

FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS - TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT ILLNESS

EXPRESSION AND APPROACH



Children need explanations to make sense of the world. This is how they understand what is happening around them. The same is true of illness, which is why it is a good idea to make your child familiar with the topic and to explain things well.

You can use the following suggestions and adapt these if required. Match your words to what your child can understand and what your child has already experienced. If you have any questions, ask us for help.

One way of explaining illness, which young children can also understand, is as follows:

"Sometimes a body stops working correctly. This can be because of something outside (like an accident) or inside (like an illness).

A body that is ill or injured is weaker than a body that is healthy.

There are minor injuries and illnesses that disappear after a bit of time and help, the body recovers and works correctly again.

But there are also major injuries and illnesses. For these, the body needs a lot of time, medicine and help, and it is not always certain that the body will recover and when it will work correctly again."



CHILDREN GENERALLY HAVE GOOD EXPERIENCES

Young children in particular apply the knowledge that they have about the illness the same way to every new situation in which someone is ill. Be sure to explain what is the same in the current situation and what is completely different.

Discuss, for example, whether the illness is contagious and describe how weak the body of the sick person is already. Describe who and what is being done so that the person gets better, or so that the sick person recovers as much as possible, e.g. to bear pain (rest, medicines, hospital staff, family and other people, or even medical equipment).

Offer the child something to do for the sick person, e.g. paint a picture, write a greeting or record a message.

If the issue of dying is a possibility, involve the children gradually and first explain that the body will get weaker and weaker first, and that less and less will work.

It is natural to want to protect children, but this can mean that they are suddenly confronted with the topic of dying too late and without being prepared. Allow your child to approach the topic slowly without fear - together with you. Read more in the "Finding the right words - Talking to children and dying and death" leaflet.

GET INFORMATION OR HELP



If you have questions about this topic or would like support, ask for help. Your local advice centre or our advice team can discuss with you what you are concerned about, what the next steps are, and how you can tackle these.

Sie erreichen uns Montag bis Freitag
zwischen 10.00 und 14.00 Uhr

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