



## **Tips for Teachers:**

### **Talking with and Supporting a Child after a Death**

- Acknowledge your own feelings about the loss so you can be emotionally available to the grieving child. Get the support you may need.
- Acknowledge the child's loss and grief. The worst thing you can say is nothing.
- Find out what the child already knows about the death and what questions he/she might have. Provide simple, honest, accurate information, with respect and compassion.
- Watch for magical thinking and guilt and counteract it. Explain and reassure if child is indicating feelings of responsibility for the death.
- Provide a safe place, literally, and figuratively, for the hard work of grief. The emotional climate of home may not feel stable enough for the child to feel comfortable expressing sadness and fear.
- Accept that children's grief at times looks very different than adult's grief. Allow the child to grieve in different way at different times.
- Allow the child an opportunity to share his/her story of loss with peers if child would like to do so. If not, ask the child if he/she would like you to share that story.
- Be a good listener and a good observer. Pick up on subtle expressions and extreme responses. Seek professional guidance regarding behavior problems or significant behavior changes that persist.
- Use the real words: died, dying. Help child put words to feelings. Avoid euphemisms such as "gone away," "pass away," "sleeping," "lost."
- Use examples from nature to explain life cycles and death. Have children's books about death available to child. Do not impose your philosophy of death on the child. Work toward teaching that death is irreversible and final (permanent) and ultimately inevitable (all living things eventually die); that a dead person's body is no longer working (and needs nothing other' than to be



treated respectfully), that the cause of death was (and not the child's behavior or wishful thinking).

- Reassure: People usually die when they're very very old or very very. There are different types and levels of sickness. If a child is worried about a type of sickness, help them understand more about it. Expect to have to repeat explanations.
- Help child understand that all life functions (such as thinking, feeling hungry, feeling afraid, feeling pain, breathing, beating heart) stop with death – so no worries about physical suffering. The body has totally stopped working.
- Provide child with opportunities to talk, dictate and draw about the person who died or about child's experience in regard to the death. Offer variety of modalities for expressing feelings – art, drumming, dance, physical exercise, clay, drama.
- Use this opportunity to teach the concept of community – how people care for one another during difficult times.
- Holidays are especially difficult. Find ways to acknowledge the loss at these times.
- Eventually, help the child experience his/her own resilience and coping strategies