

## True Heroes in Your Community

"The entire crew stayed with us at the hospital after Kaylee died. About 20 minutes later, the doctor came in and told us there was nothing he could do. Her heart was too fragile. I nearly collapsed. The nurse came in and asked us if we wanted to see her. I was so afraid. I didn't know what to do. One firefighter told us we needed to go in and see her to say goodbye. He said he'd go with us and that we wouldn't be alone. So we went in the room to say goodbye to our precious daughter. He picked her up and gave her to me. Then he left the room to get a rocking chair so my husband and I could rock her. I will never forget the gift he gave to our family."

"John committed suicide on his 19th birthday. When we arrived at the hospital, we didn't know what happened. A social worker took us in a room, where they told us what happened. She didn't offer any words of comfort, but rather, she just held me as I sobbed in her arms. I didn't realize it until months later, but she was actually crying with me. On the first anniversary of John's death, she sent me a card telling me she remembered him."

"I will be eternally grateful...they are the true heroes."

"I was scheduled for induction in three days. Suddenly, my water broke at home. I called my husband at work,

but the contractions were fast and hard, so he had me call 9-1-1. The paramedics arrived within a few minutes. They helped me breathe through the contractions and got me to the hospital right away. We joked about the baby's name and how wonderful this day would be. When I arrived at the hospital, the paramedics stayed to see if I'd have the baby soon so they could come and meet him. My son died during the delivery. I was totally devastated. The paramedics returned two hours later to visit me. They held my son and cried with me. The pain, even three years later, is still overwhelming. But they are the true heroes of this story. I will be eternally grateful for their compassion."



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*Helping Educate and Empower Professionals*

## Psychosocial Outreach: Helping the Family Facing Death



623-979-1000  
[www.misschildren.org](http://www.misschildren.org)

M . I . S . S .  
F O U N D A T I O N

# When a Child Dies...

## Words are Powerful

Words can be a powerful source of comfort or they can cause deep pain. The death of a child is devastating. By using trite platitudes, a professional can exacerbate a family's sense of disconnectedness. Please avoid the following euphemisms:

"It was God's will." or "God has a plan."

"He/She is in a better place."

"God needed an angel."

"Everything happens for a reason."

"Things will work out for the best."

"You're young. You can have more children."

"Aren't you grateful you have two other children."

"You have to be strong (for your wife, children...)"

"Your child wouldn't want you to be sad."

"Aren't you over that yet?"

"At least it wasn't your older child."

"At least they aren't in pain any more."

"You shouldn't be so sad. It is for the best."

Does grief ever end? Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross looks at evidence from the past and present to support the notion that significant losses by death are life time losses. Secondary losses, developmental factors, as well as reminders and new losses that serve to reawaken 'old' grief are all shown to extend the grieving time after a major loss and consequently the bond with the deceased. How to be helpful? Avoid imposing a time-line on the bereaved. Never assume you "know" what they should or should not be feeling. Be there. Experience the death with them. Share. Allow them to own their feelings. This grief is a life time grief. Call M.I.S.S. Foundation for family support at 623-979-1000.

## How to Help:

1. Do convey the child's prognosis or death gently, but honestly. Encourage them to ask questions and stay with them. It is important for them to feel like they did not 'experience' this traumatic event alone.
2. Do remember that you can't take away their pain, but you can share it and offer compassion and kindness.
3. Do call the child by name during your interaction with the family. It gives the child 'identity.'
4. Do focus on the family equally. Fathers, mothers, and surviving children are all traumatized.
5. Do become culturally competent. Know your demographics and ensure that the family is offered culture sensitivity during this difficult time. The MISS Foundation offers specific training classes on cultural competency.
6. Do offer a number where they can reach you later if they have questions or concerns about the incident.
7. Do offer a gentle shoulder to cry on or a hug.
8. Do allow them to talk about the child that has died as much and as often as they want.
9. Do not be afraid to share your own sorrow with the family.
10. Do give special attention to the child's brother and sister. Surviving siblings are hurt, confused, and in need of attention which their parents may not be able to give.
11. When appropriate, do reassure the parents that it is not their fault, that they did everything they could, and that the care the child received was the best possible.
12. Do follow up if you are able. A phone call or a card expressing sympathy makes a tremendous impact.
13. Use good judgment if the family is within your sight or if they can hear you. Do not make jokes, laugh, or discuss patient care in front of family members or the public.
14. Use good eye contact, a slow and gentle tone of voice, and repeat important things several times.
15. Allow the family an opportunity to say goodbye to their child. If they are fearful, offer to help or

- to hold their child for them. If the body is disfigured, offer a hand or a foot to touch.
16. Do ask questions. If you are not sure what they want offer them options by asking specific questions on how you can help.
17. Do encourage others to provide practical support like child care, meals, running errands, and cleaning the house.
18. Do attend the child's funeral. This is as important for a professional for personal closure and resolution. Be honest with yourself about your own feelings of grief and loss and seek debriefing or outside counseling if needed.

Know your community resources for child death! Call **The M.I.S.S. Foundation at 623-979-1000** when a child dies. A peer counselor will send information to the family on available resources for surviving children, parents, and grandparents!

## M . I . S . S . F O U N D A T I O N

**More than 120,000 children die every year in the United States. After the death of a child, families experience significant trauma and grief that can complicate and send ripples of grief through a community. The MISS Foundation is committed to helping families through local support groups, camps for grieving kids, free bilingual books and resources, indigent funeral funds and free funeral planning, free counseling, newsletters, web sites, and opportunities for volunteerism that allow people victimized by trauma, death and tragedy so that they can fully heal from the event.**

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**Web Site: [www.misschildren.org](http://www.misschildren.org)**