

Helping Children through Grief

- When telling a child that someone they care about has died by suicide, it is always best to be honest and to do so in an age appropriate way. This may mean acknowledging it was a suicide or it may mean referring to the mental illness that your loved one may have faced.
- It is best - especially with younger children - not to share the method, but to be honest if they ask the question.
- It may be helpful to reassure children that the person who died loved them very much and this is not their fault.
- Return to the normal household schedule as quickly as possible. Children feel more secure with their regular routine.
- Let the children know that they are protected and safe. When they feel secure, they will be able to live through their grief.
- Try to understand the children's behavior. If they do not have the words, they will express their grief through their behavior.
- Involve the children in a ceremony that gives them an opportunity to say goodbye to their loved one.
- Talk about bad dreams, or have the children draw a picture of the dream. Have them rip up the picture and throw it away. This gets rid of the dreams.
- Do not be alarmed if the children play at dying or death. This is a way for them to work through their feelings and fears.
- It is meaningful for the child to do something to memorialize the loved one.
- Plan something for the child to look forward to, such as a vacation or other enjoyable experience.
- Let the children help out in age-appropriate ways.
- When you are not available, make sure the children know that someone trustworthy is present.
- Look at pictures of the deceased together.
- Give the children tangible mementos of the person who died.
- Let the children stay children. Do not lean on them for comfort and support.
- Let the school know of the death, and let the children know you are doing this. They may not want you to, but do it anyway. It is better for the children to know that the teacher and the other children know about the death, than to suspect they might know.