

## HELPING CHILDREN COPE WITH DEATH AND GRIEF

### *Guidelines for Parents*

#### **Be a Good Listener**

Children need your support, love and guidance. Listening to their concerns, fears and feelings with an open heart is very healing for them. Listen to what the child is asking, and provide only the necessary information to answer. It is okay to admit you don't have all the answers.

#### **Be Reassuring**

Your acceptance and reassurance will help them feel safe and secure during a time that is scary. Make time to be physically close to them; extra hugs are always a good thing.

#### **Be Honest**

It is very important that children are told the truth about what happened. Children can often deal with devastating news when told appropriately. Secrets and half truths are often more harmful in the long run and add to the child's confusion and feelings of trust. Also share your feelings; let your child know how you are doing.

#### **Be Flexible**

Children need to have their daily routines maintained; this provides for a sense of security. At the same time, parents need to be flexible in making some allowances while the children are trying to deal with their grief feelings.

#### **Be Aware**

Focus on your children, watch their behavior and monitor any changes, unusual reactions or physical symptoms. Limit the amount of TV or violent games your children are exposed to. Make sure your children are getting the appropriate amount of sleep, exercise and nutrition. Their continued good health is so important.

#### **Be Open**

Grieving children need positive outlets for their emotions. Allowing for the expression of feelings is very important. Children may need to work out their emotions in play, artwork, sports, music, writing or reading. Allow for the many different ways of dealing with such intense feelings. Provide the children with as many outlets as you can. Also be open to the fact that you may need outside help. Seek out assistance when needed; it is a sign of strength.

#### **Be Patient**

Working through such intense emotions and challenges takes time. The duration for grief is unique to each person. Children often go in and out of grief—sad and withdrawn one minute, active and playing the next. This roller coaster of a journey has many ups and downs; children need time to process and heal.



1510 E. Flower St. • Phoenix, AZ 85014 • 480.951.8985 • 480.951.8794 fax • [thenewsongcenter.org](http://thenewsongcenter.org)

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