

## Explaining Death to a Child

Explaining death to a child can be confusing and difficult. For children, trying to understand death can feel like a jigsaw puzzle. For adults, it is hard to find the words to explain what happened in terms children can understand. We know it is important to use concrete language when answering questions of how and why a person died. It helps to deliver these messages in small bits, knowing that children will ask you further questions when they need more pieces to complete the puzzle. Remember to open and honest while following their lead. It is okay to say, "I don't know." The information below does not cover all a child's questions. If you need additional support, please contact us.

### Explaining dying, death and dead

- Death happens when the body gets so old, sick or hurt that it stops working.
- Everything that lives dies at some time. Plants die, animals die, and people die. Death is a natural part of life.
- When a person died, their body stops working. Their brain cannot send or receive messages, their heart stops beating, their lungs stop working and their body cannot feel or move.
- A dead person might look like they are sleeping, but that are not sleeping and will not wake up.
  - When a person dies, they cannot come back to life.

### Explaining causes of death

- It is important to remember that words or thoughts never cause someone to die.
- Death happens by choice or not by choice:
  - Murder is when someone *chooses* to end another person's life.
  - Cancer is *not* a choice.
  - Suicide is when someone *chooses* to end their own life.
  - A heart attack is *not* a choice.
- Sometimes medicine and treatment can help a person to get better. Other times, medicine and treatment does not help, and they die.
- Most things that people die from are not contagious, meaning you cannot catch them.
  - The flu, a cold and chicken pox are contagious.
  - Cancer, heart attacks and depression are not contagious.



## **Explaining specific types of death**

**Aneurysm/Stroke:** The pathways that carry blood get weak or clogged and develop a bubble. If the bubble pops or the clog stops the blood from moving, it damages the brain and the body stops working.

**Cancer:** A person's body is made up of cells. Cancer is when the cells do not grow right, and they make the body sick. Sometimes cancer causes a lump or bump to grow, and sometime cancer can make the blood, bones or other parts of the body so sick that the body stops working.

**Heart attack:** A person's heart is the engine that moves blood through their body. When the heart stops working, it cannot move the blood through their body.

**Kidney failure:** The kidneys wash the blood in the body. If a person's kidneys stop working, the blood gets dirty and poisons their body.

**Murder/Homicide:** Murder is when somebody does something that makes a person's body stop working.

**Overdose:** If people take too much medicine, drugs, or alcohol, it can make their body stop working. For some people, a sickness in their brain called addiction makes them want more and more. Medicine is okay, as long as you take what the doctor tells you to take.

**Suicide:** When there is a sickness in a person's brain (e.g., depression, addiction, mental illness), the sickness can make the person feel so sad and hopeless that they do not want to live anymore. When they feel this way, some people decide to do something to make their own body stop working.

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