PARENT/GUARDIAN RESOURCE-SUPPORTING CHILDREN IN GRIEF/LOSS

Helping Secondary Youth Deal with Grief and Loss

Here are some things that parents/guardians can do to support youth dealing with death.

CHECK FACTS:

- Give accurate information about what happened. Tell only what you know to be confirmed.
- Answer questions honestly, providing only as much detail as requested.
- Be aware that repeated viewing of the media coverage of the death can be traumatizing.
- Check out what has been heard about the death and correct any misinformation or rumours. "Tell me what you have heard . . ." is a good conversation opener. Be aware of the kind of information exchange happening through msn, chat lines, or social networking sites (Facebook, etc.).

CHECK FEELINGS:

- Ask your youth how he/she is feeling.
- Tell him/her that feelings of anger, sadness, guilt, fear, relief are all common.
- Be aware that this kind of news and these strong feelings can lead to: nightmares, irritability, stomach aches, loss of appetite, lack of interest in normal activities, desire to be alone. Self-criticism, displaced anger, decline in school performance, and participation in at-risk behaviours may also occur. These are all common reactions under these circumstances and are usually temporary.

EMPOWER:

- Encourage your youth to attend school.
- Invite your youth to talk about the person that he/she has lost.
- Help your youth identify what he/she has done in tough or sad situations before and how it has helped.
- Remind him/her that you know he/she is strong and has coped with difficult situations in the past.
- Facilitate opportunities for him/her to engage in healing activities such as: talking to friends or relatives, getting together with peers, writing in a journal, drawing or painting, listening to music, participating in sports, going to a memorial service, making a memory book or collage, planting a flower or tree. Follow his/her lead.

MONITOR:

- Monitor chat line/msn/Facebook, etc. use.
- Monitor risk-taking behaviour such as use of alcohol and drugs, violence, delinquency, and self-harm.
- Watch for signs that your child may need professional help to cope with this loss:
    - Normal living patterns do not resume over time.
    - A continuation of nightmares or need to talk about the death.
    - A continuation of feelings of anxiety, insecurity and/or fear.
- Seek support from your Family Doctor, Hospice, or Child and Youth Mental Health, school or community counsellors.

OTHER RESOURCES: The Dougy Center- The National Center for Grieving Children & Families
https://www.dougy.org/grief-resources/

Remember that children are remarkably resilient. With love and support, they do recover from the very sad and tragic events that life can throw their way.

(Source: Greater Vancouver School District Emergency Preparedness Manual, 2016)