



TALKING TO CHILDREN WHEN SOMEONE IS DYING OR DIES

All children will have questions about the virus but for those who are bereaved, have a loved one who is ill or are bereaved during this time feelings and anxieties can be heightened. Sadly, the coronavirus restrictions put further complications on normal methods of support and the grieving process, with social distancing isolating children from other family members, friends and networks that would normally have provided this. Households and individuals will need to find time to remember, time to cry, but also time to hug, smile and do happy things together.

**Remember our FREE telephone helpline is still open as normal and continues to operate
Monday-Friday on 02380 647550**

(please leave a message if we are unable to answer your call and we will get back to you as soon as possible)

Some practical guidance:

- ★ Be clear and honest with children that their special person is sadly dying. Be honest and use the words dying, and death. Be prepared to explain what dead means (there are some useful books and literature online * see our reading list for suggestions)
- ★ Explain what is happening and how their loved one is being cared for. Using age appropriate language, answering their questions and concerns – be led by the child. If they are asking questions, they are trying to understand and process and what is happening. Do not be afraid to use the words Coronavirus, Cancer etc..., but do be prepared to explain these words to them (again there are some great books to help with this:
<https://axelscheffler.com/books-for-older-children/coronavirus>
<https://shop.winstonswish.org/products/the-secret-c>)
- ★ Be prepared to repeat the same information as children may need lots of opportunities to hear and process what they are being told. These are difficult times for everyone, be patient and know it's ok not to have all the answers.

- ★ Acknowledge it is difficult in these circumstances, and this is not how anyone wants to say goodbye. Provide reassurance that their special person knows they are loved and understands why no one can visit. Explore different ways you can let them know you are thinking of them.
- ★ Be creative, and use technology for children to talk/video and share messages with their loved ones (if possible).
- ★ Children can draw pictures, make cards, write poems etc... or send a treasured item to their loved one. They may be able to stand outside at a distance or through a window if permitted.
- ★ As restrictions reduce, they may be able to visit to say a final goodbye. However, it is important to prepare a child for this as they will be unlikely to be able to touch their loved one and will need protective equipment. This could be very frightening for them. If they cannot attend but someone else is, take photos (for when they are ready) and pass on their love and hugs.
- ★ Reassure them whatever they choose to do is fine.
- ★ If possible, record any conversations, screen shots of their special person to keep as a digital memory box.
- ★ Keep children updated, and prepared (if possible) when their special person becomes gravely ill.
- ★ Help them to find their own special way to say goodbye. There is no right or wrong way, just what feels right to them.
- ★ They may wish to light a candle, play music, look at photos, talk about their loved one – encourage all of this. They may also be angry and distressed, be patient with them as this is all normal.
- ★ Do not be afraid to cry in front of them, it helps them to learn how to grieve in a healthy way. Crying together will help them accept what has happened and give them permission to express their feelings in a healthy way. Hugs at home are still allowed!
- ★ Reassure them they are safe, healthy, and cared for. Although we cannot promise that no one else we love will die, we are hopeful, and doing all we are being asked, to keep our loved ones safe.



SUPPORTING CHILDREN WHEN THEIR SPECIAL PERSON DIES

Some practical guidance:

- ★ If the cause of death was Coronavirus a child may have additional feelings of worry (that someone else will die of the virus) and/or guilt that it was their fault they caught the virus. They may need extra reassurance and support. It maybe helpful to explain about the virus, how they can help protect themselves and others and how scientists around the world are working hard to find a vaccination.
- ★ Where possible, let children be part of the funeral arrangements, they may choose the music, flowers, write a poem or message to be read at the service. Anything that allows them to feel connected and involved in the process. Although due to social distancing restrictions they may not be able to attend.
- ★ They may want to pick something that can be laid beside the coffin, something that has a meaning for them like a toy, a letter, a paper flower, a poem, or a drawing.
- ★ If possible, set up a 'virtual wake' so children can honor the life of the person by sharing special memories and stories about the person who has died.
- ★ Many places are arranging live streaming so you can follow the same order of service from home. The children may want to prepare and dress as if they were attending in person. However, they will need to be prepared in advance of what will happen on the day and encouraged but not made to attend.
- ★ For adults who can attend, maybe bringing home mementos (if possible) i.e. a flower, pebble, booklet and taking photos during the service are all things which can be shared with children afterwards to help them feel involved.
- ★ Suggest a day or time for friends and family to light a candle in memory of the person or do something the children would like to do to remember their loved one.

- ★ Respect their views, allow them to express their feelings in their own way, some might want to do this privately others may want to share.
- ★ Acknowledge there is no right way to grieve, they are doing the best they can. If they do not want to engage with some of the memorials - that is ok.
- ★ Involve children in planning when restrictions are lifted (and they will) a way for family and friends to come together and remember their special person.
- ★ Let them know when restrictions lift they will be able to attend a Simon Says support group where they can meet other children who have been bereaved before AND during the restrictions imposed as a result of Coronavirus. They will be able to meet other children who may have similar stories of their own to tell.
- ★ Register with Simon Says and ask to receive our support @ home newsletters which are full of support, activities and advice for children, young people and adults.

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