



Speaking about Death to Young Children

- Listen.
- Be patient. Often the same questions are asked repeatedly. Each time is an opportunity to remind the child that they are heard, their questions are important and that they matter.
- Be concrete. Use concrete words and terms. Explain death in a factual way. *When a person dies, their body stops working. Their heart stops beating, they don't breathe, talk, walk or eat. We will not see them anymore.*
 - Avoid vague language. *"He went to sleep" or "We lost this person"*.
- Be reassuring. Kids sometimes fear that the cause of death is contagious. Or that they caused it. They are also sometimes hypervigilant about the surviving people in their families. It is important to listen to their fears before responding.
- Be aware of mood, behavioral and cognitive changes.
- Know that sometimes we see regression in behavior and presentation.
- Keep the R.I.C.E. model in mind.
 - RESPECT
 - INFORM
 - CONNECT
 - EMPOWER
- Take care of yourself. Supporting a grieving child is not easy, especially when you are grieving yourself. Keeping it simple and getting support can help.

Jennifer Wiles, LMHC, BC-DMT.

HEARTplay Director

jwiles@gsccommunitycare.org. Please do not reprint without permission.

