

Having conversations with children about death

Death is a subject that many families hesitate to discuss with their children. Our own feelings and fears about death, and the natural desire to shield children from these realities sometimes keep us from the subject. However, it is important for children to believe that they can rely on their parents to answer some of their most worrisome questions and to guide and protect them through difficult times. Because of the worldwide Coronavirus pandemic, you may find that your child has immediate questions and concerns.

Generally, children's interest in death tends to be matter-of-fact, intellectual and relatively unemotional. Although your child may not ask specific questions verbally, they are probably extremely interested in what happened. Since your child may be forming his /her own opinions about death, it is a good idea to discuss the topic with them.

As you talk with your child about death, stay calm, truthful, and realistic. Children understand things literally, so words such as dead, die, and death should be used instead of confusing euphemisms such as "gone to sleep for a long time." It is a good idea for parents to tell their children that death is final and that all bodily functions stop. Children are usually very interested in what happens to a body after death, so be prepared to answer their questions. Explain to your child that death happens because of old age, severe illness, or tragic accident—never because of another's bad wishes, thoughts, feelings, or not being nice. Tell your child that most people live long lives and you are here to help them make healthy choices and be safe.

Here are some things you can do to help your child further understand death:

- Use clear, simple words when discussing death
- Listen and comfort them when they are upset
- Help your child put their emotions into words
- Explain what death is and what they can expect
- Provide your child with reassurance and things to make them feel better
- Give your child time to heal
- Read books about death to help children understand