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

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

Check Facts

- Give accurate information about what happened; tell only what you know to be confirmed.
- Limit viewing of media coverage of the death as repeated viewing may be traumatizing.
- 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 youth how they are feeling.
- Tell them that feelings of anger, sadness, guilt, fear, relief are all common.
- Be aware that this kind of news and these strong feelings commonly lead to:
 - Nightmares, irritability, stomach aches, loss of appetite
 - Lack of interest in normal recreation activities, a desire to be alone
 - An increase in acting out behaviours, exaggerated emotional responses
 - A decline in school performance

Empower

- Encourage your youth to attend school.
- Invite them to talk about the person who has died.
- Help them identify what they have done in past tough or sad situations 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 them to engage in healing activities such as: connecting with friends or relatives, journalling, drawing or painting, participating in sports activities, going to a memorial service, making a memory book or collage, planting a flower or tree. Follow their lead.

Monitor

- Social media use and messaging.
- Participation in at-risk behaviours such as isolation, substance use, violence, and delinquency.
- Watch for signs that your youth 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 at length 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 young people 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)

