



Talking With Young Children About Death: Strategies for Educators

1. Recognize that children are not born with a fear of death. This is something that is passed on to them from adults. Protecting children from death and their feelings about it by not talking about the event may only complicate grieving.
2. Talk to the children about the death as soon as possible after it occurs to prevent them from hearing misinformation and rumors from other sources.
3. Because classroom teachers are familiar to children, they should lead the discussions whenever possible. Avoid impersonal announcements over the public address system.
4. Give children honest explanations about what happened. Detailed focus on the specifics of the death is not usually necessary and may frighten younger children. It is important to acknowledge that all information about the event may never be available and we have to be careful about believing everything we hear, since rumors are often created to fill vacuums in data.
5. Review with children the many different ways we can react to loss and reinforce that there is no one way or right way to feel. What is important is to recognize our feelings and talk about them.
6. Explain that sometimes a current loss can make us remember and re-experience previous losses in our lives. We may find ourselves thinking about a death in our own family, for example that happened a long time ago and not understand that these thoughts have been triggered by this current death.
7. Understand that children express feelings through their play, art work or written work. Be sensitive to the messages that may be conveyed in these ways.
8. Recognize that children may need what seem like endless explanations about what happened because of their immature ego structure. Their obsessive questions may be a way to deal with the confusion they are experiencing in trying to understand and come to terms with the event.
9. Help children to remember the deceased and integrate these memories into their lives.

Taken from *Managing Sudden Traumatic Loss in the Schools* by Maureen Underwood (LCSW) and Karen Dunne-Maxim (MS, RN).