

## The Reaction of Children to a Sibling's Death

As in every experience in life, children's reactions to death may be unpredictable. Their age and previous experiences with death will play a role in their responses.

There may be:

- ❑ Anxiety and fear – Children may cling to parents or other adults seeking reassurance that they are loved. They fear they may die or someone close to them may die.
- ❑ Anger – Children may be angry at sibling for dying; at God and/or parents for not keeping her alive. They may be angry at not getting the attention they need.
- ❑ Guilt – Children often feel guilty because of what they may have said or done before their sibling died; at being alive when their brother or sister is dead.
- ❑ Regression – Children may return to earlier behavior like thumb sucking, using a bottle, and bed-wetting for a short period of time.
- ❑ Shock – Children may not fully understand that their brother or sister is not coming back; they may not show any emotion.
- ❑ Sadness – Children's activity may decrease. They may become quiet, cry or daydream without knowing why.



Be prepared for the honesty and directness which young children will bring to conversations about death. Clear and direct answers to their questions are the best.

Give only the information they request. Don't be surprised if they ask the same questions repeatedly.

Don't be surprised if children seem sad one moment and go on playing the next. They need to grieve on their own schedule.