



Communicating with Your Child or Youth About Grief

At the *Children and Youth Grief Network*, we understand that grief can significantly impact the communication between caregivers and children/youth. We also know that keeping lines of communication open is an important part of grief that helps everyone process their feelings and concerns. We encourage you to continue communicating with your children/youth by sharing your thoughts and feelings with them and allowing them to share theirs with you.



- Be honest with your children. Provide truthful information that is age-appropriate. Use clear, concrete language and avoid euphemisms for death like “passed away”, “gone”, “lost”. These terms can confuse a child. Instead, use words like dying, died, or dead.
- Children who are grieving will worry about others in their life dying, especially other important caregivers. Reassure your child in conversation that you are trying to stay healthy, and be safe, but there will always be someone to care for them. Avoid making promises that you cannot keep, such as declaring that the special person will return home healthy, a timeline for when the person will return, or that you will not die.
- Often children will ask the same questions over and over again. This is done in an attempt to understand complex or abstract ideas. Be patient if you need to repeat yourself.
- Invite your child/youth to ask questions. Clarify what they are asking and explore what they already know by using open-ended questions. If you do not have an answer to a question, be honest with them and tell them you do not know but will do your best to find the answer either on your own or together.
- Occasionally asking things like, “*Do you want to talk about how you are feeling today?*” gives them a chance to express their feelings. Sometimes the best way to help is to just listen.
- Try to end conversations with prompts like, “*Do you understand?*” or “*Is there something else you’d like to know?*” to ensure they have absorbed the information. Continue to check in to see if further questions have surfaced.
- Model that it is okay to express your own feelings. It is important to talk about your grief because it normalizes and validates their feelings.
- Continue to talk about the person who died. Not talking about them can give the impression that you have forgotten about them or have moved on, which can be distressing for a child/youth. They may also fear upsetting you if they talk about the person, so letting them know you are comfortable doing so is important.



The Children and Youth Grief Network is a collaboration of 11 agencies and organizations across Peel, Halton & The GTA. Visit our website to learn more about our partners and how we can help: www.childrenandyouthgriefnetwork.com Or connect with us on social media: https://twitter.com/c_grief
<https://www.facebook.com/childrenandyouthgriefnetwork/>
<https://www.instagram.com/childrenyouthgriefnetwork/>



Communicating with Your Child or Youth About Grief

- Be sensitive to their wishes for privacy. Let your child know you are there for them when they want to talk. Never force your child to talk when you want them to. Children and teens may need more time to process death or grief before they are able to find the words to talk about it .
- Before a special event or activity, talk about what is likely to happen and ask whether there is anything that they are nervous about or uncomfortable with.
- Certain days of the year (e.g. holidays, birthdays, anniversaries) may be particularly difficult for you and your child/youth; try asking questions or sharing memories of the person at this time. Asking them to participate in memorial activities may be helpful and can start a conversation.
- Be aware of how your words and fears may influence your child. Remember, children listen carefully to adult conversation, even when it appears they are distracted or unable to understand. Have adult conversations away from your children.



*** Please see other Tip Sheets on *Recognizing a Grieving Child or Teen, Parenting When Your Child or Teen is Grieving* and *The Importance of Self-Care in Helping Your Child or Youth Grieve*.**

© 2018 Content was created by and is the sole property of the partners of the Children and Youth Grief Network and cannot be copied, distributed, or republished without written permission.



The Children and Youth Grief Network is a collaboration of 11 agencies and organizations across Peel, Halton & The GTA. Visit our website to learn more about our partners and how we can help: www.childrenandyouthgriefnetwork.com Or connect with us on social media: https://twitter.com/c_grief
<https://www.facebook.com/childrenandyouthgriefnetwork/>
<https://www.instagram.com/childrenandyouthgriefnetwork/>

Communicating with Your Child or Youth About Grief

Our Network & Contact Information

**When this tip sheet was posted, all the information and links below were accurate.*



www.hearthousehospice.com
www.facebook.com/Hearthousehospice
www.twitter.com/HeartHouseHosp



www.bethellhospice.org
www.twitter.com/BethellHospice
<https://www.facebook.com/BethellHospiceFoundation/>



www.dlhospice.org/
www.facebook.com/The-Dorothy-LeyHospice-123474981148199/
www.twitter.com/dorothy_ley



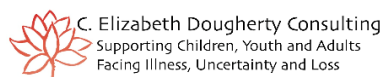
www.drjaychildrensgriefcentre.ca
www.twitter.com/DrJayCentre
www.facebook.com/drjaychildrensgriefcentre/



www.grievingchildrenlighthouse.org
<https://www.facebook.com/Lighthouseprogramforgrievingchildren/>



www.andreawarnick.com
www.twitter.com/andreawarnick1
www.facebook.com/andrea.warnick.consulting



www.cedoughertyconsulting.org
www.twitter.com/CEDoughertyMSW
www.facebook.com/C.ElizabethDoughertyConsulting/



www.familyedcentre.org
www.facebook.com/familyedcentre/



www.thecarpenterhospice.com
www.twitter.com/carpenterhosp
www.facebook.com/TheCarpenterHospice



www.bereavedfamilies.ca



The Children and Youth Grief Network is a collaboration of 11 agencies and organizations across Peel, Halton & The GTA. Visit our website to learn more about our partners and how we can help: www.childrenandyouthgriefnetwork.com Or connect with us on social media: https://twitter.com/c_grief
<https://www.facebook.com/childrenandyouthgriefnetwork/>
<https://www.instagram.com/childrenyouthgriefnetwork/>