

Explaining murder to a child is a delicate and challenging task that requires honesty, empathy, and age-appropriateness.

Here are suggestions to help you approach this sensitive topic:

1. Timing and setting

- Choose a calm moment and a comfortable, safe space for the conversation.
- Allow enough time for the questions and discussion, but do not force discussion.
- Ideally the discussion should occur with a trusted adult (parent, caregiver, relative) to provide extra support and reassurance to the child.

2. Initiate the conversation

- Start by gauging what the child already knows about the situation by asking open-ended questions like, "What have you heard about what happened?"
- Encourage, but do not force, the child to share their thoughts and feelings (don't do this in a group setting).

3. Be honest and clear

- Use simple and direct language, such as "died" or "dead," and avoid euphemisms that can confuse children, like "passed away" or "gone to sleep."
- Explain that the person's body stopped working and they can't see, hear, move, or talk anymore.
- Offer simple details about how the person died, but avoid overly graphic descriptions unless the child asks for more information.

4. Addressing complex questions

- Be prepared to answer questions about why someone would commit such an act. It's okay to admit that you don't know the full reasons, as the motives behind such actions are often complex and difficult for even adults to understand.
- If the perpetrator is unknown, acknowledge that and explain the efforts being made to find them.
- Validate the child's feelings, including fear, anger, sadness, confusion, and even numbness.
- Help them find healthy ways to express these emotions, such as drawing, playing, talking, writing, or engaging in physical activities.

5. Provide reassurance

- Reassure the child that they are safe and loved. The person who committed the crime cannot hurt anyone else.
- Emphasize that such events are very rare.
- Point out the various ways in which they are protected and all that adults do to keep them safe, both within the family and the wider community.
- Maintain routines and predictable schedules to provide a sense of stability and normalcy.

6. Resources and support

- Contact the school psychologist or counselor if the child appears to be struggling to cope.
- Utilize age-appropriate books (e.g., *A Terrible Thing Happened* by Margaret M. Holmes) and resources (school counselors and psychologists) that can help children understand and process their feelings.
- Help them to identify other trusted adults in their lives who they can talk to (teacher, relative, counselor, church leader).
- Remember: It's okay to be honest with children about difficult topics, but it's essential to do so in a way that is sensitive, reassuring, and tailored to their age and developmental stage.