



Helpful Hints for Adults Supporting Grieving Youth

TELL THE TRUTH.

Be honest when talking to children about the death. Though they may not need to know all the details, it is important for them to receive truthful explanations. Do not lie about the death or what it means to die. In case you don't have an answer, it is OK to say, "I don't know."

EXPLAIN CONCRETELY.

Children aren't able to process figurative language like adults. Say "died" rather than "passed away," "lost," or "went to sleep." Explain that when someone dies, he or she no longer needs to eat, sleep, or go to the bathroom. If the person died of an illness, explain that it was different than getting sick like the cold or flu.

DON'T DENY.

It is OK for children to see you cry or to let them know how you are feeling. If you deny or try to hide your emotions in front of them, they will likewise try to hide their emotions.

EXPECT MANY EMOTIONS.

Grieving children will experience a variety of emotions including sadness, anger, guilt, confusion, jealousy, and even happiness. Let them know that it is OK and normal to feel however they are feeling. Expect these emotions to come and go quickly, too. One minute they may be sad and crying, and the next they may be playing and laughing.

BE ALL EARS.

It is important for children to tell their story and express their emotions. Check in with them regularly and let them know you are there to listen. Ask questions and let them do the talking.

ENCOURAGE PLAY.

Play is a normal and healthy outlet for children. It is not uncommon for young children to play funeral or heaven much like playing school or house. Encourage activities that help children express their emotions.

ALLOW CHOICES.

Following a death, a child's world will feel out of control. Offering choices will help children regain some sense of control and promotes a healthy grief experience.

ROUTINE.

Because of this "out of control" feeling, it is also important to maintain a routine as much as possible. This provides children a sense of stability and security and reassures them that the adults in their lives will continue to take care of them. Try to stick to the same schedule, expectations, and consequences as much as possible.