



Talking with a Child about Death

- Speak simply and honestly.
- Use concrete words like dead, died, or the body stopped working. Avoid the use of metaphors such as, “Daddy went to sleep” or “We lost Mommy.”
- Explain clearly that death is the end and the person will not come back.
- Talk about the loss whenever your child brings up the subject.
- Do not force your child to talk about the death. Children can only process so much information at a time and what they can’t understand now may be brought up later.
- Let their questions lead the discussion. They’ll let you know when they are ready for more.
- Be patient with repeated questions.
- “I don’t know” is an okay answer to your child’s question. Ask them, “What do you think?” to give them permission to express their own thoughts and concerns.
- Don’t assume that children are too young to understand death or be impacted by it.
- Children grieve the secondary losses (different homes, new schools, new routines, etc.) that come with the loss of a loved one. They may seem more focused or upset about these than the death loss.
- Children are quick to blame themselves for the death and can secretly carry this guilt so reassure them they did not cause the death through their thoughts or actions.
- Be honest with your child about who will take care of him or her in the event of your death.
- Let your child know that crying is okay. Don’t be afraid to cry in front of them...it gives your child permission to cry.
- Try to maintain routine, rules and limits in order to provide a sense of security for the child.
- Their world can feel turned upside down so give them lots of choices to feel a sense of control.
- Children are perceiving the emotions around them...label them, describe them, discuss them.
- A grieving child needs to feel secure and taken care of with consistent hugs, kisses, and warmth.
- Help them find ways to express and comfort themselves such as art, reading, writing, music, and physical activities.
- Children grieve more intermittently than adults...one minute they are sad and the next minute they are playing and laughing.
- Children will revisit losses over their lifespan so what can seem like a step back is actually part of the process.

- Help your child recognize their support network so they have multiple people to turn to when in need.