

Talking with Kids

A quick reference for talking with children about death and other difficult issues.

- ❖ **Begin by asking the child what he/she has observed, been told, or figured out.**
This invites children into the process and allows them to demonstrate that they “know” something important. For example, “Grandma seems different doesn’t she?”
 - ❖ **Determine what the child knows about illness and death.**
Has he/she experienced a death before? Where else might he/she have learned or seen something on death? (Books, Television)
 - ❖ **Share with the child “what can happen if” by asking him/her about different scenarios.**
What can happen when people get very sick? What can happen if a person can’t get better?
 - ❖ **Try to find out what questions the child may have.**
Ask about changes in the patient’s appearance. Ask about changes in the way the patient acts. Ask about medical equipment, medication, and procedures. Be prepared to answer or address the child’s questions and concerns.
 - ❖ **Don’t worry so much about whether or not the child “gets it.”**
Understanding is a process that children grow into. Just having the story about what will happen or has happened helps, even if it is not fully understood.
 - ❖ **Normalize hard feelings – being afraid, sad, guilty, worried.**
It’s ok to be upset, adults and others feel the same way.
 - ❖ **Affirm for the child how his/her own heart, spirit, and talent will help in difficult times.**
Making music on the piano is a good way to show how you feel. A good artist can communicate how he thinks and feels through drawings. A good reader can ask for books about people being sick (or having died) and then share with other people what he/she has learned.
 - ❖ **Identify the “go-to” person/people for the child.**
This can be someone other than parents, if parents are too overwhelmed. Ask the child if there is someone he/she would like to talk to. Make sure that the person named is willing to answer questions and give support.
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