

# TALKING WITH KIDS ABOUT DEATH AND DYING

WORKSHOP  
GUIDE

Telling a child their parent is going to die gives them the opportunity to spend quality time with them.

Rehearse what you are going to say what, when and where and practice answering difficult questions

Choose a time when you feel ready, calm and prepared



Shared your news in stages using language they understand, be honest. Give them an accurate picture

Let your child take the lead as they may already know more than you realise

Hold hands and try to be physically close to them. It's OK to show your emotions

Remember, finding the right words and answers is not as important as being loving and open

Talking with your children provides a chance for them to show you their feelings

Make sure they know it is okay to ask questions, at any time. Many questions are asked at random times

## WHAT TO SAY

### TALK ABOUT WHAT THE DOCTORS HAVE SAID.

"The doctors have said that I'm ill and they will make sure I'm not in pain, but they can't make me better."

### TALK ABOUT CHANGES.

"The treatment the doctors have been giving me isn't working any more. The cancer has come back (or is getting worse). And as it gets worse, my body can't work like it's supposed and will stop working. When my body stops working, I will die."

Try to use the words "die" and "death" rather than "pass on" or "lost". "going to a better place" "going to sleep"

It is extremely common for children around 5 can become obsessed about death, regardless of their parent's health

Reassure them that the illness hasn't changed your love for them

Reassure them they did nothing to cause the illness

Reassure them they will always be loved and taken care of

Reassure them they will be told of any changes

IF WORDS FAIL SIMPLY HUG, SIT CLOSE, AND HOLD HANDS. THIS IS JUST AS IMPORTANT.

Give your child time to absorb what you've said. This may take a day or two.

Be sure to check in later to find out what your child really understood and be prepared to say it again.

Remind them that dying is not a deliberate choice and you do not want to leave them.

Don't expect your child to always want to talk. They usually will when ready, and often to people who are not immediate family.

Try not to make them feel embarrassed if they say or react 'inappropriately', e.g. if they try to blame others for what is happening. Some children ask questions that might sound strange or insensitive. For example: What's it like inside a coffin? What does a dead body really look like? Will I be a ghost when I die? It can be reassuring to a child if you discuss them, rather than dismissing them as silly. If your child gives no reaction, know that this reaction isn't unusual. Often the child is protecting themselves and needs some time to digest the information.

After difficult conversations try to allow time to do something with your children that they enjoy, like reading a story or playing a game with them.

## HELPING YOUR CHILD

Children need a safe place to express their emotions and grief, and different opportunities to do this. Being left alone with big feelings and thoughts can be very hard for them.

### STICK TO ROUTINES

It helps children feel secure, and it helps them manage their own expectations.

### ASK THEM TO HELP

can make them feel included and an important part of the family.

### SUPPORT NETWORK

Create a support network for your children that includes all the people in your inner circle of support as this helps children to see the number of people who are there for them. Find a group or an event run by the local hospice, or children's bereavement charity that connects children who have similar experiences.

### INFORM PEOPLE WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

Let schools and the wider community know, such as sports and club groups, church leaders etc so people are aware of the situation.

### PROVIDE AGE-APPROPRIATE INFORMATION

This will help them understand why you are sick, and give them a sense of control about the situation.

### TIME OUT

Give them time out from the illness situation and let them play, interact with their friends.

### A SAFE OUTLET FOR FEELINGS

Provide a safe space for them to express and share their feelings and worries.

Try not to shut their response down by getting angry yourself but remind them that they can talk to you any time about it.

### BUILD LASTING MEMORIES

Doing an activity together, for example building Lego, colouring in, or jigsaw puzzles, can create opportunities for sharing thoughts as children tend to talk when they do not feel under pressure to do so.

Start collecting or making things to go in a memory box. Share with your child stories about your own life.