



## **Guiding Elementary-Age Children Through Stress/Trauma**

Children respond to sensitivity, warmth and reassurance. They may need extra support. Be open, honest and patient, and use language appropriate to the child's age.

- Let children know what we know and what we do NOT know. Information should be accurate and literal. (You don't have to have all the answers.)
- Be careful not to overload them with information-let their questions be your guide
- Reassure children of their personal safety and their family's safety.
- Listen to the children. Let them talk about their thoughts and fears, & ask their own questions.
- Be aware that a child's reactions may be very different from your own.
- Provide empathy for the child's feelings, which may cover a considerable range.
- Allow children to engage in constructive ways to express their feelings about what happened (e.g., write a letter or draw a picture, make a poster/collage).
- Give out hugs freely. (Young children often seek closeness during these troubled times.)
- Teach them to ask for what they need.
- Identify the support people that the child can talk to.
- Be fairly consistent with classroom routine following a traumatic event/death, to assure a sense of stability.
- Consider an additional outdoor recess or large motor activity in the gym.
- When appropriate, read a silly or funny book together or watch a funny children's video to help relieve stress.
- Help children to understand that death is a natural part of life (though for some, it might come much earlier than expected for a variety of reasons).
- Normalize feelings of powerlessness as part of grief & loss . . . "Yes, I miss Johnny, too".