

Talking with Children about Traumatic Death

Below are some strategies for talking to children about difficult deaths, particularly those that may be mentioned widely in the media.

Your child may be trying to make sense of this information by themselves and may be feeling worried or scared.

You can help in the following ways:

1

KEEP CALM

When parents feel anxious children can notice and begin to feel stressed too. If needed, take some time for yourself or talk to another adult about your distress before talking to your child.

ASK YOUR CHILD WHAT THEY HAVE HEARD

Ask your child to tell you what they have heard about the traumatic death and correct any misinformation. As parents and carers, we instinctively want to protect children from things that might frighten them; however not talking about something can actually make children more scared.

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CHECK WHAT SUPPORT THEY NEED

Ask them how they are feeling and offer support in the ways that they choose. Perhaps they need reassurance that they are safe; or the comfort of a blanket or their favourite food; maybe they need the distraction of watching a movie together; some prefer to do something physically active.

CREATE A CALM ENVIRONMENT

Try to limit your child's exposure to news reports, social media and discuss your worries outside your child's earshot.

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KEEP TO THE SAME ROUTINES

This creates a sense of stability and predictability and helps to return children to a sense of safety. Keep the days structured with consistent mealtimes, playtime, bedtime etc.

ANSWER QUESTIONS HONESTLY

This is an opportunity to talk openly to your child.

- Answer your child's questions in language they will understand, with a level of information appropriate to your child's age.
- Avoid sharing too much information, as this can be overwhelming.
- Let your child know that they can ask you any question. It is ok not to know all the answers, just tell your child you will let them know when you have more information.

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