



How to Talk to a Child About Death (Ages 3–18)

Supporting Children, Families, and Communities in Times of Need

Telling a child that someone has died is difficult, but using clear, honest, and age-appropriate language can help them process their loss. Below are guidelines and resources based on different age groups.

General Guidelines for Talking to a Child About Death

- **Be Honest & Use Clear Language**

Avoid euphemisms like "passed away" or "went to sleep." Instead, say, "They died."

- **Provide Age-Appropriate Information**

Tailor your explanation to their age and understanding.

- **Encourage Questions**

Allow them to express their feelings and ask anything on their mind.

- **Reassure & Offer Comfort**

Let them know they are safe and supported.

Ages 3–5 (Preschoolers & Early Childhood)

- **How to Talk to Them:**

- Use simple, concrete language: "Grandma died. That means her body stopped working, and we won't see her anymore."
- Expect repeated questions—they may not fully grasp the permanence of death.
- Reassure them they are safe and cared for.

- **Helpful Books:**

- *When Dinosaurs Die* by Laurie Krasny Brown – Simple, factual explanations about death.
- *I Miss You: A First Look at Death* by Pat Thomas – Gentle and straightforward explanations.

- **Activities:**

- Have them draw pictures of their loved one.
- Light a candle together and share a happy memory.

Ages 6–9 (Early Elementary)

- **How to Talk to Them:**

- They may understand death is permanent but still have magical thinking (e.g., "If I had behaved better, they wouldn't have died").
- Be honest but gentle: "She died because she was very sick, but it's not anyone's fault."
- Let them express feelings through play, art, or writing.

- **Helpful Books:**

- *The Memory Box: A Book About Grief* by Joanna Rowland – Encourages remembering loved ones.
- *The Goodbye Book* by Todd Parr – Simple and reassuring messages.

- **Activities:**

- Make a memory box filled with pictures and special objects.
- Write a letter to the person who died.

Ages 10–12 (Preteens)

- **How to Talk to Them:**

- They understand death is final but may struggle to express emotions.
- Give space to talk while reassuring them that all feelings are okay.
- Be ready for big emotions or avoidance—both are normal reactions.

- **Helpful Books:**

- *Tear Soup: A Recipe for Healing After Loss* by Pat Schwiebert – A comforting story about grieving.
- *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf* by Leo Buscaglia – Explains death through nature.

- **Activities:**

- Encourage journaling to express thoughts and emotions.
- Create a scrapbook of happy memories.

Ages 13–18 (Teens)

- **How to Talk to Them:**

- Teens may try to hide emotions or act as if they're "fine."
- Acknowledge their grief without forcing them to talk.
- Let them know support is available (friends, family, counselors).

- **Helpful Books:**

- *Straight Talk About Death for Teenagers* by Earl Grollman – Answers real questions teens have about grief.
- *You Are Not Alone: Teens Talk About Life After Loss* by Lynne Hughes – Stories from other grieving teens.

- **Activities:**

- Encourage writing or music as an outlet.
- Suggest volunteering or honoring their loved one's memory in a meaningful way.

Additional Resources

- The Dougy Center – www.dougy.org (grief support for children & teens)
- National Alliance for Children's Grief – www.childrengrieve.org

Suicide & Crisis Hotline Resources

Crisis Hotlines

- **Suicide and Crisis Hotline**

Dial 988 – call or text
Press 1 for **Veterans line**
Press 2 for **Spanish line** - [More Info](#)

- **Essential Community Service**

211 – Access local essential services - [More Info](#)

- **Crisis Text Line (CTL)**

Text 741741 for confidential support - [More Info](#)

- **National Hopeline Network**

Call 1-800-784-2433 - [More Info](#)

- **National Child Abuse Hotline**

Call 1-800-422-4453
Text CHILDHELP to 847411
Operates 24/7 in 170+ languages - [More Info](#)

- **Postpartum Depression**

Postpartum Support International: 1-800-944-4773 - [More Info](#)

National Maternal Mental Health Hotline: 1-833-TLC-MAMA - [More Info](#)

- **Infant Loss**

Bereavement Support Line: 1-800-221-7437 - [More Info](#)

- **Veterans Crisis Text Line**

Text 838255 - [More Info](#)

- **LGBTQ Support – The Trevor Project**

Text START to 678678

Call 1-866-488-7386

Live Chat: thetrevorproject.org/get-help

- **Young Adult / Teen**

NAMI Helpline:

Text: 62640

Call: 1-800-950-NAMI (6264)

Email: helpline@nami.org

- **Domestic Violence**

Call 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

Text START to 88788

Live Chat: thehotline.org

Additional Resources for Children's Grief

- **National Alliance for Children's Grief (NACG):** nacg.org

The NACG is a large resource meant to assist families of grieving children find local support.

