

## Adolescence (13 to 17)

## Helping children in their grief

A few guidelines

Like adults, teenagers understand death and everything that it entails. However, they will often react to it differently.

Teenagers might be away from home frequently, eat poorly or sleep little. It is also possible that they might show aggressiveness toward family members or adopt an attitude of indifference.

### Teenagers need...

- honest and open discussion;
- the presence of a friend or some other person in whom they can confide.

### It is best to avoid...

- forcing the hand of a teenager who refuses to confide in you.

Be attentive to children's questions; encourage them to share their fears.

Do not put off telling them about the death. If possible, announce the news to all the family members at the same time.

Tell children the truth, in language they will understand.

So far as possible, avoid removing them from their environment.

Invite them to take part in the funeral rites (going to the funeral parlour, attending the service, visits to the cemetery, memorial mass).

Share your sorrow with them, so they do not feel isolated or abnormal when they feel it themselves.

Encourage them to express their emotions in words, but also in play, drawing, music or writing.

A presentation of your local funeral cooperative



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How do I tell you?

## Explaining death to children

*A humane  
approach*



## Death:

# A reality learned from a young age

## Very young children (under age 2)

## School age (6 to 12)



You have just lost a loved one. This new bereavement will certainly be a difficult trial, both for you and for your family, young and old.

If you have children, you may tend to want to shield them from the truth, thinking to protect them from grief.

While this is a normal reflex, you do children no service by keeping them in the dark: quite the contrary.

When they sense that their family is suffering, children realize that something serious has happened. And that can make them feel very insecure.

Telling children the truth, using language that is adapted to their age, will help them through this difficult time.

At this age, children do not understand death. But they have a very strong sense of the distress of the people around them. They might cry more than usual, or refuse to sleep or eat.

Children at this age need...

- continuity in their habits;
- to be comforted, soothed, cuddled.

It is best to avoid...

- removing them from their environment;
- keeping them apart from their parents or the surviving parent.

## Preschool age (3 to 5)

By age 3, children have some understanding of death. However they think of it as a long sleep and believe that the deceased person will come back.

Children at this age might think that the death that has just occurred is their fault. They might also be afraid that other people dear to them could also disappear.

Children at this age need...

- to know they will not be abandoned;
- to understand that this death is not their fault;
- to hear the truth, in words they can understand.

It is best to avoid...

- telling them that the deceased person has gone on a trip or is resting (they might become afraid of going to sleep or leaving on a trip);
- any excessive disruption of their daily routine.

By age 5 or 6, children understand that the dead person will never be coming back. Around 9, they also know that they too will die one day. They are big enough to understand what is happening and to attend the funeral, if they wish.

At this age, children could display anger toward the deceased person who has abandoned them. They might also look for someone to blame, or else feel that they themselves are responsible for the death.

Children at this age need...

- honest answers to their questions;
- lots of support in their daily lives and at school;
- to be reassured that they will not be abandoned.

It is best to avoid...

- keeping them shielded from all the events surrounding the death.