



CHILDREN AGED 7-9

PARENTING IN THE  
FIRST 12 MONTHS



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### NAVIGATING YOUR WAY AS A PARENT WITHIN THE FIRST 12 MONTHS AFTER THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE

The funeral is done, your friends have gone back to their lives, and you realise that this life is what remains. Everything is different but you don't know how to manage those changes? This booklet aims to give you some thoughts on how to move forward and create a safe and eventually happy environment for you and your children.

#### 1. COMMUNICATION IS KEY

It will be as important as ever to create space for your child to ask questions, discuss their feelings, and open up about their concerns after the death of their loved one. They will need adequate information about the death, reassurance they are not to blame, and time to address their despair, fears, and anxieties as they arise in this period. While you engage in these conversations, listen intently and supportively to create a sense of safety. The death of a parent or close family member often shatters kids' belief that the world is a safe place and they need plenty of reassurance and encouragement to begin to feel safe again.

You may not have all the answers or always know "the right thing" to say, but that's not usually what your child truly needs. What your child more fundamentally needs is to sense that you are willing to "feel with" him or her in this difficult time rather than go into problem solving mode. By confronting and working through these difficult emotions together, your child learns that they do not have to be overwhelming and can more easily come to accept and manage them.

#### 2. MAINTAIN CONTINUITY

Try, to the best of your ability, to maintain your child's typical routine at home, at school, in sports, and in the community. They may, understandably, want to withdraw from activities for a few weeks immediately after the death and they should be allowed some space initially; however, re-engaging with daily responsibilities and pastimes is important for your child's health and enables them to move forward in their grieving process. You may want to talk to your child's school counsellor and teacher about what has happened so they may offer extra support.

#### 3. GIVE HUGS!

Make sure you take time to give your child plenty of hugs and cuddles. This will be a very lonely and trying time for you both. These caring gestures help your child feel looked after and connected. You may also seek support from



other family members and friends to help you care for your child following the death, both to reinforce that your child is surrounded by support and to give you a break when your own grieving process gets overwhelming.

#### 4. KEEP CONNECTED

When a close family member dies, the surviving family can feel fractured and incomplete. Each family member may be grieving in their own way and at their own pace, causing them to withdraw from and engage with one another at different times. It's important to be aware of the ways you make yourself available to connect with your child during this time. Small gestures such as offering to play games or inviting them to cook with you show that you want to get through this with them.

#### 5. EMPOWER YOUR CHILD

Whenever possible, give your child choices and respect their voice. They have opinions and feel a sense of empowerment and value when given a choice in important matters. For instance, it is advisable for children to be included in any memorial or funeral services to the extent that they choose to. Leaving them out of such activities can breed resentment and hinder their grieving process.

#### 6. REMEMBER YOUR LOVED ONE

Create opportunities to remember the deceased through rituals, remembrance activities, or even making a memory box filled with precious items that help you and your child remember your loved one. Allowing time for reflection on fond memories of your child's loved one helps them process their emotions and moves them along in their grief process.

#### 7. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Although your child's wellbeing and care may be of utmost priority at this time, don't neglect your own self-care and grief. Find time to practice self-care in some form, whether it be exercising, reading, connecting with others, meditating, or other activity that grounds you and helps you cope with the loss. This will model the type of self-care your child can use to cope as well as put you in a solid position to help your child.



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DEATH OF A PARENT BEFORE  
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PO Box 4327, Pitt Town NSW 2756 Australia

