

Helping Middle School Youth Deal with Grief and Loss

Here are some things that parents/guardians can do to support youth dealing with death.

CHECK FACTS:

- Give accurate information about what happened. Tell only what you know to be confirmed.
- Limit viewing of media coverage of the death as repeated viewing may be traumatizing.
- Answer questions honestly, providing only as much detail as requested.
- Check out what has been heard about the death and correct any misinformation or rumours. "Tell me what you have heard . . ." is a good conversation opener. Be aware of the kind of information exchange happening through msn or chat lines.

CHECK FEELINGS:

- Ask your youth how he/she is feeling.
- Tell him/her that feelings of anger, sadness, guilt, fear, relief are all normal.
- Be aware that this kind of news and these strong feelings can lead to: nightmares, irritability, stomach aches, loss of appetite, lack of interest in normal play activities, desire to be alone. Your youth may also exhibit a decline in school performance and an increase in acting out behaviours, including exaggerated emotional responses. These are all common reactions under these circumstances and are usually temporary.

EMPOWER:

- Invite your youth to talk about the person who has died.
- Help your youth identify what he/she has done in past tough or sad situations and how it has helped.
- Remind him/her that you know he/she is strong and has coped with difficult situations in the past.
- Facilitate opportunities for him/her to engage in healing activities such as: talking to friends or relatives, getting together with peers, writing in a journal or writing a poem, drawing or painting, participating in sports activities, going to a memorial service, making a memory book or collage, planting a flower or tree. Follow his/her lead.

MONITOR:

- Communication exchanges through msn and other chat lines
- Participation in at-risk behaviours such as isolation, drug and alcohol use, violence, and delinquency.
- Watch for signs that your youth may need professional help to cope with this loss:
 - Normal living patterns do not resume over time
 - A continuation of nightmares or need to talk about the death.
 - A continuation of feelings of insecurity and fear
- Seek support from your Family Doctor, Living and Learning Through Loss (413-3114), Hospice (370-8715, or school or community counsellors.

REMEMBER THAT YOUTH ARE REMARKABLY RESILIENT.

WITH LOVE AND SUPPORT THEY DO RECOVER FROM THE VERY SAD AND TRAGIC EVENTS THAT LIFE CAN THROW THEIR WAY.



Critical Incident Response Team

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