

COPING AS A FAMILY

Communication is the key to coping and growing as a family through grief. It is important to be together to talk, cry and rage or even sit in silence. At the same time there should be respect for each member's way of handling their grief. Some family members will grieve privately, others openly and others a combination of these two styles. In many ways each family member must grieve alone. Here are some suggestions to help with family grief.

- ❖ Continue to give attention and time to your present family members when you are together. Let them know that you love them.
- ❖ Maintain balance of attention between deceased family member and surviving family members
- ❖ Try to be sensitive to each others feelings. Feelings are often difficult to verbalize. Listen to what is meant as well as to what is said.
- ❖ Hugs, a hand on the arm or back give comfort and a sense of closeness.
- ❖ It may be helpful to set aside time to be "alone together" as a family or to even hold a family meeting. Encourage but don't pressure family members to talk and express grief in their own way. Be a good listener.
- ❖ Plan family projects or trips
- ❖ Make a "family diary" in which each family member may contribute a writing or drawing. You may want to make a collage together.
- ❖ Be careful not to give each other the silent treatment. Make sure the person who has died continues to be part of family conversations.
- ❖ Respect the life stages of various family members, an adolescent might gravitate towards peers in coping with grief. Everyone has a unique way of grieving which can at times be at cross purposes among family members. Accept each person's method of coping.
- ❖ Discuss the loved one's former role in the family which now necessitates changes in family duties and new roles for the survivors in the family. Be careful not to expect a family member to replace or to be the same as the member who died (expecting a young boy whose father died to be "the man of the house" or a son whose sibling died to be like that sibling in schoolwork, sports, etc.). Discuss what will be missed and irreplaceable.
- ❖ If depression, withdrawal, grief or family problems are getting out of control, seek professional help.
- ❖ Recognize that anniversaries, birthdays and special holiday will be difficult for the family and each member of the family. Discuss together how to observe these occasions. Should there be a variation on traditional celebrations? Do any family members have particular concerns, suggestions?
- ❖ Consult family members on the disposition of the deceased loved one's possessions, including their room. Take your time and tread carefully where these precious mementoes are concerned. If possible, put off making major decisions about moving, giving away possessions, etc.
- ❖ Studies show that a bereaved person's self-esteem is extremely low. Survivors should work on their image of themselves and help each family member to think and feel good about themselves.
- ❖ Remember it is difficult to help your family if you are falling apart. Working on your own grief will eventually enable you to help your family to cope with their grief.
- ❖ If you can learn to share your grief as a family, hopefully you will grow as a family.