



# dcafs

**Dufferin Child & Family Services**

**children's mental health • child protection • developmental support**

## **Supporting Children and Teens Following the Death of a Loved One....**

1. The best thing adults – parents, teachers, counsellors, neighbours, youth workers, aunts, uncles - can do for grieving children and youth is to listen.

To listen, not just with our ears, but with our eyes, our hearts, our souls.

To not presume we have (or have to have) the answers.

To allow for individual differences.

To not rush into judgment or pat answers.

Grieving the death of a loved one is a process that unfolds in different ways, time frames, styles and intensities.

Our foremost job is to listen.

Grief following a suicide is more complicated.

2. Grieving children and youth don't need to be fixed...grief is not an illness that needs to be cured. It is not a task with definable, sequential steps...it is a normal, healthy and predictable response to loss. Its symptoms are normal reactions and may include changes in appetite, sleep, focus, motivation and energy.

3. Children and youth need to be allowed to make their own meaning....we need to provide safety, honesty, permission and example.

4. Children and youth know and understand much more than we give them credit for....

5. Adults can be an impediment to children and youth healing after death...sometimes our own fears about death or discomfort talking about it or our lack of understanding of what to say or simply that it can be demanding to be with a child/youth's pain that we can't take away.

6. Theories are great but.... they can cloud our ability to be really present emotionally...each youth is a teacher and best approached by adults willing to be taught.

7. Expressions of grief help in the healing process but the form the expression takes vary greatly. What matters most is feeling understood.

8. Children and youth need, want and deserve honesty, truth and choices. We build trust by giving honest answers even when the answer is "I don't know".

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