

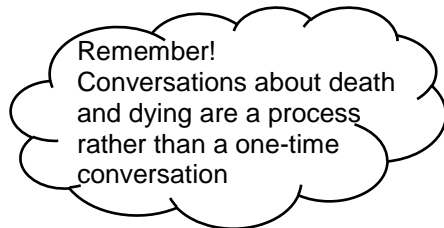
Discussing Parental Death and Dying with Children (DPDDC) Tool

General approach:

- ⇒ Prepare yourself:
 - What are your beliefs and attitudes towards death?
 - Whose support will you need during these conversations?

- ⇒ Prepare the information:
 - Who needs to be part of the conversations?
 - What is their level of understanding of the illness?
 - Is there additional information that you need? Where can you get this information?

- ⇒ Prepare the location:
 - Ensure a comfortable location for the child



Keep in mind:

- Parents tend to underestimate their child's distress
- Younger children process information in brief, unplanned conversations
- Conversations with young children are sometimes in the context of play, therefore a quiet location is not always suitable or necessary

What to say:

- Avoid euphemisms such as:
 - "passed away"
 - "lost" or "gone"
 - "went to sleep"
- Say the words "death, died, dead"
- It's OK to say "I don't know"
- Parents can express their feelings to their children, for example:
 - "I'm feeling sad"
 - "I need a hug"
- Brief but heartfelt sentiments may help children who are grieving, for example:
 - "I love you"
 - "You are loved"
 - "I am here for you"

What to do:

- Keep a routine as much as possible
- Reassure children often that they are loved, and that the illness isn't their fault
- Reassure children that the disease is not contagious
- Explain who will care for them after the ill-parent has died
- Explore how they feel
- Help them name their feelings
- Offer the choice for short, scheduled visits to the hospital
- Children like to be included for funerals, for example:
 - Leaving a drawing or letter with the parent

For more information:

- ⇒ www.kidsgrief.ca
- ⇒ www.deuil-jeunesse.com
- ⇒ www.lamaisondespetitstournesols.com

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Please note that this is not a validated tool. Further research is required.

Ages 0-2 years:

- ⇒ May not understand the concept of death; however, they are sensitive to changes within the home
- ⇒ May need more physical touch or reassurance
- ⇒ Try to keep a stable routine
- ⇒ Consider using the correct words like “cancer” or “heart disease”

Ages 3-5 years:

- ⇒ Difficulty understanding the permanence of death (e.g., death is temporary and reversible)
- ⇒ Communication is mostly through play and fantasy
- ⇒ Repeatedly ask the same questions to gain understanding
- ⇒ Separation with the ill-parent may be a source of stress; offering to plan a short visit may be beneficial

Ages 6-8 years:

- ⇒ Starts to understand that death is permanent and universal (e.g., it will happen to everyone, including myself)
- ⇒ Both magical and logical thinking which leads to misunderstanding cause and effect
- ⇒ Tend to blame themselves, even if this might not make sense

Ages 9-11 years:

- ⇒ Understand that death is final, irreversible, universal and has a cause
- ⇒ More advanced logical thinking but cannot extrapolate from insufficient information or “read between the lines”
- ⇒ Prefer to learn incrementally; ask how much more information they want
- ⇒ Can be distressed from physical changes due to the disease or the treatments, so they may benefit from explanations



When things are getting worse: Use “very, very, very”

Parent: Daddy has cancer, and he is very sick. The doctors are trying to make him better with medicine.

Parent: The medicine is not working, and daddy is very, very sick, but he is still your daddy, and he loves you very much.

Parent: Daddy is very, very, very sick. His body will stop working and he will die.

Addressing questions: When will Grandma be coming back?

Child: I want Grandma to come to my birthday party!

Parent: I would like Grandma to be there, too. But her body stopped working and she died.

Day-to-day: The “Teachable Moments”

Teachable moments are day-to-day events that may be an opportunity to explore death with your child. For example, a child who has found a dead bird on the sidewalk.

Child: Why is the bird not moving?

Parent: That’s because the bird’s body stopped working and he died. He can’t hear, sing, or move.

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