

GUIDELINES TO HELP CHILDREN DEAL WITH LOSS

The mental health of dealing with grief is not denial of the tragedy, but the frank acknowledgement of painful separation.

1. Enable the child to discuss the crisis before it strikes.
 - a. Talk in a quiet, honest, and straight forward way to encourage further dialogue.
 - b. Being at the child's level and remember that your attitude is more important than your words
 - c. Never tell the child that he will need to unlearn.
2. Allow the child to give vent to his emotions of grief. Anger, tears, despair, and protest are all natural reactions to the family disorganization.
3. Encourage the child to discuss his 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 if he desires, to express anger as well as affection.
4. Do 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.
5. Respect the child's personality, for in the long run it is he who must find his 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.

THE REAL CHALLENGE IS NOT HOW TO EXPLAIN LOSS TO YOUR CHILD BUT HOW TO UNDERSTAND AND MAKE PEACE WITH IT.

HELPING CHILDREN DEAL WITH DEATH

DON'T

1. Attempt to hide your feelings.
2. Fail to recognize behavior problems may be transferred emotions.
3. Tell half truths and fairy tales.
4. Provide a theological lecture. (preach)
5. Imply a temporary situation. (he has gone away) (she is sleeping)
6. Blame God. (It is God's will... What, God would destroy a person?).
7. Leave explanations incomplete. (He was sick... So am I, will I die?)

DO

1. Share your feelings. Encourage tears.
Respond to your child's feelings.
Allow time for mourning (can be months).
2. Recognize the stages in the grief process and accept that children go through these stages.
3. Be honest at all times. When explaining, identify with something familiar to the child. Answer the child's questions candidly and rationally.
4. 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 the surrounding adults.
5. Discuss death with your child. Explain in advance about funeral rituals. Discuss the funeral service (mortuary, church, graveside). Listen to what your child has to say.