

Guidelines to help a child deal with loss.

1. Enable the child to discuss the crisis.
  - a. Talk in a quiet, honest, straightforward way to encourage further dialogue.
  - b. Begin at the child's level and remember your attitude is more important than your words.
  - c. Never tell the child what one will later need to unlearn.
2. Allow the child to give vent to emotions of grief. Anger, tears, despair, and protest are all natural reactions to the family/classroom confusion.
3. Encourage the child to discuss innermost fantasies, fears, and feelings.
  - a. The child needs to talk, not to be talked to.
  - b. Give the child every opportunity to reminisce about the absent person and to express anger as well as affection.
4. Don not close the door to doubt, questioning, and difference of opinion. The child's effort to find meaning in a time of acute stress can be very damaging.
  - a. Supply the child with simple facts rather than have the child figure them out on his/her own.
  - b. Be willing to struggle with the child as he/she tries to understand the disruption in the family/classroom unit.
5. Respect the child's personality, because he/she must find his/her own answers to the problems of life and death.
6. Talking to the child about loss is often complex and disturbing. Seeking help is not an admission of weakness, but a demonstration of strength and love.

### Helping Children Deal With Death

#### **Don't**

Attempt to hide your feelings.  
Fail to recognize that behavior problems may be transferred emotions.  
Tell half-truths and fairy tales.  
Preach.  
Imply a temporary situation. (the person is sleeping or gone away)  
Blame God.  
Leave explanations incomplete.

#### **Do**

Share your own feelings, encourage tears, respond to the child's feelings, and allow time for mourning.  
Recognize the stages in the grief process and accept that children also go through these stages.  
Be honest at all times. When explaining, identify with something familiar to the child.  
Answer the child's questions candidly and rationally.  
Allow the child to become involved. Look for the child's needs and fulfill these needs if possible. Allow the child to help fulfill the needs of surrounding students/adults.  
Be open to a discussion about death with a child. Be willing to listen about concerns for funeral arrangements, services, etc.