

# Guidelines To Help Children Deal With Death

A child's healthy recovery from the loss of a loved one is built upon the candid acknowledgment of the painful emotions felt, *not* by the denial of the tragic event.

1. Allow a child to express his/her full range of grief-filled emotions. Anger, tears, fear, gloom, and protestation are all natural reactions to a new family situation.
2. Allow a child to discuss a problem he/she is facing before it gets unmanageably out of control. Talk in a non-judgmental and straightforward way to encourage further disclosure and continual dialogue. Talk at the child's level and attempt to view the situation by seeing the issue through his/her eyes.
3. Encourage a child to discuss his/her deep rooted fears and emotions. Rather than talking *to* or *at* the child, listen carefully for verbal and non-verbal clues. Look for opportunities when you and a child can reminisce about his/her dead parent. Allow for both good and bad memories to be discussed.
4. Allow a child to question, doubt, and have different opinions from you. Respect the fact that each child has his/her own unique personality and that each one will deal with death differently. He/she needs the freedom (in a safe environment) to search for his/her own meaning in the death of a parent or another loved one.
5. If you feel unable to answer a child's questions, please let him/her know that there are special people who are trained to do just this. Also, let him/her know that seeking help is a character strength and *not* a sign of weakness.