

FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS - TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT DYING AND DEATH

EXPRESSION AND APPROACH



The understanding that children have of illness, dying and death varies from child to child. It depends on how much they can already understand, what their own experiences have been, and of course also what they have been told. Feel free to use the following suggestions to explain to your child all about death and what it means to be dead. Adapt the explanations if required, use your own words, and build from one step to the next, e.g.:

"When an injury or illness is so big that even time and medicine cannot help any more, the body becomes weaker and weaker.

Sometimes it takes a while, sometimes it happens quickly.

When the body is so weak that it cannot work any more, then eventually the heart stops beating.

When the heart stops beating, the person dies and is then dead."

This explanation might seem very technical or matter-of-fact. But some children find it helpful to categorise what is happening. Children can also find practical reassurance in the fact that they can feel their own heartbeat or that of their grown-ups.

Feelings also have a part to play, so talk about the fact that it can be sad when someone dies. If possible, at the same time explain that you know from experience, and be sure to mention that whoever is looking after the dying person does everything to ensure that he or she does not feel fear or pain.

If you have questions about the explanations or the right time to use them, contact us for support. If you need to talk about a serious disease, read the "Finding the right words - Talking to children about illness" leaflet.



BODY & SOUL

For many children, the most frightening thing about death is the feeling of losing a connection to a loved one. Explain to them what ends and what doesn't end when someone dies:

"People are made up of two parts - one part is their body, which is like a house. The other part lives inside the body for as long as their heart is beating. It is bright and clear like light, and many people call this a soul.

When the heart stops bearing and a person dies, the soul cannot live in their body anymore and so moves out. The body is taken to a final resting place like a cemetery and the soul always remains the part that we can keep contact with, if we want to."

This explanation helps children to maintain a connection to their loved one even after their death. It is also a good first step for explaining words like funeral and burial, and for thinking together about where the souls will live (in the sky, in a star, or another safe, beautiful imaginary place.

BE PRO-ACTIVE - GET INFORMATION OR HELP



For many children it is good if they can do something themselves, and often it can be something very small: Wish something good together with your child, or get an "I love you" or "Thinking of you" card and send it to the dying person including blowing a kiss. Perhaps light a candle together in the evenings.

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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