



## HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD WHEN GRIEVING AN UNEXPECTED DEATH

**Talk to your child** in a quiet place explaining in simple terms what happened. Your child may have questions over the next few days and weeks.

Very young children up to 5 years old may not fully understand death. Help them by giving examples as when flowers die or animals die and do not come back. Do not use words like “he is sleeping” or “went away”. It is important that children understand the person will not return. Assure them that you will be there to support them.

**Encourage your child to talk about their feelings.** Encourage older children to also talk to other adults in their life that may help such as a teacher, counselor, physician, minister.

Children may express anger or fear. This is normal. **Share your own feelings of sadness.** Tell them it is OK to cry. Give them a hug.

It is OK for a child to attend a funeral as long as things are explained ahead of time, the child is accompanied by an adult that can explain the service to them and they are allowed to talk about it after the service has ended.

Children 6-10 year old may show signs of fear of separation from parents, of going to school or stop spending time with friends. They may have difficulty concentrating in school. **This is a normal process.** Some children start acting younger than their age.

Youth 12-18 years old may deny their emotional distress to you or may act angry or have unexplained physical complaints or aches.

While it is important that children be given time to express their sadness, it is important that they return to their **normal routine after a few days.** Allow children to return to school, play with their friends and engage in their usual chores.

**Take care of yourself.** Children react well when their parents are doing well. Make sure that you also are getting the support you need.



[www.FSUSTRESS.org](http://www.FSUSTRESS.org)

### FOR MORE HELP FOR YOUR CHILD OR YOURSELF, CONTACT:

Florida State University Center for Child Stress & Health: (239) 658-3123 or [fsustress.org](http://fsustress.org)

Healthcare Network of Southwest Florida: (239) 658-3000

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