Impact of Suicide and Homicide on Children

15,517 homicides in 2000
One of six youth (10 - 17) has seen or know someone who has been shot

More than 30,000 persons die each year of suicide
7 - 12,000 children experience the suicide death of a parent annually

Principles:
- Grief is natural reaction
- Intensity and duration different
- Have internal capacity to heal self
- Caring and Acceptance helps

Factors that complicate grief
- Sudden and traumatic deaths
- Social Stigma of death
- Multiple deaths
- Conflicted past relationships with the deceased
- Grief process and support system of the surviving parent or caregiver
- Witness the violence or finding the body

How grief is different for kids after:
Illness Death
- issues of health and body
- dealing with issues of hospital and dying process
- personality changes of deceased due to illness
- affects of the illness
- roles in the family dealing with an ill parent

Accident Death
- issues of safety
- loss of control, fear, powerlessness
- unpredictability of the world
- need to talk about the accident, what happened, how it happened
- possible trauma symptoms

The Dougy Center: The National Center for Grieving Children and Families  www.grievingchild.org
Suicide Death
issues of abandonment
shame
social stigma
anxiety
need to share and ask why

Violent Death
issues of safety
loss of control, fear
rage and revenge
powerlessness
public issues, media
police, court
trauma

Suicide and Violent death kids experience a chaotic energy, difficulty settling, concentration problems, anxious hyper energy

Issues kids face after:
A Violent death
Police and investigation
Court, reliving the event over and over,
Sentence, no matter what is not enough
Media often invasive and family isolates themselves
Possible mutilated body or no body,
Missing person, presumed to have been killed
Concerned about if person suffered
Fears about safety, being killed
Rage and revenge, scary, intense emotions
Intrusive thoughts, visualizations or reliving the horror
Reenact the crime through play
Hyperarousal
Guilt at not being able to protect family member
Stigma - criminals get murdered, bad people
Possible PTSD

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A suicide
Why
Shame and stigma
Abandonment
Anxiety
Guilt and blame
Family connection, person has a 300 % increase risk of suicide
Societies views of suicide as selfish act, a sin,
Suspect of foul play, police investigation
Child may have found the body
Intrusive curiosity and speculation rather then understanding

Techniques that help
Tell them the truth, in a balanced way
Answer their questions
Listen to their stories as often as they want to tell them
Provide support: family, friends, groups, church
Allow them to “play out” their fears, questions, issues- play, art,
Provide structure and routines, allow choices
Help the child to regain sense of safety
Allow times to remember, speak the name of the deceased,
Develop rituals
Understand different ways children grieve and support their process
Allow all emotions, anger, rage, revenge, relief, sadness
Be aware of warning signs, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, risk taking and refer for counseling if appropriate