- **Dougy Center:** dougy.org

The Dougy Center supports grieving children and families by providing extensive resources and support.

- **What's Your Grief?:** whatsyourgrief.com

A website focused on grief education, resources, and community support for those currently experiencing grief.

- **Kids Mental Health Foundation:**
<https://www.kidsmentalhealthfoundation.org/mental-health-resources/grief-and-trauma>

It provides guidance and resources to help adults support children in coping with grief, loss, and traumatic experiences.

Infant Loss

- **Rachel's Gift:** rachelsgift.org

Rachel's Gift is a bereavement center for parents who have experienced a miscarriage, stillbirth, or infant death.

- **Share Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support:** nationalshare.org

Share provides support to parents who have experienced the tragic death of a baby through miscarriage, stillbirth, or in the first few months of life.

Spanish-Speaking Grief Resources

- **Hispanic Family Counseling:** hispafam.com

Hispanic Family Counseling strives *"To be the leader in multidisciplinary mental health services for the Hispanic community."*

- **Dougy Center – Spanish Resources:** [duelo-apoyo-recursos-y-grupos](https://www.dougycenter.org/espanol/apoyo-y-recursos)

Spanish-language grief resources and support groups through the Dougy Center.

Grief from COVID-19

- **Hidden Pain:** hiddenpain.us

Hidden Pain supports children and families who had a loved one pass away due to COVID-19.

Support for Grieving Parents

- **The Compassionate Friends:** [compassionatefriends.org](https://www.compassionatefriends.org)

A non-profit organization designed to support families who have experienced the death of a child.

- **Grieving Dads: To the Brink and Back:** grievingdads.com

Grieving Dads provides support to fathers who have lost a child.

Non-Grief Related Community Resources

Resources for Families in Crisis

- **The Sharing Center – Families in Crisis:**
thesharingcenter.org/familiesincrisis

Provides assistance with rent, mortgage, and utility needs.

Resources for Those Experiencing Homelessness

- **The Sharing Center – The Oasis:**
thesharingcenter.org/addressinghomelessness

The Oasis is a resource for individuals and families experiencing homelessness and hunger.

Food Assistance

- **The Sharing Center – Food Pantry:** thesharingcenter.org/preventinghunger

Seminole County's largest free food pantry.

- **Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida:** feedhopenow.org

Their Food Locator helps families find the nearest distribution center.

- **Find Help – Food Resources:** findhelp.org/food/food-pantry--orlando-fl

A directory to locate food banks and food assistance programs across organizations.

Resources for New Legal Guardians

- **Florida Courts – Guardianship Information:** [flcourts.gov Guardianship](http://flcourts.gov/Guardianship)

Informative page explaining what a guardian is, different types of guardianship, required forms, and resources related to family court.

- **Florida Bar – Guardianship Pamphlet:** [floridabar.org Guardianship Pamphlet](http://floridabar.org/GuardianshipPamphlet)

Consumer guidance on guardianship, including who can be a guardian and legal considerations.

*****This information is intended to help you better understand the topic of legal guardianship. It is not legal advice. For help with your individual circumstances, please contact a qualified legal professional.*****

Resources for Supporting Someone Who is Grieving

Articles

- **Ways to Support Someone Who is Grieving** – Harvard Health Publishing
[Read Article](#)
- **Helping Someone Who's Grieving** – HelpGuide
[Read Article](#)

Toolkits

- **The Dougy Center – Supporters of Grievers**

The Dougy Center provides multiple toolkits and resources for those supporting individuals who are grieving.

[Dougy Center Resources](#)

Practical Tips

- **Good Grief: 10 Tips for Supporting Someone Who is Grieving (PDF)**

[Download PDF](#)