



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

Explore what they know about the situation

- Kids are very perceptive, so can pick up on when adults are stressed or feeling emotions.
- So begin by exploring “what do they know about the person, what they have been going through, etc.”

Provide honest, clear information

- Help them understand death or the event in a simple, concrete way
- “Death is when someone’s body stops working”
 - Their heart stopped beating, their lungs are no longer breathing
 - They can no longer think or feel pain
- Explain what happened to cause their body to stop working
 - Disease stopped a certain body part from being able to do it’s job
 - An accident injured part of their body which kept that part of the body from being able to do it’s job

Avoid euphemisms

- No “passed away”
- No “sleeping”, “in a better place”, “went away”
- Saying death/dying is ideal

Help them to understand the finality and how it will look in their life:

- 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

- 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 of a child’s typical concerns regarding death:

- 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

childcorefamilysupport.com



How to Start a Conversation About Death with Kids

Potential Script

Provide warning:

"I have something important to talk to you about."

Introduce topic:

"What have you been hearing adults talking about, or wondering about your Loved One?"

Topic of death:

"Well their body *** and your Loved One has died"

- *** - was very sick and it couldn't do its job any more
- *** - was in a car accident and their heart got very hurt in the accident

Death/Dying:

"Dying is when someone's body stops working. Their heart stopped beating, their lungs are no longer breathing. They can no longer think or feel pain."

"They will no longer be able to play on the playground with you after school."

Help them identify feelings:

"I am feeling ***, and you might see a lot of people feeling the same."

"I wonder how this is making you feel?"

Explore their feelings or questions:

"I wonder what you are curious about?"

"I wonder what you are scared about?"

What happens next:

"The plan is to celebrate their life by ***"