not use phrases such as: "He's sleeping," or "God took her," or "He went away," etc.

Ask your child questions to better understand what he or she may be thinking or feeling. "What are you feeling?" "What have you heard from your friends?" "What do you think happened?" etc.

Explain your feelings to your child, especially if you are crying. Give children permission to cry. We are their role models and it's appropriate for children to see our sadness and for us 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.

Read an age appropriate book on childhood grief so you have a better understanding of what your child may be experiencing.

Read an age appropriate book on death to your child. Take time to discuss what you have read and relate it to what is happening to you.

Talk about 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 "goodbye" to the person who died.

Talk to your child about God, if appropriate, and what happens to people after they die.

Invite your child to come back to you if he or she has more questions or has heard rumors – tell your child you will help 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.

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 – a memorial.

You might see some of the following behavior:

- Tearfulness
- Irritability
- Clinging to you
- Whining
- Somatic complaints
- Temporary dip in grades
- More pronounced fears, e.g. of dying or of you dying, of the dark, etc.
- Regression in behavior
- Aggressive behavior

These are normal emotions. If, however, you ever feel the reactions are more extreme or lasting longer than you think they should be, never hesitate to consult a professional.

Offer your child loving, touching support.