



How to Talk to Your Children About Death

Death is a touchy subject, but it is best to talk about it with your children when they are young, so it is not such a shock when someone close to them passes.

1 Don't lie to a child, you are just teaching them to lie. Talk straight -- using code words will only confuse them later on. Show them dead plants, flowers and birds. Give a brief summary of what death is and the "circle of life." Show them movies like the "Lion King," it's a little less traumatic than Bambi. "All Dogs go to Heaven" may work well too if your family believes in the afterlife, but be aware that it shows the main character returning from the dead. (Only show movies like this if your children are old enough to comprehend the fact that the dead won't come back.) Discuss with them what your beliefs are, and a good rule of thumb, if they are old enough to ask the question they are old enough to get an answer.

2 Use real-life situations. When they overfeed their goldfish, and you find him belly up, don't flush him down the toilet and run out to the store to buy another. First, get them ready: "Ashley, what happened to all Mr. Puddles's fish food?" Then will come the always expected "I don't know?" "I think you fed him too much and he went to fishy heaven."

3 Explain what has happened and why we need to do the right thing for Mr. Puddles or he can get sick. Feed him the right amount of food, keep his bowl neat and clean, keep him where the cat can't get to him and eat him.

4 Explain that accidents can happen; this also helps to teach kids that we need to be careful, and alert because of things called accidents they happen when we are not paying attention to things going on around us. Like playing ball in the bedroom and it knocks the fish bowl over.

5 Ask the child what they feel, and how the passing has affected him or her emotionally. Get them to express their feeling by drawing a picture. Children need to learn to show others the way they feel and it should be encouraged, and it will help them to deal with such things better when they are

older. Sometimes it hard to deal with grief, when you are not taught how.

Tips

Remember that children grieve differently than adults and grieve differently at different stages of their lives. A young child may hear bad news and return to play; although it seems to the adult that s/he didn't understand or has no feelings on the matter, the child may just need time to assimilate the information. S/he may come back and ask questions, talk, or cry later on. Older children and teens may feel that they had something to do with the death or that they could have prevented it in some ways. It is important to let the child know that there is nothing that s/he could have done to change the situation.

If children are taught how to deal with difficult situations, aren't they better prepared for life? Death is something we will all have to deal with someday. If they are given the right emotional equipment to deal with it, they will be healthier and happier when things happen. Resentment can even come from hiding our children from things such as this.

Answer questions honestly. Don't be afraid to tell a child you don't know, particularly when questions of philosophy or religion arise. Any lies you tell now, either to shield the child or because you want to reinforce a belief, will surely come to haunt you.

Children are a lot smarter than we give them credit for. Even before they start to speak, the wheels are turning.

Children who experience a death in the family may feel very insecure, worrying that other close relatives will die too. Shielding small children from seeing a terminally ill grandparent may make them think that healthy people could die overnight from cancer or whatever. Better that they should see Grandma very sick -- and it gives Grandma enjoyment too.

If your family (or the family of the deceased) follows religious or cultural traditions, explain what will happen in advance. If children will be going to a wake or funeral, let them know what they will see and experience.

A photograph of the deceased looking happy in previous times can be helpful, whether they were dog or human. This matters especially if a child has witnessed a traumatic accident -- reinforce the happy memories.

Tell your child that it happens to everyone for different kinds of reasons.

Allow your children to see you grieve, but not to lose control. It is important that

they learn that even adults are affected by death, but it is frightening for them to see the adults on whom they depend so overcome with grief that they can no longer function.

Tell your children that it is okay to still love the person that passed away. Tell your child that you will love them forever and that even though they won't be able to touch or see the person any more that it is okay to remember them and talk about them occasionally.

Warnings

Never tell your children that someone who died "went to sleep" or "went on a long trip". This will make them even more fearful for obvious reasons.

Resentment can come from *over* protecting our beloved children from life's issues, this may lead to rebellion and even in extreme cases *hatred*, so don't hide things from your children.

If you are not the person who teaches your child these life lessons, who will be?

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Talking to Children about Death Website Links

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2011/apr/30/barbara-want-husband-bereaved-children>

<http://www.hospicenet.org/html/parent.html>

<http://www.hospicenet.org/html/talking.html>

<http://www.ccascounseling.org/Telling%20Children%20About%20Death.htm>

<http://www.kidshealth.org.nz/helping-child-cope-death-parent>

http://www.webmd.com/palliative-care/talking_to_children_about_death

<http://thedianerehmsshow.org/shows/2012-03-05/death-parent>

<http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/death.html>

http://www.babycenter.com/0_how-to-talk-to-your-preschooler-about-death_65688.bc

<http://lifehacker.com/how-to-talk-to-your-kids-about-death-1517421198>