

A CHILD'S VIEW OF GRIEF

**** Allow children to be your teachers about their experience of grief.**

Don't assume you know what your child is feeling. Children may have a clearer less cluttered view of grieving. It shows respect for a child's feelings when we ask them how they are doing and allow them to teach us.

**** Don't assume children in the same age group will react alike.**

Give children the freedom to be different. Every child experiences life in different ways. Homes, schools, friends, and families are all different. Traditions shape how we show grief. Even very young children experience grief, and if given the opportunity will express it.

**** Don't lie to children about death.**

Children need the truth. Half-truths are confusing and may undermine trust. They will grasp what they can from your communication and leave the rest until a later time.

**** Don't wait for "one big tell-all."**

Help children as they are growing to work through some of the smaller losses that life presents. Friends moving away, changing schools, divorce or separation, the loss of a pet, all help teach a child how to deal with the issues of loss and grief. Share your own feelings of loss and grief so children learn that these feelings are okay.

**** Encourage children to ask questions about death.**

Children are afraid of sounding foolish. Take their questions seriously and answer in easy-to-understand words. Children do not expect you to have all the right answers, but just to treat their questions with respect.

**** Let children know you really care.**

Set aside a special hour to just talk about feelings. Make this time sacred and safe, a place to share the feelings that often are neglected unless given an outlet. Look directly at the child. Make eye contact and use tone and body language to show real listening.

**** Understand that children don't always act sad.**

Children need to take a break from intense feelings to be able to handle the pain. They cannot absorb the feelings all at once, and sometimes they appear not to be grieving at all. This is normal, and a caring adult can learn to be there for the child when the feelings of grief surface.

**** Allow children to participate in the funeral.**

Sometimes a child will refuse to attend the funeral out of fear. Never force a child, but do invite them more than once and explain to them what to expect. It is a way of honoring and saying goodbye to a loved person. It is also a way to receive support from family and friends.

**** Understand that grieving takes a long time.**

We never truly get over the loss, but we can learn to live with it. Avoid telling children to be strong and brave. Instead encourage them to feel and express their feelings.