

Helping Your Grieving Child

- ◆ Allow your child to talk about the death as often as he/she wants.
- ◆ Let your child cry or be sad.
- ◆ Show love, support and care for your child physically and emotionally.
- ◆ Maintain a normal routine.
- ◆ Use simple, truthful words to explain death.
- ◆ Reassure the child that the death is not contagious; that the death of one person does not mean the child or other loved ones will soon die.
- ◆ Listen to what your child is saying; observe what your child is not saying.
- ◆ Children often think that they caused the death or illness. Reassure them that this is not true.
- ◆ Do not compare death with sleep, since this may make children afraid of sleeping.
- ◆ Encourage children to talk to each other about the death.
- ◆ Encourage children to remember their sibling by keeping a diary; box of mementos to remember him/her through stories, drawings, and play activities; use books, memorial or funeral services to explain death.
- ◆ Let your child know you are sad; it's okay for you to cry or be angry.
- ◆ Make sure your children understand that you are upset because your child died, and not because of anything they may have done.
- ◆ Obtain the help of professionals if a child's fears seem to last unusually long or seem unusually severe.

Various ages and how they see death:



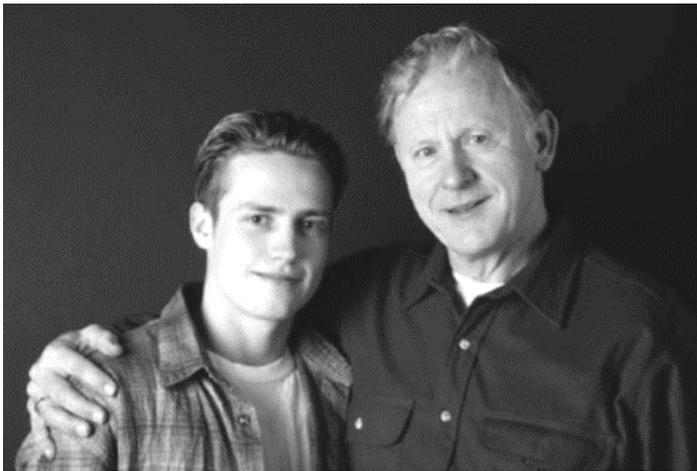
- ◆ Infancy to 2 years of age have no concept of death.
- ◆ Early childhood, 3 to 5 years of age, see death as temporary.
- ◆ School age, 5 to 10 years of age, knows that death is FOREVER.
- ◆ Later school age and adolescent, 11 to 18 years of age, have a more realistic view of death.

The Reaction of Children to a Sibling's Death

As in every experience in life, children's reactions to death may be unpredictable. Their age and previous experiences with death will play a role in their responses.

There may be:

- ◆ Anxiety and fear – Children may cling to parents or other adults seeking reassurance that they are loved. They fear they may die or someone close to them may die.
- ◆ Anger – Children may be angry at sibling for dying; at God and/or parents for not keeping her alive. They may be angry at not getting the attention they need.
- ◆ Guilt – Children often feel guilty because of what they may have said or done before their sibling died; at being alive when their brother or sister is dead.
- ◆ Regression – Children may return to earlier behavior like thumb sucking, using a bottle, and bed-wetting for a short period of time.
- ◆ Shock – Children may not fully understand that their brother or sister is not coming back; they may not show any emotion.
- ◆ Sadness – Children's activity may decrease. They may become quiet, cry or daydream without knowing why.



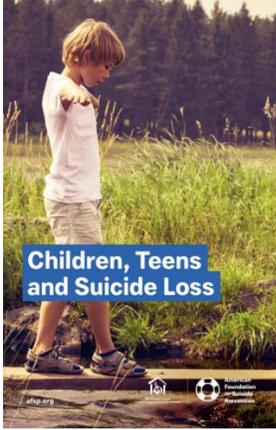
their own schedule.

Be prepared for the honesty and directness which young children will bring to conversations about death. Clear and direct answers to their questions are the best.

Give only the information they request. Don't be surprised if they ask the same questions repeatedly.

Don't be surprised if children seem sad one moment and go on playing the next. They need to grieve on

Adapted with permission from "When A Baby Dies..." produced by the Massachusetts SIDS Center with funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Public Health Service and the Maternal and Child Bureau and from the handout "Explaining Death to Children", developed in 1996 by the SIDS Task Force at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center.



This is a great resource booklet from [AFSP](#) and the [Dougy Center](#).

[Here are other helpful resources from AFSP.](#)