

# Helping 3-5 Year-olds

As parents and teachers we want to protect our children from pain, fear, and sadness. But sheltering them from the pain of death can do more harm than good. If parents and teachers are uncomfortable talking about death and hide their own feelings, children may learn it's a taboo subject and not ask questions they may have. It's important to encourage children to express their grief and to see you doing the same.

We hope that the following information will help you talk to your children.

## Helping 3-5 Year-olds

- 1 A typical preschooler thinks death is reversible as seen on television and in movies. State the reality of death without giving too much information. Repeat the facts calmly and simply—when someone dies his body doesn't work anymore. When someone dies he can't come alive again.
- 2 Preschoolers have a fuzzy concept of death. Don't describe dying as falling or going to sleep and never waking up. You may cause the child to start having sleep problems.



## To Help Children of All Ages

- 1 Make your explanation of death brief. Keep the information factual, simple, and honest.
- 2 Focus on feelings. Let children know that most if not all of their feelings are perfectly natural and normal. Do not tell children how they should feel.
- 3 Children may need to ask the same questions over and over. Be patient with them and answer their questions without going into too much detail.
- 4 Help them develop a sense of closure about the loss. Help them remember special moments they shared with the person who died. Encourage them to draw pictures or write about special moments.
- 5 Maintain order and stability by keeping routines as much as possible.



Adapted in part from *Losing a Loved One: Helping Children Grieve*. Parents magazine, July 2001.

# Helping 6-7 Year-olds

As parents and teachers we want to protect our children from pain, fear, and sadness. But sheltering them from the pain of death can do more harm than good. If parents and teachers are uncomfortable talking about death and hide their own feelings, children may learn it's a taboo subject and not ask questions they may have. It's important to encourage children to express their grief and to see you doing the same.






We hope that the following information will help you talk to your children.

## Helping 6-7 Year-olds

-  1 Children this age understand they can die. They fear death. Their talk can be fearful and they need lots of reassurance.
-  2 Children this age are usually able to understand that death is permanent. They want to see lots of pictures and talk frequently about the person who died. This behavior may last for as long as a year.



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# Helping 8-10 Year-olds

As parents and teachers we want to protect our children from pain, fear, and sadness. But sheltering them from the pain of death can do more harm than good. If parents and teachers are uncomfortable talking about death and hide their own feelings, children may learn it's a taboo subject and not ask questions they may have. It's important to encourage children to express their grief and to see you doing the same.

We hope that the following information will help you talk to your children.

## Helping 8-10 Year-olds

- 1 Children this age understand that death is final.
- 2 They may express concern about the effect of death on them with regards to lifestyle or finances. They are more future oriented.
- 3 Children this age may have a flippant attitude. This attitude is a defense mechanism. Children might try to avoid their true feelings because they fear acknowledging them would cause them to lose control. Children this age, especially boys, do not want to look weak in the eyes of their friends.
- 4 Children this age may feel more comfortable writing down their feelings or drawing pictures. You can also tell them that if they decide to talk about feelings, you will be glad to listen.



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