



Suggestions for Helping Children Cope with Grief

By Sasha J. Mudlaff, M.A.

- Be available - physically and emotionally.
- Listen...with your ears, eyes and heart.
- Remember that touch can sometimes say more than words.
- Answer ALL of the child's questions as directly and as honestly as you can even if the answer is, "I don't know." This expresses your respect toward the child and the very real feelings he or she is experiencing. Children tend to know when they aren't being told the whole truth; sometimes the answers they will come up with in their own minds are much more frightening than the truth.
- Face your own feelings of loss and grief. Sharing these feelings makes you vulnerable and in turn helps the child to feel more at ease becoming vulnerable in expressing his or her feelings. Children need to see the adults in their lives expressing their grief. This gives the child "permission" to grieve as well.
- Encourage and define appropriate expressions of grief (talking, drawing, writing, yelling, running, etc.). Provide appropriate and "safe" places for grief expression.
- Acknowledge the reality that the loss HURTS! Do not attempt to "rescue" the child (or yourself) from the hurt; allow the hurt to run its course. (This isn't easy!)
- Encourage the child to establish his or her own quiet, private place to go to whenever he or she needs to be alone.
- Do not isolate or insulate children from death or from grief.
- Try not to single out the grieving child for special privileges or compensations. The child needs to feel a part of his or her peer group and should be expected to function accordingly. This will help to encourage progression through the grieving process and "getting on with life".
- Maintain a daily routine if at all possible. Continuity provides children with a sense of security and stability during a time full of uncertainty.
- Try not to expect too much from yourself or from the child. Temper your expectations with kindness and understanding.
- Continue to be available long after you think the child *should* be "over it."

