



Talking About Death

Age-Appropriate Information

UNDERSTANDING DEATH

Birth – 2-year-olds: do not understand death, but recognize change in family dynamics



2 – 5-year-olds: see death as temporary. Their emotions towards death change frequently, and they have “magical” thinking that results in misconceptions.

6 – 9-year-olds: begin to understand the irreversibility of death. They may believe in superstitions and/or worry that other people will die.

9 – 12-year-olds: consider how death affects their lifestyle. They may fear their own death and fully recognize the finality of death.

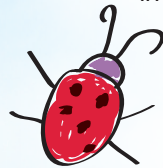
Teens: understand death but the ability to cope varies by personal experience and development. They begin questioning afterlife.

REMEMBER

You are the expert on your child. These are suggestions to get you started.

TELL THE TRUTH

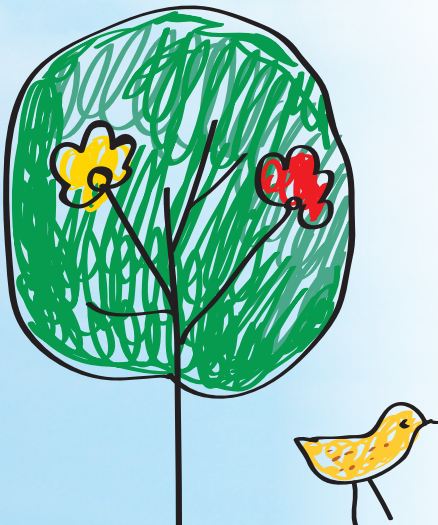
It is important that you continue to model open and honest communication in your family. Children need to know that you will give them truthful information. It is completely acceptable to say “I don’t know” and explain that when you do know, you’ll share information with them.



Note: Kids don’t need to know ALL information, just enough to prepare them and answer questions. Be honest with the information they need to know.

USE THE ‘D’ WORDS

It’s important to use the correct terms to avoid misconceptions. Say death or dying. It may be uncomfortable for you, but it is the most clear way to convey the change that is happening in your family. **Avoid:** Passed away, sleeping, or is on a journey as you explain death for the first time.





MEMORIAL SERVICES AND FUNERALS

It is a common misconception that children should not attend funerals or memorial services. It can be helpful for children to experience the end of life rituals alongside the adults in their family.

Preparation is key to help kids memorialize a loved one. Consider the five senses when preparing your child.

Touch: People might give extra hugs today. If there is an open casket some people may touch the deceased person.

Sight: The deceased body, a closed casket, or an urn are typically new to children. Also inform them that family and friends will visit to mourn alongside you.

Taste: Snacks or candies might be available at the service or that they may have to wait until after to eat.

Smell: A deceased body doesn't have a smell, but a child might smell floral arrangements or burning incense.

Hear: Some people cry, some people share funny stories and laugh, some people are very quiet. Its all acceptable.

Consider having a babysitter or a trusted adult available to specifically care for the child during a memorial service, funeral, or wake. This allows the child an opportunity to ask questions and take breaks while you can focus on yourself.



KID-FRIENDLY DEFINITIONS

Casket: A special box that a dead body goes in before it is buried. A casket has a pillow and a soft cushion for the body to lay on. Only people that die go in caskets.

Cemetery: A special park that people are buried in after they die. This is not a park that you play in but its a special place to think about and remember a person that has died.

Cremation: A body is put in a special room, called a crematory. This room gets so hot that it turns the body into ash. These ashes are collected and then often placed in an urn.

Death: When the body stops working. The person cannot feel, think, talk or do anything anymore. When something dies it cannot come back to life.

Hospice: A type of care for people who are dying. When someone is in hospice the doctors know that they can't make them better anymore, so they work to keep the person comfortable until they die.



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To learn more about NorthShore Home and Hospice Services, please call (847) 475-3002, or visit northshore.org/hospice

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