

HEARTLINKS GRIEF CENTER

HELPFUL IDEAS FOR CLERGY

Talk to me about the truth of religion, and I'll listen gladly. Talk to me about the duty of religion, and I'll listen submissively. But don't come talking to me about the consolations of religion, or I shall suspect that you don't understand.

A Grief Observed, C.S. Lewis

Initial Impact

For Family:

- Be as involved as the family desires; better to err on the side of too much. "Go interfere...carefully."
- Numbness, inexperience, and shock are predominant so offer guidance, structure, and limited options.
- Traumatic death - ask caregivers what to tell the child(ren) and how they prefer them to be told. Be ready to guide them in knowing what to say.
- Assist with funeral plans, rituals, and practicalities. Many young families have no experience in dealing with any of these.
- Explore the family's beliefs on including children in the funeral.
- Encourage inclusion of children gently and give ideas on how to do this.
- Visit the funeral home in advance with the children and explain as much as they want to know. Give them a general idea of what will happen.
- Answer children's questions openly while respecting family beliefs.
- Find out what the loss really means; don't make assumptions based on preconceived notions or stereotypes.

For Congregation:

- Organize a communication channel to keep support at a maximum, but grieving individual's responsibilities at a minimum.
- Be a connection point to members in the church who can help in practical and professional ways.
- Gather the children and youth, encouraging their attendance at the funeral.

Ongoing Support

For Family:

- Help educate on grief.
- Listen.

- Be present with their pain.
- Encourage the keeping of mementos special to individual family members.
- Open up the timeline for grief to both the grieving and their supporters.
- Support the grieving family's timeline for healing.
- Encourage the use of support groups and/or counseling if appropriate.
- Be open to spiritual questioning, especially from the children. Think of them as spiritual pioneers on a journey through uncharted territory with no map.
- Older children and adults can use a spiritual model showing them an engagement with the struggle for understanding while showing them how faith can help them respond to a loss.
- Avoid pat answers and cliches.

For congregation:

- Encourage the grieving family's inclusion in the life of the religious community but help pave the way for changes as well.
- Keep the loss in front of the community in gentle ways.
- Help develop a support group for grieving church members; consider networking with other churches if your congregation is small.

For more information, please call Heartlinks at 618-277-1800.

