

WHAT ABOUT GOD?

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, SPIRITUALITY AND GRIEF

At this age, most kids in elementary school think literally but are beginning to grasp concepts of time and space. This shifts their understanding of God and His involvement with people, as they begin to recognize that things happen that they are unable to see. However, kids this age tend to learn best with visual or repeated examples and still struggle with abstract concepts. Here are some things to consider when talking with elementary aged children about God and grief:

- **Keep it short**

Elementary age kids tend to ask big, intense questions, such as “Why did God let this happen?” or “Could God have stopped this?” It’s tempting to try to give long, nuanced answers that are beyond the cognitive development of children this age. Remember that children tend to focus on their own experience, the impact on them, and tend to orient toward the present time. Try offering answers that are no longer than 3-4 sentences and gauge their reaction and understanding. Children

will typically ask more questions if they have them and are invited to talk more.

- **Keep it concrete**

Kids in elementary school are literal thinkers, even though they are gaining the ability to think about things they cannot see. Using information and metaphors they are already familiar with can help, rather than introducing complex vocabulary. You could say things like “Jesus is taking care of our person and keeping them safe. He

will take care of us too.” “God knows and cares about how we feel. We can talk to God about that.” Sometimes it helps to use children’s books about death, to connect pictures with your words and have the same words that children can return to over and over.

- **Keep it reassuring**

Children are often fearful about whether they will be cared for after a death, whether others will die, and what will happen next. Emphasize God’s power to care for them and comfort them. Try to avoid statements that might confuse concrete thinkers, such as saying that God needed the person with Him. Point out ways that God is caring for them in their day-to-day life as they grieve.

- **Keep it honest**

Kids around this age begin to ask questions that are very difficult to answer, often wondering about God’s will, power, and ability or desire to intervene in daily life. At the same time, they are learning basic truths about life, death, and theology. You might feel very confident about some answers, such as “where is our person now?” and not at all confident about others. Tell your child what you know and believe in short, age-appropriate language. It’s also okay to say that you don’t understand some of this either. Sometimes it is helpful to focus on the emotion behind the questions, or to simply reflect back what your child is saying. Remind your child that God is big enough to handle our emotions, questions and confusion.