

How to talk to children about death



When someone close dies it can feel like a child's world has been turned upside down. Telling your child about the death of a close family member may feel like the hardest thing that you have ever had to do. With support and information, children can find ways to grieve and, in time, learn to live with their loss.

It is natural to want to protect children from sad news and difficult things that happen. In order to make sense of what has happened children need open, simple information and

explanations. Grief is a part of life and children need to be enabled to express it.

A simple, honest explanation that the person has died will help to prevent misunderstandings. Families will have their own beliefs about what happens when someone dies. Some families believe in a heaven, or that the loved one becomes an angel or a star. For some, death is the final end.

A clear and straightforward

explanation, with opportunities for children and teens to ask questions, will help to avoid confusion and encourage acceptance. A good approach is honesty combined with lots of reassurance.

Younger children can find some phrases such as 'gone to sleep' or 'gone to heaven' confusing and may feel that this means that the person will come back again. They may also need reassurance that the death is not their fault. While older

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children can understand more about death, they may need reassurance about whether others close to them will also die as fears may arise around this. They may also need more support to understand and name their feelings as they grieve. Adolescents may need reassurance that there is no right or wrong way to grieve for a loss and may value the opportunity to talk

at greater depth about the deceased and their beliefs around death.

Using stories can help children to make sense of death and dying in a way that feels safer and less frightening. Talking openly about the person who died, sharing memories and stories, also helps children with their grief. Children often fear that they will forget the person and

talking openly can help the child keep alive their memory of the deceased.

We cannot stop children feeling sad, but by giving them opportunities to share their feelings (and yours) and by giving them information, we can support them in their sadness.

We rely entirely on voluntary donations from our clients, local businesses, individuals, community groups and grant making trusts.

If you would like to support our work or find out more about the emotional support we provide please do get in touch.

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