Grief Information and Helpful Tips

Children of different ages process death differently. Children ages 2 to 6 may feel a threat to their own security, believe death is reversible, believe the dead can still function, and are sensitive to non-verbal messages. Children ages 5 to 8 begin to understand that death is final, but have little ability to cope. They have magical thinking, believing their thoughts can make something happen. By ages 8 to 12, children can accept finality, but do not relate it to themselves. They may withdraw or postpone grief.

Ways that parents and staff can help children deal with loss include:
- Having children talk about their feelings and listening to parents/adults model this talk. For example, "I feel sad that......"
- Setting aside special time for extra attention to children.
- Using correct language: death, died, dying not passed away or sleeping.
- Allowing children to take part in religious or cultural events (funeral) as one sees appropriate.
- Being ready to repeat facts and story because of misconceptions about death/loss.
- Reassuring children that they will be taken care of by people who love them.
- Educating the child about the process of death, i.e., the body stops working, the deceased can no longer breathe, feel, touch, eat, etc.
- Creating positive memories, telling stories, etc., to help child process his/her feelings.
- Keep as normal and typical a routine as possible as this can be reassuring to children.

Also, remember to take care of yourself physically.
- Try to eat well-balanced meals and keep active.
- Get plenty of rest and sleep.
- Take time to relax each day and participate in activities you enjoy.

Take care of yourself emotionally.
- Contact friends
- Share your feelings with others
- Write your feelings in a journal
- Accept the support and encouragement of others

Taken from: *Hospice of Lenawee*
                     Adapted from Hospice of Monterey Peninsula

Other Resources

Hospice: www.hospicenet.org
- *Talking to Children About Death*