



How to Talk with Your Child or Teen After the Death

Talk openly and honestly with them.

Give the facts in a direct and simple way:

Keep your explanations appropriate for the age of the child/teen and only give them as much information as the child/teen needs. Understanding what happened can be very reassuring to the child/teen.

Explain what it means to die:

For a child, sharing with them that the body stopped working and the person can not feel pain or be cold, hungry or hot can be helpful. Use terminology such as the person “died, dead, buried”. It is helpful to let them know that the person is not coming back. Depending on their age and comprehension some will understand this and others may not.

Avoid language that softens the message:

There are many common phrases that are said to young children about death. “The person is sleeping” or “God took” the person. Other terms that are often used are “passed away, lost or gone”. All of these can be confusing to a young child wondering if they will be taken, lost or gone.

Check the Child’s Understanding:

Be mindful of assuming that the child understands everything the first time that you share with them about the death. Ask questions: “What do you think happened?”, “What are you hearing others say?” or “What do you want to know?”

