

SOME GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS TO HELP THEIR CHILD THROUGH GRIEF

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 children in your care and really hear what they are 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 or her mind.
- If you can't answer their questions, it is 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" for example. Do not use phrases such as: "He's sleeping," or "God took her," or "He went away."
- Ask your children questions to better understand what they 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 them permission to cry too. We are their role models and it is 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 and worried. 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.
- Think about ways your child can say "good-bye" to the person who has died.
- 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 install in him or her.
- 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 and at school.
- You might see some of the following emotions: tearfulness, irritability, clinging behavior, whiney moods, somatic complaints and an inability to concentrate.
- Talk about memories, good ones and ones not so good.
- Invite your child to come back to you if he or she has more questions or has heard rumors – and you will help get the correct information.

Friends, family, schoolmates and others frequently find solace and comfort in doing something in the name of the person who died – particular rituals or a memorial.