



How to Talk About DEATH by SUICIDE with Your Child

Talking with a child about death by suicide is hard.

It is difficult to know what to tell a child or teen after someone has ended their life, but you can offer comfort and help them begin to understand.

Create a calm and quiet setting. Give them your full attention and let them know you are there to listen and answer any questions.

Have age-appropriate conversations. Be truthful while keeping in mind your child's age and emotional development. It is unnecessary and overwhelming to give specific details about the death.

- **Children 8 and under may not fully understand what suicide means.** Explain that sometimes a person who feels sad all the time is afraid things won't ever change and can't think of how to get help to feel better. Talk with them about things that can help you feel better when you are sad or upset.
- **Children 8 to 12 can understand more complex ideas.** You can gently explain that the person was in extreme emotional pain, felt overwhelmed, and couldn't think of how to get help to feel better. As with a younger child, talk with them about things that can help when you feel upset or overwhelmed.
- **Teens 13 and older can often handle more thoughtful, direct explanations.** For instance, "sometimes suicide happens when a person feels hopeless and trapped in extreme emotional pain. They might think things can never get better, even if that isn't true. If you ever feel that way, please know things can get better and there is help. You can talk to me or reach out to other people you trust like a teacher, friend, or call a helpline like 988."

Offer reassurance. Children might fear the death was their fault or worry someone else they love may die. Emphasize that nothing they did, said or thought is to blame. Also tell them if they are ever worried about someone they care about, they can talk to you any time.

Validate their feelings. Let them know whatever they are feeling is okay. Help them understand that feeling sad, angry, or confused is a normal part of grief, and they can talk about those feelings whenever they need to.

Provide ongoing support. People who lose someone to suicide often experience complex and intense grief. They may be at higher risk for depression, post-traumatic stress, suicidal thoughts, self-harm, and prolonged grief. When supporting a child or teen through this kind of loss, it's important to be sensitive to these risks. Thoughtful, honest conversations can help them feel understood and less alone.

Watch for red flags. Every child will grieve differently. Pay attention to changes in mood, behavior, sleep, or eating patterns. Consider involving a therapist who specializes in grief and/or trauma if your child is struggling.

Don't hesitate to reach out to a professional if your child exhibits persistent regressive behaviors, nightmares, refusal to go to school or activities. You know your child best. If you have questions or concerns, please reach out to JCS at **410-466-9200**.

For more information on grief support, contact **Donna Kane, Grief Clinician**
Jewish COMMUNITY SERVICES
at dkane@jcsbaltimore.org or **410-843-7394**.

To learn more about grief support and resources or to access video programs for children, visit jcsbalt.org/grief.



No matter where you live, if you are concerned about yourself or someone you love, you can access 24/7 emotional support.

Call, text 988 or visit 988lifeline.org/chat to chat with a caring counselor.