

How Caring Adults Can Support a Grieving Young Child...



Children need lots of love and support from the caring adults in their life to cope with the loss and reach constructive grief resolution. When talking with children about death, adults should speak on the child's developmental level, be respectful of cultural backgrounds, and show sensitivity towards the situation. Listen to what the child is *really* asking and saying.



Things to consider when helping children cope with grief and loss:

- Allow children to be the teachers about their grief experiences. Children need to have the opportunity to talk openly about their grief and sadness. Young children may need you to help label their feelings.
- Don't assume that every child in a certain age group understands death in the same way or with the same feelings.
- Grieving is a process, not an event.
- Be honest with children about the tragic experience taking into consideration their developmental level.
- Help all children, regardless of age, to understand loss and death.
- Encourage children to ask questions about death and loss.
- Don't assume that children always grieve in an orderly or predictable way.
- Let children know that you really want to understand what they are feeling or what they need.
- Children will need long-lasting support.
- No two children grieve alike.
- Keep in mind that grief work is hard.
- Understand that grief work is complicated.
- Be aware of your own need to grieve; share your sadness and grief.
- Keep in mind that grief is natural and normal.
- Children often show rather than tell their grief. They will show their feelings through their social interactions and their play.
- Share memorial preparations with children and allow them to participate as much as they desire.
- Give children outlets to let go of their anger and stress like sports, hobbies, physical play, and arts.
- Watch for difficulties such as nightmares, separation anxieties, reversion to babyish behaviors, withdrawal, and intense anger. Set aside some time to help the child explore his/her feelings and thoughts.
- Avoid a constant diet of television programs focusing on the horror, destruction and sadness of events. Choose what a child is exposed to carefully and provide an opportunity to discuss what is seen by the child.