

Understanding and Explaining the 5 C's

After the death of a significant person in a child's life, they will often wonder and worry about the **5 C's**.

- 1 Did I **CAUSE** this? I was misbehaving, and daddy had to yell at me, that's why his heart stopped working.
- 2 Can I **CATCH** it? Will I get cancer and die too? When I get older will I get ALS?
- 3 Could I have **CURED** it? If I would have cleaned up my room, been nicer to my sister and listened to mommy, her cancer would have gone away.
- 4 Who will take **CARE** of me? Daddy is dead, what will happen to me if mommy dies too?
- 5 How do I keep a **CONNECTION** with the person who died? I'm afraid I'll forget about my sister, I'll forget what she looked like, or sounded like.

Many children and youth struggle with these questions, especially the worry of who will take care of them. When they present these questions, allow children time, space, and safety to talk about their feelings and worries.

Here are some points to keep in mind when discussing the 5 C's...

1 CAUSE: Explain that diseases are caused by something that goes wrong in a person's body; cancer cells growing out of control, a weakness or problem with someone's heart, but not something that the child did or said. If the cause of death is suicide, talk about how some people have so much sadness and pain in their head that they don't want to keep living. If the death was accidental, wonder with the child why and how it happened, e.g., a distracted or drunk driver.

2 CATCH: Talk about their fears of catching the disease that killed their person. Are they worried about catching the disease now, or when they grow up? Is there a reason they think they might catch it? If the disease does have a hereditary component, discuss medical advances and screening.

3 CURE: Discuss what we do when we have a cold, ear infection or broken leg. Explain that wishing a sickness away, or being nicer to our

sister, or cleaning our rooms won't cure them. We must go to the doctor and get medicine or a cast to get better. It's the same thing with the person who died; even if we had behaved differently or wished harder, or loved them more, it wouldn't have cured them.

4 CARE: Talk to them about their fear. Explain precautions taken to ensure the health and safety of everyone, including getting regular check-ups, wearing seatbelts, tried to eat healthy and exercise? Do they know, or would they like to know, who would take care of them if something happened to their surviving parent?

5 CONNECTION: Remind the children that there are lots of ways that they can stay connected to their person. Suggest ideas such as looking at pictures, listening to someone else tell stories about their person, writing letters to them, watching videos, doing the things they liked to do, or keeping mementos of their person (i.e., necklace, stuffy, clothing, etc.) in a special place.