

Helping Children Cope with Stress after a Loss



- **As a result of stress behaviors may regress.** Thumb-sucking, bed-wetting, baby talk, and fear of sleeping alone may reappear or intensify in young children.
- **Children may begin to complain** of stomach cramps and headaches and may refuse to go to child care or be away from your sight.
- **It is important to remember** that children are not “being bad”— they are afraid and stressed due to the loss.
- **Reassure children that they are safe.** Take steps to let them know you are there for them. Comfort at night and, if possible, telephone or visit during the day.
- **Get a better understanding of the child’s view** of the stressor and hear in their words what they are experiencing.
- **Encourage** children to draw pictures of their feelings, thoughts, fears, and concerns.
- **Put a label to feelings that children are experiencing.** Many children do not have names for the feelings they are experiencing. Putting a label to the feeling helps children develop emotional awareness and become more capable of communicating their feelings.
- **Work to structure children’s activities** which can serve as a positive outlet for stress and anger, for example: sports, clay work, sand-play, exercise, and drawing or journaling.
- **Teach children breathing exercises or relaxation techniques** to use when feeling anxious or overwhelmed.
- **Allowing children to care for and play with pets** is a stress relief that will help children care for another being and feel empowered by their ability to help the pet feel loved and safe.
- **Participating in sports or other forms of exercise** helps children relieve stress. Outside play provides fresh air and exercise and allows children to release pent up energy and negative emotions.
- **Provide social support and social outlets for children.** Doing things with friends is a positive outlet of stress and anxiety.
- **Laughter** – Notice or create moments of silliness to bring laughter to the child’s day. Reframe negative thoughts and feelings with humor.
- **Just be there.** Some children do not feel like talking about what is bothering them and constant questioning adds to the stress. Respect their feelings and give the child space, while making it clear that you are there when he or she does feel like talking. Initiate things that you can do together that may open the door to talking about the stressful feelings.

Promoting Healthy Social Behaviors in Child Care Centers