

## Supporting Your Child After a Sudden Death

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- Be available, nurturing, reassuring and non-judgmental.
- Be predictable, have structure and guidance.
- Be prepared to maintain family routines, i.e. bedtime, mealtimes, chores, play and school, as your child will feel more secure during this difficult time.
- Reassure your child that he/she is safe. If needed, have safety routines, i.e. wear seatbelts, lock doors and windows; take these fears seriously, as they can feel very real to your child.
- Understand extended separation from your child may feel scary. Inform them of the plan to provide predictability for your child to decrease anxiety and increase emotional safety.
- Be prepared to give affection if your child is ready or wants affection.
- Be guided by your child's questions and be open to talk about the topic when your child brings it up.
- Be prepared to discuss the same details over and over again, as younger children often re-tell the story or ask questions when you least expect it, i.e. when you are driving in the car.
- Provide honest, open and simple information, while being consistent with your responses to avoid confusion.
- Have clear and simple communication based on their age i.e. when someone dies, they no longer breathe, their heart stops beating and they no longer can feel or think.
- Explain the meaning of death as early and immediately as possible and be prepared to repeat your answers when they ask.
- Use your families belief system to explain death.
- Make the loss real for your child by giving them the option to participate in mourning rituals i.e. funerals, memorial services, going to the cemetery.
- Making the decision to attend the funeral is a personal one. It may feel scary or unknown to them. Your child may not want to attend or participate and it is encouraged they not be forced.
- If they attend the services, prepare them in advance for what they may see and experience, i.e. people may be crying, telling stories, hugging and laughing.

- Have a designated person to sit with and talk with your child, as they may only want to briefly participate in the rituals.
- Allow your child to have keepsakes of their loved one i.e. an article of clothing, pictures, jewelry.
- Encourage them to do something for their special person i.e. draw a picture, write a letter, poem or bring a present to the cemetery or to place in the coffin.
- Continue to be truthful with your answers as time passes, as your child may continue to have questions as they get older.
- Reassure your child that whatever they are feeling is normal and OK.
- Children often feel guilty after a death. Remind them that it is OK to smile, have fun and laugh.
- Encourage them to share happy or funny memories and stories of their special person.
- Reassure your child that he/she will heal in time.
- Remind them that their special person will always be in their heart and memories and there are things they can do to keep their special person's memory alive.

**To request counseling services, please ask parents or guardians to contact the Stepping Stones Program (727) 523-3458**