

# Khululeka

## Grief Support for Children and Youth

### Information on Grief for Grannies and Aunts and Uncles who raise children

You may find yourself in a situation where you raise the children of your children or of your bothers or sisters because they have died.

Some of the things that you are confronted with are particularly difficult:

- ❖ You might feel that your grandchildren grow up in a different world that you don't understand.
- ❖ You may feel resentful at having to look after so many children and are scared to admit it.
- ❖ You may feel that you cannot discipline a child that is not yours. Or you may feel that they have enough trouble already you don't want to make things even more difficult for them.
- ❖ The child may not know that you are not the real parent and you don't know how to tell the truth.
- ❖ The child may ask questions that you don't want to answer.
- ❖ There are difficult things for you to talk about because you want to protect the child from knowing too many troubling things, or you feel it's wrong to talk about such things.

#### **Understanding a bit about grieving children**

Children go through different phases and are often confused about that is happening with them. Frequently they feel isolated and end up isolating themselves even more by being angry and rude or withdrawn.

To begin with the child will probably feel shock and numbness, not feel anything at all and not believe what has happened.

They might not sleep at night and wet their beds, act out and be explosive and angry. They might more often be ill, have tummy aches, headaches and rashes and not like to eat their food. The body's immune system is usually weaker at the time of a loss that is why they are more susceptible to viruses and have colds and flu.

They might not be able to concentrate at school and find it hard to do their homework.

They often feel empty inside, sad and tearful and then suddenly seem to be quite happy and normal. These mood swings are natural.

They might feel guilty about the death (children often do) thinking they have somehow caused it.

All this is normal.

More information on [www.khululeka.org](http://www.khululeka.org)



**What helps:**

It helps the children are allowed to freely talk about the person, draw pictures and play games that involve the person.

It helps if there is an adult around that can be a special person to each child so that the child can talk to about the dead person. If you feel you can't do this because you are very upset about the death too then have a look around if there is anyone who can take on that role.

It helps if the children are allowed to go to the funeral and visit the graveyard when they want to.

It helps to allow children to have their own space and to choose who to open up to and who not.

It helps if the children continue to experience the same routine.

It helps if the children are included in the decisions that are made about them.

It helps if the children are allowed to see the dead body. Some children really want to see the dead body and others don't. Trust each child to know the right thing. Sometimes what children imagine in their minds is worse than what they will see. Do prepare the children by describing in advance what they may see.

It helps if you are understanding and listen hard to what the children have to say. If a child gets aggressive and shouts, stay calm.

It helps not to tell the child what to feel.

It helps the child to meet other children that have experienced the same thing.

**Don't forget to:**

Use your life experience of things that have helped before.

Look after yourself and get together with other people, who are experiencing something similar. Maybe start a support group.

