

# Supporting a Grieving Child or Teen

## Tips for Informing a Child or Teen About a Death

*First, take a moment to absorb the information yourself before informing a child or teen about a death. When you share the death with them, consider the following:*

- As they struggle to make sense of the news, tell them that you are still working on getting more information.
- Be open to questions; be present, honest and available. If you don't know the answer, say you don't know.
- Focus on how they feel, both emotionally and physically.
- Discuss the possible physical and emotional effects such as changes in sleep, appetite, focus or numbness.
- Use the words "dead" and "death".
- Young children do not fully understand what "dead" means, so you may explain as:
  - Something physically happened to cause the death, keep it simple and not too graphic, such as "the fall caused Bob's heart to stop."
  - Be clear that the deceased will not be coming back. Death is permanent and irreversible.
- Limit the information you share, you can always add information, but you cannot take it away.

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## Tips to Support a Child or Teen Immediately Following a Death

*The first few days are crucial, take care of each other:*

- Keep routines.
- Create opportunities to be together.
- Share how you feel. Keep the door open for discussion and the sharing of information especially about emotions.
- Offer comfort such as physical proximity, hugs, or just touching.
- Show respect for how different people might deal with their emotions.
- Show respect for individual privacy.
- Reassure them about their and your safety, but don't make promises you cannot keep.
- Share stories about the person who died.
- Include children in memorial/funeral service planning and keep them up to date with any new information.
- Seek grief support. Companions on a Journey is available at (513-870-9108).