

## Talking with Children about Death and Grief

Many adults fear talking to children about death and loss. We are unsure of how much to tell them, and we long to be able to shield or protect them from pain. Parents and other adults can support children by teaching them about death, letting them know that it is a natural part of life, and helping children heal by leading them through the grieving and healing processes. Children do not naturally fear death. They usually do not think much about death, as they are so busy living.

**Be honest.** Children need to hear the truth from their parents or other adults in their lives.

**Let children know that it is okay to cry,** and it is okay if they see you cry.

**Encourage your child to share his conversations with others about death with you,** so that you can help guide him to an understanding of death that fits with your family's beliefs.

**Be ready for guilt.** Make sure your child knows that she did not cause the death. Teach older children the difference between guilt and regret.

**Seek help if you need it.** There are many options for assistance, from pastors to counselors, to grief and loss support groups.

**Very young children** cannot understand that death is final, so they may not express sadness. Children ages three to six still cannot understand the permanence of death. At ages six to nine, children want to know the details, like "how did he die?" They see death as something that comes to get you, and they become scared. Adolescents have feelings much like those of adults. They may feel angry, helpless, lonely, or guilty. They may be in denial, or withdrawn, or they may act out. Teenagers cannot handle grief alone and need your support.

Children need time to work through their emotions. Grieving usually begins with shock that someone close has died. Shock is soon replaced by denial. Next comes anger, which is followed by loneliness. As a child moves through the grief process, parents need to give her plenty of opportunities to express her feelings, as well as helping her to work through them.

**Talk about feelings.** Name them and talk about them.

**Start or attend a support group.** Sharing feelings about a friend who died can be very healing.

**Don't try to fix everything.** Be open to just listening, and don't offer your opinion unless it is asked for.

**Be patient.** Be there for your child and help him to work through his emotions.

### Resources

[https://www-tc.pbs.org/parents/whenfamiliesgrieve/documents/TLC3gp\\_CGG\\_ENGdigital\\_sm.pdf](https://www-tc.pbs.org/parents/whenfamiliesgrieve/documents/TLC3gp_CGG_ENGdigital_sm.pdf)

[https://www-tc.pbs.org/parents/whenfamiliesgrieve/documents/TLC3gp\\_CGG\\_SPdigital\\_sm.pdf](https://www-tc.pbs.org/parents/whenfamiliesgrieve/documents/TLC3gp_CGG_SPdigital_sm.pdf)

[https://childdevelopmentinfo.com/how-to-be-a-parent/communication/talk-to-kids-death/#.WYESuf\\_yuu4](https://childdevelopmentinfo.com/how-to-be-a-parent/communication/talk-to-kids-death/#.WYESuf_yuu4)

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