

Talking with a Child about A Loss to Suicide

For anyone, suicide can be upsetting and scary. It may feel overwhelming to have to thinking about, let alone explaining to our children or family. Here are some tips that may help during that time

Telling the Truth

- It 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
- A child should understand that the person loved them, but because of their illness, it may have been hard to show that
 - Assure the child it was not their fault
- 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:
 - "Your person died because they were very sick in their brain and could not think of another way to end the illness of pain."
 - What they did:
 - "He used a gun to make his body stop working."
 - Name it:
 - "What he did is called suicide."
- **For older children:**
 - Explain what happened:
 - "Uncle Joe had a disease called depression, which made them have a lot of emotions. Because of this disease, he couldn't think clearly. This caused him to end his life to end the pain he had."
 - This is a hard time, let's think about who you can talk to when you need it



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 suicide; what they would like to share
- Have responses ready
 - “I’m too sad to talk about this,”
 - “I don’t want to talk about this,”

Continued Support

- Talking about suicide will not increase the risk of other suicides
- As children begin to process, they might ask if it was good or bad. Its best to steer clear and explain that this is something that happens when a person’s brain is ill.
- 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