
Helping **Elementary School Children** Deal with Grief & Loss

Here are some things that parents/guardians can do to support children dealing with death.

Check Facts

- Give simple, accurate information; share only what you know to be confirmed.
- Do not allow children to watch media coverage of the death.
- Answer questions honestly, providing only as much detail as requested.
- Check out what has been heard about the death and correct any misinformation or rumours. “Tell me what you have heard . . .” is a good conversation opener. Be aware of the information circulating on social media.

Check Feelings

- Ask your child how they are feeling.
- Tell them that feelings of anger, sadness, guilt, fear, relief are all common.
- Reassure them that they are not responsible. (Children may sometimes believe that a death is punishment for something they have done wrong.)
- Be aware that this kind of news and these strong feelings can lead to:
 - Nightmares, irritability, stomach aches, loss of appetite
 - Lack of interest in normal play activities
 - Reverting to younger behaviours: crying easily, being clingy, not wanting to be alone

Empower

- Encourage your child to attend school.
- Invite your child to talk about the person who has died.
- Help your child identify what they -have done in sad situations before and how it has helped.
- Remind them that you know they are strong and have coped with difficult situations in the past.
- Facilitate opportunities for him/her to engage in coping activities such as: talking to friends or relatives, getting together with peers, writing in a journal, drawing a picture, going to a memorial service, making a memory book or collage, planting a flower or tree. Follow their lead.

Monitor

- Monitor social networking use.
- Watch for signs that your child may need professional help to cope with this loss:
 - Normal behaviour patterns do not resume over time.
 - A continuation of nightmares or need to talk about the death.
 - A continuation of feelings of insecurity and fear.
- Seek support from your Family Doctor, Child and Youth Mental Health, school or community counsellors.

Other Resources

The Dougy Center – The National Center for Grieving Children & Families
<https://www.dougy.org/grief-support-resources/parents-caregivers>

*Remember that children are remarkably resilient.
With love, support, and time, they do learn to cope with the losses they encounter.*

(Adapted from Greater Vancouver School District Emergency Preparedness Manual, 2016)

