

## PRINCIPLES FOR HELPING BEREAVED CHILDREN

1. *Allow children to be teachers of their own experience of grief*
  - remember that any child that is able to love is able to mourn; even babies feel loss
  - "help me find the words to describe what I'm feeling"
  - "don't think that I'm too young to experience grief"
  
2. *Don't assume children in the same age group will act alike*
  - "I am different than my siblings or other friends so I will feel or act differently. Please don't tell me what I should or shouldn't be feeling or doing"
  
3. *Don't lie or tell half-truths*
  - "I know you want to protect me from the hurt but my hurt is still there even if you try to hide things from me"
  - "we can cope much better with what we know than what we don't know"
  - "if you don't tell us the truth then we will fill in the spaces with our imagination"
  - "don't tell me that the person has gone for a big sleep; that's lying"
  
4. *Don't wait for one Big-Tell-All before talking about death*
  - remember that we all experience loss all through life; "prepare me for it"
  - "when my pet dies please don't rush out and get me a new one to replace the one that died; instead help me understand my hurt"
  - "when I hear about death help me walk through it; don't hide it from me"
  
5. *Encourage children to ask questions about death*
  - let children ask the questions about your experience of death
  - "remember that maybe my questions come out stupid sounding or strange but they are honest"
  - "remember that it is hard for us to make pictures in our heads for things we don't know"
  - "please be patient when we ask questions over and over again; sometimes they need to be repeated because we didn't understand the first time or maybe this time we'll understand more than the last time we asked the same question"

**6. *Let children know you really care***

- "please look at us and be aware of your tone of voice when we are telling you about our feelings"
- "please don't feel sorry for us; rather spend some time with us and listen"

**7. *Understand when children don't always act or feel sad***

- "it feels good to laugh when everything around me is so sad"
- "don't be offended if I go out to play after I hear about someone's death; playing helps so it won't hurt so much"
- "if I play it doesn't mean that I don't care"
- "if I don't cry right away it doesn't mean that I don't care or don't feel"

**8. *Allow children to participate in funerals***

- "we will always feel like we were part of the process if you invite us to be part of the funeral"
- "help us understand why we have funerals; that it is a time for family and friends to support each other and honour the person who died"
- "tell us what to expect and what we'll see at the funeral before we go; that way it won't be as scary"

**9. *Understand that grieving takes a long time***

- "don't tell me I should be over it by now; it will never be something I will get over, rather it is something I will need to learn to live with"
- "don't tell me that I'm the "man" (or the mom) in the house now and need to take care of my mom (or dad) and siblings; I don't have my father's (or mother's) wisdom; remember I'm only a kid too"
- "patiently accept me for where I'm at"