Parent/Guardian Resource-Supporting Children in Grief/Loss

Helping Elementary School Youth Deal with Grief and Loss

Here are some things that parents/guardians can do to support youth dealing with death.

CHECK FACTS:

* Give accurate information about what happened. Tell only what you know to be confirmed.
* Answer questions honestly, providing only as much detail as requested.
* Be aware that repeated viewing of the media coverage of the death can be traumatizing.
* Check out what has been heard about the death and correct any misinformation or rumours. “Tell me what you have heard . . .” is a good conversation opener. Be aware of the kind of information exchange happening through social media.

CHECK FEELINGS:

* Ask your youth how they are feeling.
* Tell them that feelings of anger, sadness, guilt, fear, relief are all common.
* Be aware that this kind of news and these strong feelings can lead to: nightmares, irritability, stomach aches, loss of appetite, lack of interest in normal activities, desire to be alone. Self-criticism, displaced anger, decline in school performance, and participation in at-risk behaviours may also occur. These are all common reactions under these circumstances and are usually temporary.

EMPOWER:

* Encourage your youth to attend school.
* Invite your youth to talk about the person that they have lost.
* Help your youth identify what they have done in tough or sad situations before and how it has helped.
* Remind them that you know they are strong and has coped with difficult situations in the past.
* Facilitate opportunities for them to engage in healing activities such as: talking to friends or relatives, playing outside getting together with peers, writing in a journal, drawing or painting, listening to music, participating in sports, going to a memorial service, making a memory book or collage, planting a flower or tree. Follow their lead.

MONITOR:

* Monitor chat/texting/social media, etc. use.
* Monitor risk-taking behaviour such as taking risks on the playground, self harm, etc..
* Watch for signs that your child may need professional help to cope with this loss:
  + Normal living patterns do not resume over time
  + A continuation of nightmares or need to talk about the death.
  + A continuation of feelings of anxiety, insecurity and/or fear
* Seek support from your Family Doctor, Living and Learning Through Loss (250 413-3114), Victoria Hospice (250 370-8715), Child and Youth Mental Health, or school or community counsellors.

REMEMBER THAT CHILDREN ARE REMARKABLY RESILIENT.

WITH LOVE AND SUPPORT THEY DO RECOVER FROM THE VERY SAD AND TRAGIC EVENTS THAT LIFE CAN THROW THEIR WAY.