

## GUIDELINES TO HELP CHILDREN COPE WITH GRIEF AND LOSS

- **Learn about your own feelings** around the issues of grief and loss. Understand why you react as you do when that topic comes up.
- **Educate yourself** about the process of grief.
- **Use the correct language.** If it is a death, say the word “dead” or “died.”
- **Avoid using clichés** such as “...when you lost him” or “...it’s part of God’s plan.”
- If possible, **set aside regular time for the child** to come in and talk.
- **Listen to the child.** It isn’t necessary to talk or to come up with answers. *Silence really can be golden!*
- **Don’t expect to give answers.** If you can’t answer a question, it’s okay to say so.
  - For example: “I don’t know how to answer that, but perhaps we can find someone who can” or “That’s a really good question. Let me think about it, and I’ll get back to you.”
- **Accept and encourage the expression of feelings.** Help the child identify feelings and teach good coping techniques.
- **Ask questions.** “What are you feeling?” “What have you heard from your friends?” “What do you think has happened?”
- **Be objective and accepting** as the child shares thoughts and feelings with you.
- If you and the child are comfortable, **reach out and touch him/her** on the arm or some other “safe” place.
- **Encourage the child to read and educate himself/herself** on the process of grief.
- **Help the child find available resources.** Perhaps a grief group at his/her school.
- **Invite the child to come back** at any time that you are available to him/her.
- **Be patient.** The work of grief takes time.
- **Watch for signals that warn of complications:**
  - **grade dipping** for more than two weeks
  - **withdrawal** from school activities and/or friends
  - **spontaneous crying**
  - **use of drugs or alcohol**

- little or total **lack of emotion** regarding the loss
- **super active** without a sense of the loss
- prolonged **inability to acknowledge the loss** that has happened
- **extreme reactions** to the grief that are lasting longer than you feel comfortable
- **change in health**
- **prolonged depression**
- **talking or writing about dying**

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