

# How to Talk to Kids about Death...



- Explain what happened in *their* language
  - Use the small deaths (ex. family pets) that most children experience to help them understand
  - Be open and honest
- Encourage them to talk
  - Grief responses may not be immediate or obvious
    - Often their behavior will reveal their feelings
  - Listen to and accept their feelings
    - Watch for grief related behavior
      - Shock
      - Physical Symptoms
      - Anger
      - Sadness
      - Guilt
- Answer questions in brief and simple terms
  - Allow them to ask questions freely
- Show affection, support, and consistency
  - Reassure they will still be loved and cared for
  - Let them know that you will be there to help as much as possible
- Share your feelings and help them label their feelings
  - Use words they will understand in a way that will not be overwhelming
  - Let them know you hurt too
    - If you try to hide your feelings, they may think they shouldn't share theirs
    - Reflect upon your own experiences with death
- Telling them they are too young to understand...
  - Only avoids dealing with the problem
  - May be more upsetting to them



Adapted From American Cancer Society, Inc., Pacific Northwest Extension

*Promoting Healthy Social Behaviors in Child Care Centers*