

DEALING WITH DEATH AND LOSS

PARENT CONVERSATION GUIDE . . . for kids

Grief is hard. There's no way to outrun it, no way to fix it or get rid of it. It just keeps showing up. It's a very valid emotion, that's not weak, un-Christian, nor wrong. It's something we have to go through. Now imagine you're a kid again, trying to navigate through grief and all that comes with it. Imagine trying to explain to your teachers why mommy won't be able to show up to "meet the teacher night." Imagine spending Father's day or Christmas without a parent or loved one. Imagine the constant reminder as mommy's chair sits empty, and daddy has made another awful meal. Grief is hard.

Kids of all ages may have questions you don't know the answer to. They may face fear and confusion on many aspects when it comes to sickness and death. Our hope is to help you in the midst of conversation and help ease the fear and anxiety that may come with these difficult conversations.

WHAT TO DO

BE HONEST

It's OK to not have all the answers. Many kids have already experienced death from other sources, animals on the road, pets, etc. Use these times as a way to ease into the conversation.

Be straightforward with what happens to a person's body when they die. How their organs stop working and they no longer can think, act, or talk. Only answer the questions they have, and explain details that are essential and age appropriate.

Ask: "How does this make you feel?"
"Do you have any other questions?"

BE PATIENT & PRESENT

Kids do things in small bits at a time. From eating, to playing. They do the same for processing. Be patient and expect the same questions again and again as they process what it means.

Be there for your kids... they will express how they feel about it in a variety of different ways, just as we do. When they need you, turn off the TV, stop working, most things can wait. Don't act like you need to fix their emotion. Let them feel it, and be available in presence and proximity.

Ask: "Do you think there is something that is causing you to feel this way? If not, that's okay!"

GET IN COMMUNITY

It really does take a village. Your kid needs to know that there are many other people in their life that love them, care for them, and want to be with them.

Death can stir up very real feelings in kids. Fears of being alone or abandoned. Show them that they are not.

If you see that the death is severely affecting the well-being of the child, get in contact with a local family/childhood counselor.

Ask: "Do you want to talk to anyone else about this?"

WHAT NOT TO DO

DON'T USE IDIOMS

Kids don't think in the abstract. Using phrases like "they passed away" "They're gone" or "They're Asleep" can cause confusion and fear. Leading them to ask questions like... "When I get sick and go to sleep...will I die too?" Be crystal clear.

DON'T FAKE IT

Kids need to know the many emotions that may come. When you feel those emotions...don't feel like you have to hide them from your kids. Let them see you cry. Tell them why you're angry and upset. Speak openly and candidly about your grieving process. Find a healthy balance so they know you're grieving too, but be careful to remain age-appropriate.

DON'T LOSE HOPE

Use the opportunity to share the hope that comes from believing in Jesus. The hope that one day, everyone who believes in Jesus will be reunited.

Show them that life is going to go on. Go to football games or the arcade. Go get ice cream. Don't be afraid to laugh again.



**THE LORD IS CLOSE TO THE BROKENHEARTED; HE
RESCUES THOSE WHOSE SPIRITS ARE CRUSHED. -
PSALM 34:18 (NLT)**