



1. Start the conversation.

Don't wait for children to bring it up. When you start the discussion, you are letting them know it is okay to talk about the subject of death.

2. Normalize emotions.

Let the child know that everyone is sad and it is okay if talking causes tears. Reassure the child that "we" will all get through this and tears are a normal response to sadness.

3. Establish a base of information.

Find out what your child knows or has heard. Listen carefully and be aware of issues the child avoids. Ask what they have heard from friends, seen on television or overheard. Let the child know you will give him information.

4. Correct any mistaken perceptions.

Sometimes in overhearing, children get wrong information. They may make leaps of assumptions from a few facts to what they may have seen on television. Get the details of what they know and correct wrong information.

5. Follow the child's lead.

Some children want lots of information and details immediately. Others may process a few pieces of information at a time and come back to ask for more information later. Don't force too much information at one time and be available when they are ready to talk again.

6. Name the feelings.

The feelings of grief can be so overwhelming that children may not be able to find the words. Give them words that will help. Examples: Sadness in my heart; worry; fear; feeling like I can't swallow; afraid to go to sleep; worried about the future.

7. Encourage the child to ask questions ---now and later.

Let him know that you will be honest, but share developmentally appropriate information. Some details are too much, especially for young children, and can cause traumatic imagery that will do more harm. It is okay to say, "I don't think you are old enough for those details right now, but when you are old enough I will tell you."

8. Be honest.

Share age-appropriate information and facts but do NOT make up a story about what happened. Children overhear conversations, learn information at school, and can find information on the Internet. They need to know the truth from trusted adults. If they are too young for details, tell them you will give them more information when they are old enough.

9. It is okay to say, "I don't know."

Sometimes we don't have all the answers about what happened or why. Assure the child that you will let him/her know more facts as they become available.

10. Be prepared to revisit the conversation and respond to the same questions again.

Shocking news is difficult to process all at once. Hearing the details over and over helps make the unimaginable real.