

## **Helping Parents Prepare Children for Death of a Loved One**

Parents can begin by understanding two common myths:

- 1) “Children will see death as I do.”
- 2) Children can be protected from ever finding out.

Parents first and foremost can be honest, open and straight-forward with their children. For example, talk about someone as dying and not as passing away or going to sleep. Talk about death as a life cycle and compare it with the life cycle of animals (pets).

Encourage children to share emotions and allow them to grieve. Children are amazingly resilient. Children can use humor, drawing and letter-writing as means to process stress and tension they are experiencing.

Reassure children through hugs and verbally letting them know they can't prevent nor are responsible for impending death.

Ultimately, comfort children with the truth of God's Word that life on earth is only temporary. Faith gives us sure hope of life forever in heaven. Heaven is a perfect place with no hurts or pains, only happiness and singing songs of praise to Him who saved us.

For more information:

- Contact local hospice
- Read “35 Ways to Help a Grieving Child” from Dougy Center (The National Center for Grieving Children and Families)

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### **HOW PRESCHOOL CHILDREN PERCEIVE DEATH**

Very young children understand facts best. They think in specific, concrete terms. When death is explained as "sleep" or "a long trip" they may expect the deceased to wake up, or return.

Very young children see death as reversible, as it is often shown in cartoons. They may ask, "When will Bobby come back?" You may need to explain again and again, "Bobby is dead. That means he won't ever live with us again. But we will always remember him."

They may not realize that death will happen to everyone and every living thing. They may need to ask again and again, "Do girls die? Do doggies die?"

Young children need to ask questions about the death again and again. They need to learn the facts about the death and to make certain the facts have not changed.

Young children are likely to believe their thoughts or feelings have power over others. A child who was angry at his mother before her death may believe he is responsible for the death.

### **HOW GRADE SCHOOL CHILDREN PERCEIVE DEATH**

Children of this age know that death is permanent and that everything dies. They often are very curious about physical details.

These children need physical, tangible ways to experience and express grief. Rituals such as visitations, funerals, and memorial services are very important.

Children accept their parents' religious beliefs. A belief in life after death generally comforts children if that concept has been part of their religious beliefs before the death.

Boys tend to have more difficulty talking about death and showing their feelings.