



# How to Start a Conversation About Death with Kids

Explore what they know about death/dying

- What do they know or believe about death in general
- What is their prior experience with death/dying - books, a pet, a grandparent

Start with exploring/asking what they know about the situation

- What do they know about the person/patient

Provide honest, clear information

- Saying death/dying is ideal

Avoid euphemisms

- No “passed away”
- No “sleeping”, “in a better place”, “went away”

Help them understand death or the event in a simple, concrete way

- Their body stopped working
- Their heart stopped beating, their lungs are no longer breathing
- They can no longer think or feel pain

Relate back to the child in concrete terms

- Ask a memory the child has of the person, they can no longer “play outside with you, take you to school....”
- Use words they use if they have reported prior experiences

Ask open ended questions, validate questions and respect feelings

Follow the child's lead

- What are they curious about
- What are they scared about
- What do they want to know

In response to child's question

- “What do you think about that?”
- “Other kids think/worry/feel...”
- Use their words and what they already know

Remember the 4 C's children question:

- Did I Cause it?
- Can I Catch it?
- Could I have Cured it?
- Who is going to take Care of me? (in scenario if parent sick)

OVERALL:

Use honest information in small doses

Returning to play is their way of coping

It is ok if a child laughs or uses humor at a time adults would think inappropriate

End conversation with a plan for if/when they have questions or want to talk - who or what do they turn to