



Tips for Helping Grieving Children

1. As soon as possible after the death, set aside time to gently and truthfully tell the child about it. Choosing a familiar room or outdoor setting to talk may help the child feel more comfortable.
2. Be truthful. If no one will answer a child's question, he or she may imagine the death to be far more terrifying than it was.
3. Avoid euphemisms. Use words like dead, stopped working, wore-out – simple words to describe the fact that the body is biologically dead. Words such as "gone away", "passed on", "left us" might imply that the person willingly abandoned us or that they are trying to find their way back. "Lost her father" implies he'll be found sometime; "Gone away" sounds like a trip from which the person will return.
4. Give the child enough information to begin the process. Children need a logical explanation of why the person died, but may not want all of the details for days or weeks afterwards.
5. Don't be surprised if the child does not want to share feelings with you or if they don't cry. Everyone handles grief in their own way.
6. Take the child to the funeral if he wants to go. Allow him to observe others mourning. Older children may feel useful by comforting an adult, by helping visitors or by being included in some decisions about the funeral. Avoid imposing adult responsibilities on a child, such as "now you will have to be the man of the house and take care of your mother."
7. Permitting a child to go to the gravesite if she wishes will provide the opportunity for future visits and memorializing in a healthy way.
8. Let the child talk about the deceased if they wish. Conversation should be open, comfortable and casual. Recalling stories is a way of healing.
9. Reinforce that you or another willing adult will be available to answer questions as they arise. Be prepared to honor this promise.
10. Help the child to understand that all the emotions he is feeling – sadness, anger, confusion, loneliness, guilt, even joy – are normal. They are part of the process of healing following the loss of someone very special.

Caring for Life

2275 India Hook Road Rock Hill, SC 29732 P.O. Box 993 Rock Hill, SC 29731

Phone: 803-329-1500 Toll-free: 800-895-CARE Fax: 803-329-5935

www.HospiceCommunityCare.org