Lost & Found
grief center

Talking to Children About the Death of a Family Member or Caregiver

- **Deliver the news in a quiet, private setting** where you can speak quietly, maintain eye contact, and provide reassuring touches and hugs.

- **Be honest.** Children can handle the truth if it is shared in age-appropriate words, small amounts at a time, and with the care and support of people who care about them.

- **Explaining death:** The person's heart and breathing have stopped. His/her body has stopped working, and it won't start again.

- **If the death was caused by an accident or an illness, provide as much detail as the child wants,** but don't overwhelm him/her with too much detail. Be guided by their questions. Avoid painting horrible images that can be traumatic. Suicide deaths require special care. See a separate listing for details about how to explain suicide.

- **Tell the child it is normal to feel sad, confused or nothing at all** and that these feelings may change over the coming days.

- **Common concerns for children:** Did I cause it? Who will take care of me? How will we be okay?

- **Assure the child that crying is also normal.** Let the child know that he/she may see adults crying as they hear the news and share memories of the person who died. Let them know this is how we respond to sadness and that everyone will be okay.

- **Assure the child that "we" will get through this together.** Using plenty of "we" references as you talk about it lets the child know he/she does not have to deal with the death on his own.

- **Children usually have many questions over the next several hours and days.** Let them know they can ask questions and you will give them answers if you know the answers. If you don't know, tell the child that, and tell them you will try to find out.

- **Children have short attention spans,** so they may resume regular play or activities and then come back to you with more questions. This is normal.

- **Children may ask the same questions over and over** in an attempt to make this unbelievable news more real.

417.865.9998
1555 S. GLENSTONE
SPRINGFIELD, MO 65804

No one should grieve alone!