**CHILDREN'S GRIEF**

1) Children need to be repeatedly reassured that their physical needs (place to eat and sleep) and emotional needs (love) will be met.

2) Children need to be allowed to talk and cry.

3) The circumstances of the death may need to be explained.

4) In discussing death with a child, do not use the word "SLEEP".

5) Allow child to have pictures of lost loved ones and other family members.

6) A child's favorite bear, blanket, etc., should be allowed and encouraged.

7) Children should be allowed to talk about lost loved ones when they are ready. Also, adults in the family should be encouraged to talk about the lost loved ones in the presence of the children.

8) Daily tasks/schedules are important to children who are grieving. They tend to feel safer when their routine is maintained as much as possible.

9) Refrain from making any unnecessary changes in the child's life.

10) Children who have experienced loss through death often fear for the lives of other family members. These children may also fear for their own lives.

11) It is important for children to attend funerals. If a child is unable to attend the initial service, a small private service should be held again later in order for the child to experience the funeral.

12) Children need to be told repeatedly that the death is not their fault (e.g. "Mommy and Daddy died in a bad accident - it was not anyone's fault").

13) Let children know that they can still write letters and draw pictures for their lost loved ones.
Guidelines for Helping Children Who Have Experienced the Death of a Loved One

1. Take the word "death" off the taboo list. Allow it to become a concept that can be discussed openly. Understanding is a life-long process that continues from childhood through old age.

2. Understand that mourning and sadness are appropriate for people of all ages.

3. Allow children to release their emotions. Let them call their feelings by the rightful names. It is not the expression of these legitimate emotions that is harmful, but their suppression.

4. Contact your children's school and inform them of the loss in the family.

5. Seek help if you feel unable to deal with your children during this crisis.

6. Do not tell a child that he or she is now the man or woman of the house, or a replacement.

7. Do not use stories and fairy tales as an explanation for the mystery of death. Never cover up the facts with a fiction or a confusing interpretation that you will some day have to repudiate. A child's greatest need is for trust and truth.

8. Do not let your children believe that you have all the final answers.

9. Do not be afraid to express your own emotions of grief

10. Continue to give assurance of love and support

11. It is important to note that how we speak to our children about death is dependent on where they are developmentally and that we don't need to offer more information than the child is really seeking.

This is taken from the book *Talking About Death – A Dialogue Between Parent and Child* by Earl A. Grollman
TOOLS CHILDREN USE TO EXPRESS GRIEF

1. Artwork: Drawing, painting, coloring, pastels, finger paints, clay. Symbols, lines and colors tell their story. The energy they use is a release. Accept what they draw; do not analyze it. Let them tell you about it. Focus on the ideas and expressions.

2. Photo album: Looking through it together and recounting events OR making a photo album/memory book with pictures and keepsakes.

3. Treasure box: Special keepsakes from the loved one that can be pulled out.

4. Video tape: Viewing old tapes from holidays and special occasions OR making a video tape while the person is still living.

5. Storytelling: Allow child to recall memories of the person. Share your own memories.

6. Reading Children’s Books: Many books are available that touch on the issues of death and dying. Allow the child to ask questions and make comments.

7. Play: Puppets, dolls, imaginary play, skits. Allow the child to play without intervening OR play along if you are invited. The energy of play and expressing is the key factor.

8. Ritual: Together putting away clothes, having a memorial service, writing a poem, planting a tree, rose bush, etc.
HOW ART IS HELPFUL TO THE GRIEVING CHILD

- Art is a form of symbolic communication that is often non-threatening, supports the child’s developmentally concrete way of communication and helps to establish therapeutic rapport.

- The art making process and product may help others to more accurately see / feel the child’s experience.

- Because making art is an active process, the child making art is assuming an active role in the grief / mourning / healing process.

- Art serves as a tangible container for the intense internal feelings of grief.

- Because art taps the unconscious, hidden fears / questions / concerns can surface safely, whereas then the child can more easily face and integrate this information.

- The child can draw his / her story and talk about the characters / events in the picture, rather than talking about oneself. This may provide safe emotional distance if needed.

- A child’s graphic depiction of her / his understandings about the causes(s) of illness / death may reveal misunderstandings and misconceptions thus providing opportunities for clarification and adjustment.

- Dreams / nightmares can be drawn and talked about often leading to less disturbed sleep.

- Through manipulating materials, such as pounding clay and crumbling / ripping paper, a child can safely express his / her rage.

- A child can give visual form to his / her fear through imaginary characters and draw out the feared events; through the process gaining a sense of mastery and confidence to face the fear.

- Art may be a vehicle for completing unfinished business and saying goodbye.

- Because art is tangible, it provides a concrete means for a child to continually refer to for deeper understanding of his / her grieving process as well as observe growth and change.

- A child can use art to draw memories of the deceased loved one, thus strengthening the memory.

- The child can use the art to create personal rituals of remembering the person.

- A child can use art to explore life without the loved one and ways of coping with change.

(Compiled and revised by Carol Mirman, M.F.A., M.A. from a handout provided by Carol R. Coder, M.A., A.T.R.-B.C. May, 1998)
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