

How We Can Be Effective Helpers of Grieving Children

Adapted from Wass & Corr, 1984, Helping Children Cope with Death

- We must be in the process of personal confrontation with death. From time to time we need to reflect upon and clarify our concepts, beliefs and attitudes about death. We must acknowledge our own mortality and not be uncomfortable talking about it.
- We must perceive the child as a human being of worth and uniqueness.
- The child may look up to us for help, but we must be careful not to look down when giving it.
- We need to truly attempt to understand what the child is trying to tell us verbally, through body language and behavior.
- Have respect for the child's uniqueness.
- Try to see things and events from the child's perspective. We often answer questions children do *not* ask and fail to answer those they *do*.
- The child needs to feel psychologically safe and non-threatened. We should try to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust as well as open communication. This helps to encourage children to inquire and share their fears and concerns without fear of rejection.
- Honesty is key, and only strengthens the child's trust. This includes admission of ignorance if necessary.