

## Talking With Your Child About Death

These are some ideas you may want to use in talking to your child about the death of a classmate's parent. Try to remain calm and composed. Children will respond to sad news in a variety of ways. Your child may or may not want to bring up his/her thoughts with you immediately. Over the next few days or weeks the topic may continue to come up, as your child grapples with the finality and significance.

### Respond to their feelings.

- 1) Some children may feel sad but don't know what to say.
- 2) Children have a short sadness span and are unable to stay with their painful feelings for long periods of time.
- 3) Give your child plenty of attention. He/she may need an extra hug or two for reassurance.

### Listen carefully.

- 1) Reassure your child that someone in the grieving child's family will be taking care of his/her needs.
- 2) Try to be as honest as possible in providing information. Let your child's questions guide you in how much information to provide. Refocus questions about cause of death to how to show caring and concern to his/her classmate.
- 3) Share your family's spiritual beliefs about death.

### Reassure them that they are safe.

- 1) Children may worry about their own parents. Emphasize the death of a parent is unusual.
- 2) Make and keep agreements around family scheduling with care.
- 3) Remind your child the ways your family stays safe - wearing seat belts, eating healthy, going to the doctor regularly, etc.

### Help them comfort their classmate.

- 1) A concrete gesture is helpful to both the giver and receiver - a card, a picture, a flower, or a small toy. Children often try to help by offering to play.
- 2) Help your child with something to say when the child returns to school: "I'm sorry your mom died." or "We missed you."
- 3) Remind your child asking questions about "how" or "why" or other details would not be helpful.