



# Helping Your Child Cope with Death



Even though children may not show outward signs, they still grieve for and are affected by a loved one's death. When my four-year-old nephew drove by the cemetery where his grandfather was buried, he urged his mom to stop the car so they could get him and bring him home.

How can you help?

**Start by talking about the death.** Talk about what happened. Share a simple object lesson which compares the body to a house where we live. You could say something like this: *If I were to pinch you, it would hurt your body house. If I were to say mean things, it would hurt the real you that lives inside your body house. When a person dies, the real you lives forever – all believers go immediately to be with God (2 Corinthians 5:1-9). Then the body house is put into the ground because it is no longer needed.* (It is usually best not to give more information than is necessary. The final resurrection of the body could be discussed another time.)

**Reminisce about the person who died.** Share stories and memories. Look at pictures/videos, or create a memory box together. We may think these activities will make everyone sad, but it is often very comforting.

**Be truthful.** Use real words such as *dead* or *dying*, rather than trying to use phrases that may confuse them (such as “they are asleep” or “they’ve gone away”). Avoid statements such as:

- This person has gone to be an angel.
- God took this person.
- God needed this person more than we did.

**Use your discretion about whether they should attend the funeral.** No one knows your child better than you, so make the decision based on the child's age and maturity. Having the opportunity to say goodbye or put a farewell note in the casket may be helpful.

**Read books together about death.** Ask your child's teacher or the librarian for suggestions.



**Be patient.** Be prepared for anger or other emotions, mood swings, or physical problems (bedwetting, etc.). Hold your child and assure him/her of your love. Children (just like adults) grieve in different ways and on different timelines. There is no set time when grieving ends.

**Sharing your own grief is okay.** Don't be ashamed to cry together. It's acceptable to have a bad day. You don't have to know all the answers. Talk to your pastor or spiritual leader to help with needed resources.

**Get back into your routine.** Don't be afraid to laugh and have fun. Go to the park. Sing in the car. Watch movies. Spend time with friends. Go to church. Routine is so valuable to give young children a sense of security.