



Dying Matters

**Talking
with children
about dying**

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Why it matters

We can't protect children from death. They see it all the time. When a cat drops a mouse on the doorstep. When they lose a grandparent. On TV.

But one thing we can do is speak with children about death. Having an open conversation and showing we're comfortable talking about it can stop children feeling scared, confused, alone or even guilty after someone dies. And knowing about things like funerals, burials and cremations before someone close to them dies can make it easier to cope.



Helping children to talk about dying

There are lots of ways to help children think and speak about dying. It doesn't have to be a big, planned conversation. It can help just to let children know you're there if they have questions.

Try to listen carefully and let children lead the conversation. You could explain that death is a part of life, and maybe use some examples from nature. Children of every age know about things like leaves falling from trees and flowers blooming and dying.

Lots of things that happen in life can help with speaking about death too. If someone close to you dies, you could ask if the child wants to come to the funeral. It can help to let them know what to expect beforehand. Memory boxes can help too, and give the child a chance to talk about what they remember and how they're feeling.

If you have a pet that dies, that can be another good way to start a conversation. You could ask if the child wants to be there when you bury it, and maybe plant some flowers.

And there are lots of books to help you talk with children about dying. There's a list on the Winston's Wish website
[winstonswish.org/suggested-reading-list](https://www.winstonswish.org/suggested-reading-list)

Tips for talking about death

You might find children ask practical questions rather than talking about how they feel. Things like ‘What’s it like inside a coffin?’ and ‘What does a dead body really look like?’ These are totally normal questions (and plenty of adults want to know the answers too). Try to talk them through together, rather than dismissing them as silly.

It’s also a good idea to:

Listen carefully so you know exactly what the child means

If you don’t know the answer, say so, and don’t worry if you think you’ve not answered a question very well. It’s more important to the child that you pay attention and take them seriously.

Try not to look uncomfortable

It can make a child feel like death isn’t really something they should talk about. Try and stick to the point, too – regular, short conversations about death might help more than one long one.

Be clear and direct in your language

Phrases like ‘passed away’ can be more confusing than helpful. Children also often take words very literally, so it’s a good idea to check they’ve understood what you mean.

Don’t be afraid to get emotional

If a child sees that you’re upset, it’s another way to show them that their own grief is normal and nothing to be ashamed of.

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With a gift to Hospice UK, you can remember a loved one whilst helping to ensure everyone gets the care they need at the end of their life.

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- Leave a gift in your Will and enable the legacy of someone special to live on.

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Thank you.



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