

HELPING YOUR SCHOOL AGE CHILD COPE WITH LOSS

As always, you as a parent play a key role in helping your child through the sudden loss of a beloved adult or friend. In addition to your loving support, the following suggestions may prove helpful:

- Give your child the facts in a simple manner -- be careful not to go into too much detail. Your child will ask more questions as they come up in his/her mind.
- If you can't answer your child's questions, it's okay to say, "I don't know how to answer that, but perhaps we can find someone to help us."
- Use the correct language - say the word "dead" etc. Do not use phrases such as: "He's sleeping," or "God took her," or "He went away," etc.
- Ask your child questions to better understand what he or she may be thinking or feeling. What are you feeling?" "What have you heard from your friends?" "What do you think happened?" etc.
- Explain your feelings to your child, especially if you are crying. Give children permission to cry. We are their role models and it's appropriate for children to see our sadness and for us to share our feelings with them.
- Use the given name of the deceased when speaking of him or her.
- Understand the age and level of comprehension of your child. Speak to that level.
- Talk about feelings, such as: sad, angry, feeling responsible scared, tearful, depressed, worried, etc.
- Monitor your child's activity on social media sites. This may help you to gauge his/her level of distress.
- Talk about the viewing and funeral. Explain what happens at these events and find out if your child wants to attend.
- Think about ways your child can say "goodbye" to the person who has died.
- Talk to your child about your spiritual beliefs, if appropriate, and what happens to people after they die.
- Invite your child to come back to you if he or she has more questions or has heard rumors -- tell your child you will help get the correct information.
- Talk about memories, good ones and not so good ones.
- Watch out for "bad dreams." Are they occurring often? Talk about the dreams.

- Watch for behavioral changes in your child both at home and school.
- Children frequently find solace and comfort in doing something in the name of the person who died such as making a scrapbook, a donation, or writing their memories in a letter to the family.
- Some typical reactions you may see in your child include:
 - *Tearfulness*
 - *Irritability*
 - *Clinging to you*
 - *Whining*
 - *Somatic complaints*
 - *Temporary dip in grades*
 - *More pronounced fears (e.g., of dying or of you dying, etc.)*
 - *Regression in behavior*
 - *Aggressive behavior*
 - *Fear of losing others*

These are normal emotions and reactions to loss. However, if you have concerns about your child never hesitate to consult a professional. For assistance, contact your child's school counselor.

Additional information may be found at the following web-sites:

www.dougy.org/grief-resources/how-to-help-a-grieving-child/

www.dougy.org/grief-resources/kids-and-funerals/

www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/griefwar.pdf