

Helping Children After the Death of a Loved One

1. When Informing a child of Death . . .
 - . . . Tell the child the **truth** about what happened.
 - . . . Keep it **simple**. Use the word “died” and not phrases like “*we lost her*” or “*grandma went to heaven*”.
2. If the child asks to view the body, and if the body is suitable for viewing allow the child to do so. **Let the child participate** in the family sorrow and grieving rituals, including the funeral.
3. **Reassure** the child that he/she will be taken care of, loved, and cherished as before. The greatest fear of the bereaved child is that of being abandoned and deserted.
4. **Touch**, hold and hug the child. Non-verbal communication is the most powerful and direct way of telling the child you care.
5. **Explain** to the child that the loved one did not intend to die, nor did the loved one want to die. The child needs to be assured that the deceased did not intentionally desert the child.
6. Explain that it was **not the deceased child’s fault** that the loved one died. Young children often believe they possess magic power, and through the power of thought the child actually brought about their loved one’s death. The child may need help to relieve this burden of guilt.
7. **Encourage** the child to express feeling and to **ask questions** about anything that is on his or her mind. Do this on many occasions.
8. **Answer the child’s questions** simply, directly, and honestly. Children are quick to sense deceptions and may come to distrust adults.
9. **Be tolerant**. It is normal for a child confronting a major crisis to regress to levels below his or her present level of maturity.
10. It is OK to let children see your tears and **cry with them** in a shared experience.
11. **Give the child choices** about what to do. Some children may want to return to school as soon as possible. Familiar routines are comforting.