

## Talking to Children about Death<sup>1</sup>:

Here are some simple guidelines that may help families talk to children about the death of a person or pet known or loved by the child.

- Tell the truth as gently as you can.  
*Example*, “Grandpa died. He’s not coming back, but we will always remember him.”  
DON’T: Confuse your child with vague phrases such as “passed away” or “no longer with us.”
- Share your grief.  
*Example*, “I’m very sad. How are you feeling about this?”  
DON’T: Hide your grief and send the message to your child that they should do the same.
- Encourage your child to attend memorial services or commemorate the loved one that they lost.  
*Example*: “Would you like to go to the funeral/memorial service?”  
DON’T: Force your child to go.
- Comfort your child.  
*Example*, “Death is a part of life.” Ease your child’s fears of the unknown. Talk about your spiritual beliefs.
- Deal with your child’s emotions.  
*Example*, “Let’s talk about what you are feeling.”  
DON’T: Tell your child to stop feeling something without explanation.

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<sup>1</sup> “Dealing with Death.” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Public Health Service Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Center. <<http://family.samhsa.gov/talk/death.aspx>>