

## Talking With Children In Grief

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1. Be direct. Use the correct words. Say "dead." Do not use words that soft-pedal what happened. Children are not able to generalize from the words "sleeping," "gone," or "lost." They will believe that the person is lost, sleeping, or gone for a while, all of which imply that the person will come back.
2. Do not go into detail or give long explanations. Give the facts. Wait for questions. Answer the questions. If you do not know the answer, do not guess or make something up. Admit that you do not know. If you can find out the answer from another source, tell the child that, and follow through.
3. Find out what the children are thinking. Ask the children what they have heard and what they think has happened.
4. Talk about your feelings. If you look sad or are crying, explain why. Let children know that the unhappy feelings are in no way related to them, but that you are mourning the death of the loved one.
5. Reassure the children that they will be cared and provided for.
6. Talk about the person who died. Bring up fond memories and other memories too.
7. Talk about the procedures that surround the death, such as the wake, funeral, memorial service, cremation, burial, and visitation. Explain what will happen and give the child an opportunity to participate.
8. Read a children's book about death to the child.
9. Praise children when they are functioning well so they will feel more able and not so out-of-control. However, do not ask them to be grown up and take on adult responsibilities and behaviors.
10. A hug is always nice.
11. Make sure the children know what caused the death and that it is not related to anything they did, is not a punishment, and is not contagious. They will not catch it and neither will you. Assure them that you will be around for a long time.
12. Be prepared to repeat explanations and give the information again and again.