

Ten Tips to Support Your Grieving Child



- 1. Tell and show your child that tears are okay to show.** One never needs to apologize for tears. Tears show love. We don't apologize for love so we don't need to apologize for tears.
- 2. Tears, frustration or anger may suddenly appear. Please call those moments a "griefburst"** instead of a meltdown or breakdown. If you use the words meltdown or breakdown, it sends a message that your child did something wrong by hurting and grieving. Instead, label those moments as a "griefburst." [griefburst is a term created by Alan D. Wolfelt Ph.D]
- 3. If you see your child have a "griefburst," move in (swoop in) close to your child. Once your child's tears slow and breathing calms, feel free holding and hugging (scooping up) your child.** If you allow your child's tears to lessen before sharing a hug, you teach your child to release grief in a healthy manner. In an effort to comfort a hurting child, adults will immediately hold a child at the beginning of a griefburst and the child never fully releases the tears or learns how to grieve without being held your arms.
- 4. Always be truthful with your child about a loved one's illness and/or death.** Children naturally fill in missing pieces of information and will often fill in the gaps with incorrect information. This is a time to further teach your child to trust you.
- 5. Children often express guilt or regret if they are not present at a loved one's death. Tell your child that he or she will be wherever the loved one needs the child to be at the time of death.** For most children, this means children will be with family or friends, at school or asleep when a loved one dies.
- 6. When talking about the loved one's illness or death, it's best to talk about the loved one's body as separate from the loved one and his or her love.** E.g. Grandma's body isn't eating like it should. Her body can't work like it needs. Grandma's body died. Her love is forever. When you do this, you send a message that **a loved one's body has died but his or her love is forever.**
- 7. As a child grows older, greater awareness of the death occurs. Your child may re-grieve the loss.** This is a normal grief reaction for children. When this happens encourage your child to talk with you so you can provide ongoing support.
- 8. Remind your child hearing is the first sense we develop and it is the last one we lose.** Your child's loved one could sense all that was happening around him or her and heard your child talk.
- 9. Encourage your child to remember the fun or happy times shared with a dying or deceased loved one. Each time your child expresses sadness, ask him or her to picture a happy time in their mind.** Pairing a sad thought with a happy thought will help to reduce the pain of the sad thought.
- 10. Encourage your child to express grief emotions in a way that keeps your child safe** while not hurting others, property or the child's body.

If you child needs additional support, please contact FAIRHOPE's Family Grief Support Coordinator at 740-654-7077.

