

HELPING CHILDREN DEAL WITH DEATH

DO'S

1. Do allow yourself to grieve, so you may then help your child to grieve.
2. Do show feelings and share your own reasons for sadness.
3. Do present the reality of the situation to the child.
4. Do allow and encourage talking about both good and bad times had with the deceased.
5. Do offer support and comfort.
6. Do utilize the deaths of pets in explaining death. Do not try to explain it as 'death' but as the 'cessation of life'. Explain it only within your own belief.
7. Do accept and respect the feelings and behavior that reflect the child's way of dealing with death.
8. Do answer questions, don't remain silent or reject the child
9. Do allow children of age 5 and above to attend the funeral. Explain in advance what will take place. Have the child accompanied by an adult he knows and loves, and who will be able to set aside their own grief long enough to comfort him.
10. Do alleviate the child's fears, such as that he caused the death or that he could 'catch' the illness that killed the deceased.
11. Do accept the child's need to deny the permanence of death.
12. Do relinquish the memory of the deceased and rearrange family roles.
13. Do provide a surrogate parent for the child. He needs to be cared for by a consistent adult figure in order to find security once more.
14. Do inform the child where you are going and when you will return. A bereaved child is sensitive to separation from significant adults.

DONT'S

1. Don't try to protect a child from grief.
2. Don't support the belief that the deceased will return.
3. Don't suggest that a dead person "went to sleep". This may create night fears.
4. Don't get as involved in your own grief that the child is ignored. Provide some significant adult to comfort him.
5. Don't shame the child because he doesn't show the response you expect of him.
6. Don't displace your anger or guilt over the death onto your child (scapegoating).
7. Don't replace your lost spouse with an overly emotionally dependent relationship with your child.