



## SUGGESTIONS FOR HELPING CHILDREN THROUGH GRIEF:

- Remember that children don't show their feelings in the same way that adults do. Your child may not appear to understand or appreciate the seriousness of death. Remember that their words, facial expressions and behavior may not reflect the way they feel inside. They may be just learning to express their feelings to others. Sometimes they are confused and can't even figure out how they are feeling.
- As soon as possible after the death, choose

a time and familiar place to talk to your child. Explain directly, simply, and truthfully what has happened. Children need an explanation of how a person dies. In an open environment, they will ask for details and other information as they are ready for them. It may be hours, days, or weeks before they will be ready to ask some questions. Be sensitive to the type of information the child is seeking.

- Use the deceased person's name when referring to him or her.
- Use basic words like "die" and "dead" to convey the message.
- Talk about God with your child. This discussion should be done in a manner that is consistent with the beliefs and customs of your family.
- Encourage the child to express feelings. Share your own feelings. Cry together and hold each other. Be careful not to lean on your child and rely on him or her for your strength. The child could mistakenly see himself as your caretaker. It is important to share sadness, but always let your child know that you will be there to care for him or her.
- It is important that your child be prepared for what will happen at the funeral home. This will prevent him or her from being overwhelmed by all of the people and emotions of the day. Let your child know the visitation and funeral will be opportunities for family and friends to cry, to hug each other, and to share memories. Describe how the room will be arranged. For example, "There will be a casket and pictures in the front of the room with lots of flowers, and that there will be chairs for people to sit in." Add any details you can think of that will better help your child know what to expect.
- Take the children to the funeral. Let them observe others mourning and participate with them. Be sure the child knows where the body has gone. - e.g. buried in the cemetery. Allow the child to return to visit the cemetery if he/she wishes. It might be a good idea to have a friend or family member stay with your child during the visitation and service. This can be helpful in case children have questions or need to take a break.
- Allow the children to tell others of the death. The subject should be as open as possible, rather than hidden.

- Gain an understanding of the grieving process, and be aware of how your own grief is affecting your life. Your child is sensitive to any changes in your mood or feelings. Acknowledge your loneliness, fear, anger, etc. Your child will react to it anyway. By verbalizing your feelings, your child will begin to learn that all feelings are acceptable.
- Communicate to the child your appreciation of having had the deceased person in your life.
- Accept your child's feelings when he/she expresses them. Avoid the temptation to say; "you shouldn't feel that way", or try to "make" the child feel better or cheer him/her up. Examples of accepting the child's feeling are "you really miss your daddy a lot." "You're really angry that Susie has a Daddy and you don't." "It seems like you are afraid that your Mom might die too."
- Read or encourage your child to read children's books relating to death.
- Look for groups or opportunities for your children to meet other children who have experienced significant loss through death.
- Plan something (a special outing, vacation, etc.) to which you and your child can look forward to.
- During the months following the death, talk about the deceased person. Casually mention things the person said or did. Recall funny stories, happy and unhappy incidents. Encourage the child to enter into the conversation and share his/her memories too.
- Watch for signs of maladjustments; e.g. eating, sleeping, behavioral, and/or learning disturbances over a long period of time.
- Seek counseling if you want help for yourself or your child.
- In the event that your child has experienced a traumatic loss (i.e. suicide, homicide, witnessing a death), we recommended that you consult the Baton Rouge Crisis Intervention Center or other mental health professionals.