



Four Rivers Special Education District

Helping Your Child Cope With Grief Preschool/Elementary

Try To

- *Focus on your child, especially the next week. Tell them you love them and everything will be ok. Try to help them understand what happened, but do not provide graphic details.
- *Make time to talk to your children. If you do not, someone else will. Think about what you want to say.
- *Stay physically close to your child. Give lots of hugs, pats, cuddles.
- *Maintain your “normal” routine for dinner, bedtime etc., but do not be inflexible as children may have difficult falling asleep or need extra time for things.
- *Spend extra time reading or playing quiet games before bed as this is calming and fosters closeness and security.
- *Let them make cards or drawings for others.
- *Tell the truth, but keep it simple and concrete. Children will know if you are lying and will wonder what you are not telling them.
- *Understand that they will naturally have questions, and may repeat these over and over. Please answer as many times as they ask.
- *Remember that young children may feel guilty because they may think that they caused the death.
- *Talk about it as much as they want to. It’s ok for you and them to cry.
- *Understand that often children grieve in quick bursts, but then will return to play. This is normal.

Try Not To

- *Allow them access to media coverage, including social media. Content is not appropriate for young children.
- *Do not talk graphically about event in front of children. They understand more than you think, and will imagine worse.
- *Downplay their feelings or tell them not to talk about it if they need to.
- *Use words like “gone to rest”, “sleeping”, or “passed away”. These words are confusing and can cause fears in children. Please use died or dead when referring to those we have lost. Children at this age can develop strong fears about going to sleep if this phrase is used as they think they will die as well. Also, it conveys death as something that is not permanent.

Adapted from the National Association of School Psychologists online resources for crisis, trauma, and grief.

Piechowski, P., *Coping with the Sudden Death of a Student*.

Schonfeld, D, *After a Loved One Dies-How Children Grieve*; and The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Dealing with Death*.



Four Rivers Special Education District

Helping Your Child Cope With Grief Middle School/High School

Try To

- *Make time to talk to your children. If you do not, someone else will. Think about what you want to say.
- *Ask questions to determine how the child understands the loss; listen patiently as long as they need to talk.
- *Be prepared to discuss the loss repeatedly.
- *Encourage healthy expression of the loss through writing, art, music.
- *Maintain your “normal” routine for dinner, bedtime etc., but do not be inflexible as children may have difficult falling asleep or need extra time for things.
- *Remember that children may have strong feelings of guilt as they are still alive, especially those that had recent contact with the deceased. They may feel that they could have done something differently to change things.
- *Intervene if child is blaming themselves or others for the death unfairly.
- *Be open about your own feelings of sadness and grief, provide a model of healthy mourning.
- *Talk about it as much as they want to. It’s ok for you and them to cry.
- *Understand that children can grieve in quick bursts, but then will return to other activities. This is normal.
- *Understand that the grieving process takes place for six months or more.
- *Seek outside resources if your child is behaving destructively, not showing interest in normal activities, or is not coping well with the loss.

Try Not To

- *Do not talk graphically about event in front of children.
- *Downplay their feelings or tell them not to talk about it if they need to.
- *Use words like “gone to rest”, “sleeping”, or “passed away”. These words are confusing and can cause fears in children. Please use died or dead when referring to those we have lost. Children at any age can develop strong fears about going to sleep if this phrase is used as they think they will die as well. Also, it conveys death as something that is not permanent.

Adapted from the National Association of School Psychologists online resources for crisis, death, trauma, and grief.

Piechowski, P., *Coping with the Sudden Death of a Student*.

Schonfeld, D, *After a Loved One Dies-How Children Grieve*; and The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Dealing with Death*.