

**Osseo Area Schools
Student Support Services**

TIPS FOR PARENTS WHEN SOMEONE YOUR CHILD KNOWS HAS DIED

What should you do when your child has been exposed to the death of someone he or she knew at school? First, remember that children experience death differently than adults. Age and developmental level, as well as their relationship with the person who died, often determine how children will respond.

Many parents "have a talk" with their child about the death. Although talking with your child is important, you won't know what your child is experiencing unless you listen.

Ask your child the following questions and listen carefully to your child's responses. You may find that your child has been affected by the death in ways you never thought possible.

Ask Your Child . . .

- *What worries you the most now?*
- *What upsets you the most now?*
- *What is the worst part, the hardest part, for you now?*
- *What helps you feel a little better?*
- *Do you have any questions about what has happened or anything anyone has said?*

What Can You Do?

- Listen.
- Maintain routines.
- Do not criticize any regressive behaviors, such as a child's need for comfort food. Allow your child to be sad or afraid. Reassure your child that you will be there to take care of him or her. Tell your child that the sadness, hurt, or fear that he may feel now will change in time.
- Spend time together. Read a book, play a game, or just be together in the same room instead of in separate parts of the house.
- Encourage your child to engage in physical activities and activities that help him/her feel better.

Most importantly be patient and nurturing, keep it simple, and reinforce that what your child is feeling is normal and that you are there for him or her. Help your child to share his feelings in your supportive presence, and acknowledge his feelings. Do not tell your child how she should or should not feel. Healing takes time - do not hurry your child's reactions along with comments such as, "It's time to get over it."

Understand that physical reactions, such as headaches, fatigue, etc., can be normal responses to fear and a child's attempts to avoid thoughts of the crisis. Provide labels, especially for a younger child, for the feelings he is experiencing, such as sad, afraid, angry, etc.