

INFORMING A CHILD OF A SIGNIFICANT DEATH

It is assumed that you are reading this page because there is a crisis in your family and you need quick information about what to say to a child to tell them a loved one has died. This is written to give you quick, simple guidelines.

Are you the child's primary caregiver? If so, **evaluate your emotional state** regarding the death. Do you need someone with you when your child is informed? If so, reach out to family, a friend or clergyperson. Give them a copy of "Grieving Children: What to Say" to read before you meet with your child. At this time the section on *what not to say* is most useful. It is located in the same window where you found this article.

Basic Principles of Informing a Child of a Death:

- Keep it simple. Use "died", not "He is sleeping."
(I.e.: "Colin, there was an accident at work today. Daddy was working on the 5th floor when a guardrail broke and he fell down to the ground. The fall was so far and so hard that he died.")
- Allow your child to express raw feelings freely or ask questions.
- Answer questions honestly and simply. Do not go into detail, unless asked. Offer only as much detailed information as is requested.
- If the death was due to a violent crime, explain how the child will remain safe.
- If the body is suitable for viewing, allow the child to see your deceased loved one, if requested. Prepare the child for what he or she will see.
- Tell your child what will be happening in the next few days.
- Give your child choices in what to do. Some children want to go to school the day of the death. Familiar routines are comforting. Inform the school of the death before your child returns.
- Reassure your child that he or she will be cared for and explain the plan.