

## Talking with a Child about A Loss to Homicide

When someone loses their life due to an act of violence, there is an added layer to a person's grief journey. There may be a loss of safety and security, a fear and dread of how this could have happened, and what's next (police intervention, legal proceedings, etc.).

Here are some tips that may be helpful when talking to your child about a loss to a crime.

### Telling the Truth

- It is important for the child to know how the person died
- Children may hear things from other people. Hearing differing information may impact their trust in your words. It may create secrecy and shame that can impact their relationship with their family.
- It's best for the child to hear the truth from the person they trust in a safe environment
- If you have multiple children, it may be best to tell them individually depending on their developmental levels
  - Older children may want more information than younger children should need

### Processing

- Ask a trusted family member, friend, or professional counselor for help
  - This person can help you with what to say or to just provide support during this time
- It's okay to cry and express grief while talking to your child
- There may be many questions you don't have the answers to. It's okay to answer with "I don't know," or explore together, "Well what do you think?"
- Be prepared to talk about this several times through the first few weeks and later throughout the child's life
- **For young children:**
  - Explain what happened:
    - "A terrible thing happened that is not your fault. Uncle Joe was going to work and a man shot him with a gun. Uncle Joe was badly hurt and he died."
  - Name it:
    - "What happened was called a homicide."

### Be Prepared

- It may be helpful to plan with your child how to respond to others about the death
- With the child, decide when and with whom to talk to about the loss, what they would like to share
- Have responses ready:
  - "I'm too sad to talk about this,"
  - "Thanks for caring. It's been hard to be at school recently."



### **Continued Support**

- Children may feel guilt, regret, or at fault
  - Children who struggle with their emotions may benefit from professional help
- Focus on helping your family and yourself grieve
  - Find ways that help you and your family grieve and express your emotions
  - Find people that are supportive and help you and your family on your grief journey
  - Ask for help when you need it
- Be gentle with yourself during this time