

# Let's talk about...

## Conversations with Children About Death and Dying

Talking to kids and teens about death is hard, but it is important to include them. When you talk, try to be open, honest, and clear.

### Tips to keep in mind:

- **Ask what they know:** Kids often know more than we think. You can ask, “What do you already know about what is happening?”
- **Prepare them for tough news:** Let them know that you have something difficult to share.
- **Review background information:** If they don't already know, this is a good time to review any information that can help children understand how the person got to this point (accident, illness, etc.).
- **Explain the medical side:** Tell them the medical team used things like medicine or surgery, but the person's body was too sick or hurt to get better.
- **Use clear words:** Use real words like “died” or “dead.” Phrases like “went to sleep” or “passed away,” should be avoided as they can confuse kids.
- **Explain what death means:** Tell them the body has “stopped working.” It can't do things anymore, like breathe, eat, or talk.



- **Show your feelings:** It is okay for kids to see how you are feeling. It shows them that it's okay for them to share their feelings, too.
- **Encourage questions:** Kids might ask questions or show how they feel through drawing, music, or playing.
- **Read a book together:** Reading a children's book about death can help them understand and keep the conversation going.
- **Get help:** You are not alone. Reach out to family, hospital staff, or other resources for support.

For more information or to connect with a Child Life Specialist, please visit: <http://ucdavis.health/childlife>