

COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT LOSS

- (1) **It may take reassurance from you on several occasions that it is OK to talk** about feelings or to ask questions, before your child takes you up on your offer. So try to be patient ...
 - (2) **Resist the temptation to “pump” children** about what they may be thinking.
 - (3) **Let yourself be led by your child**, and give them only the information they are asking for. Children know how to pace themselves, and s/he will come back with the next question when s/he is ready.
 - (4) **Children know how much they can bear.** After talking about difficult or sad things, children often abruptly change the subject or run off and play. This does not mean that they are heartless or that they don't want to talk to you -- just not now.
 - (5) **Acknowledging children's feelings of sadness, frustration, disappointment, anger gives them a sense of relief** and will not make those feelings harder. You will be helping to make sense of that mush of emotion and to decrease feelings of isolation by showing that you understand.
 - (6) **It can help to let the child know you have a lot of feelings too, but be careful** not to burden your child with your feelings or give them the idea that you cannot cope....Ask for help and support from your friends when you need shoring up.
 - (7) **If a child worries that someone close to them may die, try to give an truthful but cautious answer.** Say something like this: “We are all very healthy and we go for all our checkups. We expect to live until we are old, and you are all grown up”.
 - (8) **If you don't know how to answer one of the questions, it's fine to say “I don't know,** I'll have to ask someone” or “I'll have to think about that and get back to you”. Just make sure that you do give an answer as soon as you can.
 - (9) **Whenever you are able to, give your child choices and a lot of comfort.** Getting to grips with the idea of mortality is hard work for a child (for any of us!) and your child may seem more clingy and babyish for a while. Give your child the comfort s/he is asking for and say something like this, "You know, I'm guessing you have a lot of feelings since x died. Let's have lots of extra hugs and help each other feel better.
 - (10) **Give children the opportunity to say goodbye or express their sympathy**, whether in person or with a letter or a drawing.
 - (11) **A child's imagination often more frightening than the truth.** Using simple language, explain as much as you can.
 - (12) **When a child encounters the tragedy of death in his/her circle, the hardest and most confusing thing is to feel isolated, overlooked or left out by the grown-ups. By keeping communication open you can do a great deal to help your child come through this difficult experience.**
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