

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR ADULTS IN PROVIDING ENCOURAGEMENT AND SUPPORT TO CHILDREN EXPERIENCING OR DEALING WITH GRIEF:**

- **The child's feelings and concerns should take precedence over almost everything else. As soon as the child tries to share feelings, stop what you are doing immediately (or as soon as you can) and focus on the child. It is important to send the message: "Your feelings are important to me, and I will find time to listen to them. You are not bothering me."**
- **When the child shares feelings of sadness, anger, guilt or shame, whether verbally or physically (e.g. looking downcast) don't ask that those feelings be postponed, denied or concealed. Stifling grief requires precious energy better used to deal with all the changes accompanying loss; moreover, grief driven underground can return months or even years later to haunt the child.**
- **When the child's feelings or the duration or timing of those feelings differ from your own, respect the differences and don't criticize or appear upset by the child's statements and feelings and actions. (Negative feelings about the past are common-try to explain to child that this is normal). It is the recognition, acceptance and validation of each emotion as it occurs that lets the child move from one emotional state to another so that grief can be completed.**
- **Remember that children often just want someone to bear witness to their pain and grief. If you have a close relationship with a child, what you say may not be as important as what you do. The touch of a hand on a knee, an arm around a shoulder, a lap to sit on, or a shoulder to cry against can offer profound relief.**
- **If a child seems to be playing up grief for attention, this is a signal that some other need is likely not being met. Giving extra support and showing ample authentic positive interest will usually make the problem disappear.**

### **REMEMBER:**

**Parents should send children the message that feelings aren't good or bad-they are just feelings. It is only when someone acts out feelings in a negative way that problems begin. Therefore children should be encouraged to talk freely and parents should listen intently - with encouragement and support, not judgment or criticism. Otherwise they will not be able to process their grief. It is also important to help children understand their history – what happened to them, why they moved (each time), why their parents could not keep them (e.g. "they had their own problems"), that it was not the children's fault.**

**Source: "Helping Children Cope with Separation and Loss" by Claudia Jewett Jarratt**