

GRIEF AND CHILDREN OF ALL AGES: SUGGESTED GUIDELINES

- ◆ As an adult, be a good observer. See how each child is behaving. Don't rush in with explanations. Usually, it's more helpful to ask exploring questions than to give quick answers.
- ◆ When someone loved dies, don't expect children's reactions to be obvious and immediate. Be patient and be available.
- ◆ Children are part of the family, too. Include them and know that reassurance comes from the presence of loving people. Children feel secure in the care of gentle arms and tenderness.
- ◆ When describing the death of someone loved to a child, use simple and direct language.
- ◆ Be honest. Express your own feelings regarding the death. By doing so, children have a model for expressing their own feelings. It's all right to cry, too.
- ◆ Allow children to express a full range of feelings. Anger, guilt, despair and protest are natural reactions to the death of someone loved.
- ◆ Listen to children, don't just talk to them.
- ◆ No one procedure or formula will fit all children, either at the time of death or during the months that follow. Be patient, flexible and adjust to individual needs.
- ◆ Adults must recognize their own personal feelings about death. Until they consciously explore their own concerns, doubts and fears about death, it will be difficult to support children when someone loved dies.

STRESS RESPONSE

Dealing with Staff Grief and Loss Issues

Typically, when one of our students dies, or experiences a trauma, the focus is on dealing with other students and family. We may get wrapped up in helping others cope and adjust, and tend to put our own feelings aside.

But when everything settles down, and the immediate concerns of others are addressed, we most likely will feel one or all of the following to some degree:

- ◆ Guilt - ("I should have known," or "I should have been able to do something.")
- ◆ Fear - ("What if something like this happens again.")
- ◆ Feeling vulnerable - ("I can't control my environment.")
- ◆ Difficulty concentrating
- ◆ Getting emotional easily
- ◆ Apathy/Withdrawal
- ◆ Family problems
- ◆ Intruding thoughts
- ◆ Emotional numbing
- ◆ Anger

These symptoms may occur within hours of the incident or even months after the incident. Those who have not resolved past critical incidents or other significant losses in their lives v often re-experience past trauma in the context of the current/readjustment phase.

Each person will respond in his/her own unique way. The experience may trigger old/past experiences. This is not unusual. Acknowledging and expressing feelings is important. Ways to cope and resources for yourself are available through:

- ◆ Your Employee Assistance Program
- ◆ Your Appleton Area School District's Crisis Response Team
- ◆ Other:

The healing process will vary in duration depending on:

- ◆ Proximity to the scene
- ◆ Previous exposure to traumatic incidents
- ◆ Relationship to the victim
- ◆ Current emotional level of functioning

Those at high risk may need attention to their own personal/emotional needs in order to:

- ◆ Promote the development of coping skills
- ◆ Promote support systems
- ◆ Evaluate and refer those having severe reactions