

GUIDELINES TO HELP A CHILD THROUGH GRIEF

1. As soon as possible after the diagnosis of terminal illness or death set aside time to talk to the child.
2. Give the child the facts in a simple manner. Be careful not to go into too much detail. The child will ask more questions as they come to mind.
3. If you can't answer certain questions, it's OK to say, "I don't know how to answer that, but perhaps we can find someone to help us."
4. Use the correct language. Say the words that apply – "dead," "cancer," etc. Do not use euphemisms like: "He's sleeping," or "God took her," or "He went away."
5. Ask questions. "What are you feeling?" "What have you heard from your friends?" "What do you think has happened?"
6. Explain your feelings to your child, especially if you are crying. Give your child permission to cry, too. Parents are role models and it's good for children to see our sadness and to share in our feelings.
7. Keeping in mind the age and level of comprehension of your child, speak to that level.
8. Talk about feelings: sad, angry, scary, tearful, depressed, etc.
9. Talk about the wake and funeral. Explain what happens there and find out whether your child wants to attend.
10. Think about ways your child can say "goodbye" to the person who is dying or has died.
11. Depending on your religious views, you may want to talk to your child about your belief in life after death. But be careful not to say things like "God loved her so much that he took her to live with him" or "It was God's will." Statements like this raise more questions than they answer.
12. Invite your child to come back to you if he or she has more questions or has heard disturbing rumors. Assure him or her that you will answer any question to which you know the answer or endeavor to get the correct information when you don't.
13. Talk about memories – good ones and ones not so good.

14. Watch out for “bad dreams.” Are they occurring often? Talking about them is a way to discharge stress.
15. Watch for behavioral changes in your child. If they concern you, call for help.
16. Sudden death, violent death, or death of a young person is especially hard to grieve and disruption of sleep, appetite and daily activities is a normal response to such an abnormal or unusual event.
17. In the case of a terminally ill child, be aware that siblings are likely to be confused and hurting, too. Not only are they about to lose a brother or sister, but because of the emotional and physical stress involved they may be losing their parents for a while, too. Parents should involve them in what is happening and give them the opportunity to be included in hospital visits and some of the care-giving (if they want to be included).