

Grieving Children Need Guidance

For both adults and children, grief is a highly emotional experience that can include fear, anger, relief, guilt, sorrow and longing for what used to be. Children in particular can feel a sense of abandonment and loss of security when a loved one dies. The following information can be useful to the adults who are supporting a grieving child.

- ❖ Let your child know that you are also sad and miss the person who has died. Reassure him that you will feel better after a "good cry". A word of caution—while it is appropriate for your child to see you cry, it can be frightening for your child to see you express extreme distress and out of control emotions. If you feel yourself about to "lose it", get off by yourself or with another adult.
- ❖ Be watchful; anticipate new behaviors and provide opportunities for safe emotional outlets. Anger is a normal part of grief. Let him know that it is ok to be angry but at the same time there are things that are not ok to do when he is angry. Teach your child some activities that he can do to express anger such as tearing up old magazines, writing on a helium balloon and letting it go, writing in a journal, etc.
- ❖ Provide structure and set limits: maintaining household rules can bring about a sense of security as well as normalcy.
- ❖ Discuss a child's behaviors and needs with others who interact with your child. Let your child's teachers, guidance counselor, baby sitters, coaches, church leaders, and other family members know what you have told your child about the death of your loved one. This is especially true when a murder or suicide has occurred.
- ❖ Offer activities that can help your child express his emotions about the loss and also ways to remember the loved one. Children can draw pictures, write stories and poems, and make a scrapbook or poster about the special person who died.

Each child (and adult!) will grieve differently, depending on the circumstances of the death and the child's age and personality. Children will use the information as they are ready and increase their understanding as they get older.

Your grief and stress should not become another burden for your child. Enlist the help of family and friends to help you cope with your new responsibilities. One day or one moment at a time, you and your family can accommodate this loss into your life and life can still be good, but different.

One of the best things you can do for your child is to take care of yourself and make sure that you have a healthy outlet for your grief.