

TALKING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT SUICIDE



**LION
HEART**
CAMP FOR KIDS

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD AFTER THE DEATH OF AN IMPORTANT PERSON BY SUICIDE

When a child's Important Person dies by suicide, it can feel overwhelming to know what to say. Children may have many questions and big feelings or they may seem quiet or confused. As adults, we want to protect them, but the best support we can give is being honest, present, and available. Children grieve differently to adults, and their understanding of suicide depends on their age and development.

BE HONEST & OPEN – IN AGE-APPROPRIATE WAYS

Children need simple, truthful explanations. Avoid saying things like “gone to sleep” or “lost.”

Say things like:

- “[Important Person’s Name] died. They ended their own life. Their brain was very, very unwell, and they didn’t know how to get help.”
- Use the words “died by suicide”.
- It’s important children aren’t left confused or imagining something worse.
- Let your child lead with questions.
- Answer only what they ask and be okay with saying, “I don’t know”.
- Reassure them it’s never a child’s fault when someone dies by suicide.
- If you feel emotional, it’s okay. Being real shows children it’s safe to share feelings.

HELP THEM FEEL SAFE & SECURE

- After a suicide, children may worry if other people in their life might die too.
- Let them know you and other trusted adults are there to look after them.
- Stick to normal routines as much as possible, this helps children feel secure.
- Continue doing enjoyable activities. It’s okay for children to laugh and play, even while grieving.

LIMIT MEDIA EXPOSURE

- Repeated exposure to news or conversations about the suicide can be confusing or distressing for children.
- Turn off news updates and gently redirect adult conversations.
- Create quiet time for connection: read, draw, cuddle, or go outside together.
- Talk to older children and teens about what they’ve seen or read online. Gently correct any misinformation and help them process what they’ve come across.

SUPPORT THROUGH CONNECTION, NOT PRESSURE

- Not all children want to talk. That’s okay. Art, play, stories and movement can help children express themselves.
- Let them know you’re available any time to talk or just be with them.
- Encourage them to name other trusted adults they can turn to.

REACH OUT TO YOUR SUPPORT NETWORK

- You don’t have to do this alone. Speak with teachers, school counsellors, and mental health professionals.
- Let your child’s school know what’s happened and what your child needs.
- Being part of community or spiritual groups can provide comfort.

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COMMON QUESTIONS CHILDREN ASK ABOUT SUICIDE & HOW TO RESPOND

Children are naturally curious, and after the suicide of an Important Person, they may ask direct, surprising or repetitive questions. Their brains are working hard to understand something very complex. These questions are not a sign of disrespect, they're part of how children make sense of what's happened. Here are some common questions and gentle, honest ways to respond:

"What is suicide?"

Suicide is when someone ends their own life. It usually means they were feeling very, very sad or overwhelmed, and their brain was not working the way it normally does. They didn't know how to get the help they needed.

"Can I catch it?"

No, suicide isn't something you can catch, like a cold. But feelings like sadness or worry are part of being human, and there are always people who can help us feel better.

"Why did they do it?"

That's a really big question, and it's okay not to fully understand it. What we do know is that their brain was very unwell and they were in pain inside. It wasn't because of anything you did or didn't do.

"Will someone else die too?"

No, suicide isn't something you can catch, like a cold. But feelings like sadness or worry are part of being human, and there are always people who can help us feel better.

"Is it my fault?"

No, it's never a child's fault when someone dies. The person who died had a lot of pain inside and it had nothing to do with you.

"Where did they go?"

This answer will vary depending on your family's beliefs. Keep it simple. Their body stopped working and they died. Different people believe different things about what happens after death. What's most important is that they knew they were loved.

REMEMBER

- Children don't need all the answers. They need your presence, your honesty, and love.
- It's okay for children to laugh, play and feel joy, even while grieving.
- Your child may revisit the death and ask new questions as they grow, this is part of healthy grieving.
- You don't have to have all the right words. Just being there makes a difference.
- Every child's grief is unique. There's no right or wrong way for them to feel.
- Take care of yourself, too. Children are supported best when their caregivers feel supported.
- You are not alone. Help is available from health professionals, community organisations, and from Lionheart.

WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

If you notice ongoing distress or changes in your child, they may need extra support.

Look for:

- Trouble sleeping or eating
- Withdrawing or being unusually clingy
- Big outbursts or risk-taking behaviour
- Constant questions or talking about death
- Difficulty going to school or separating from you

Support is available.

Speak to your GP, a child psychologist, or child's school.

You can also contact:

- Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800
- Lifeline (for adults): 13 11 14
- Lionheart Camp for Kids: 0481 199 758