



Some Suggestions on Talking with a Child about Death

Speak simply and honestly.

Tell the truth using words that the child can understand.

Use concrete words. Most children do not understand abstract ideas. Avoid the use of metaphors such as, "Mommy went to sleep" or "We lost Daddy."

Show your understanding by being patient with repeated questions.

Don't assume that children are too young to understand death.

Pick up cues from your child. Talk about the loss whenever the child brings up the subject.

Answer what the child asks. Let your child be in charge of what he or she is ready to hear.

The child may not want to talk about the death. Children can only process so much information at a time and what they can't understand may be brought up later.

"I don't know" is an okay answer to a child's question. Children need and deserve honesty.

Make sure the child knows he/she did not cause the death by his or her angry thoughts.

Reassure the child that one death does not predict another.

To relieve feelings of anxiety or distress after a death, be honest with your child about who will take care of him or her in the event of your death.

Let the child know that crying is okay. Crying can help us adjust to the hurt we are feeling. Don't be afraid to show tears. This gives the child permission to cry.

Explain clearly that death is the end and the person will not come back.

Remember that before or after a death the normal home routine is disrupted. Try to maintain some structure, rules and limits in order to provide some sense of security for the child.

Children are very receptive. Tell them what you are feeling and why you are feeling it, for example, "I'm sad because your brother or sister has died."

A grieving child may establish distance between family members through anger and silence.

A child will need constant reassurance-hugs, kisses, love, warmth.

If you are unable to talk about the death with your child when he/she is ready, it is advisable to create an outlet for your child. Maybe allow them to talk to someone else who feels comfortable with answering such questions such as friends, social worker, minister, another bereaved child, or school counselor.

Don't be afraid to seek professional help (social worker, counselor, or support group) if you think you or your child is not coping well.