



Finding the Right Words- Guidelines on How to Talk to Children about Grief:

1. Talk openly about death.
 - a. You may feel that if you are quiet and “don’t bring it up” the child will forget the death and “move on”. This kind of protection doesn’t work for long. You may mean well, but by avoiding the loss the child is left feeling confused and alone.
 - b. Use simple, concrete language. Try not to use abstract or complex descriptions of death. It’s OK to use the “D” word- death and dying.
2. Share your feelings.
 - a. A part of healing is seeing that others feels the same way you do. Let the child see you grieve and mourn. Crying together is healing.
3. Be honest and direct.
 - a. Answer questions simply and directly. Children are often satisfied with an honest, short answer.
4. Avoid euphemisms.
 - a. Avoid using metaphors or analogies for death. For example, saying the person is “asleep” can cause a child to believe the dead person might live again. Or if you say, “It was God’s will,” they may feel angry at God for taking their loved one. They may even come to the conclusion that a higher power is “out to get them” and may fear death themselves. Keep in mind- children can cope with what they know. They cannot cope with what they have been “protected” from knowing.
5. Teach what you believe.
 - a. The topic will often go to what happens after death. The key is to teach what you believe. Share your belief system with your child. Don’t forget to ask them what they think happens after death.
6. Give inviting, loving, nonverbal cues.
 - a. For children, the language of comfort is often physical. Spend time sitting with them. Hugging, snuggling, and other forms of affection help them feel safe. Stay aware of your tone of voice and make eye contact. Have a relaxed, open face, which sends the message that whatever they say is OK.