

**LIVING THROUGH LOSS COUNSELLING SOCIETY OF BC**

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**HELP FOR A CHILD COPING WITH DEATH**

1. Before taking children to a funeral, explain what they might see – open casket, people crying, and let them decide whether they would like to go. If so, stay close so that they feel safe.
2. Do not exclude children when family or friends come to comfort grieving adults. Avoidance or silence teaches children that death is a taboo subject. Children need to learn how to cope with loss, not be protected from grief.
3. Be honest. Explain death as a natural part of life. Do not say the deceased is asleep or away, this may cause future bedtime difficulties or trauma.
4. Allow the children time to mourn, do not keep them busy in hopes they will forget their loss. Help children learn to recognize, name, accept and express feelings to avoid developing unhealthy defenses to cope with difficult emotions. Use examples from the child's life to illustrate death – like death of a pet.
5. Mourn together – children need permission to grieve. It is often helpful for adults to seek additional support and education to understand their own grief process so that they can model a healthy reaction to loss by expressing their feelings and receiving support. Children will generally learn their response to loss from adults in the family.
6. Try to keep the daily routine the same as it was before the loss. Allow the children to have reminders of the deceased, e.g. a photograph, a special object, etc.
7. Children may try to protect grieving adults and try to assume care taking roles, but children need to grow up normally without being burdened with adult responsibility. They need their childhood.
8. Encourage the children to put their feelings into stories, drawings, or other art form which may help them to get in touch with their loss.
9. Share personal religious beliefs carefully. Children may fear or resent a God that takes to heaven someone they love and need. They may feel frightened and insecure because they sense the grief and stress of others, and feel powerless to help. They will need additional love, support and structure in their daily routine.
10. When someone dies, children often worry about themselves and others dying. They need to know who would take care of them in the unlikely death of both parents. Children have magical thinking and may believe that their behaviour or thoughts can cause or reverse death.

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