

Talking with Children about Suicide and Violent Death

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Download and print out this helpful tip card for parents, teachers and support professionals illustrating how to talk with kids about traumatic death.

For more information on this topic, Melissa and Lynn have also created a video exploring why truth telling is so important. [Visit that video here.](#)

[Download .pdf Tip Card](#)



TALKING WITH CHILDREN AND TEENS ABOUT SUICIDE AND VIOLENT DEATHS

3-6 YEAR OLDS

Suicide: They made their body stop working.

Homicide: Someone hurt his body so bad that his body stopped working and he died.

How To Help: Play, physical activity, creative outlets, maintain routines and structure, reassure them that they are safe and loved

Normal Grief Responses: Regressive behaviors, repetitive questions/play, crying, clinginess, increase in fears, acting out behaviors, unclear about finality of death

7-11 YEAR OLDS

Suicide: Your person caused their own death. This is called suicide.

Homicide: Someone killed your dad. He is no longer living.

How To Help: Play, physical activity, creative outlets, maintain routines and structure, answer questions truthfully, address issues around fears and safety, validate their experience without judgement

Normal Grief Responses: Crying, shocked, confused, scared, angry, sad, acting out, regression, isolation, declining grades, curious, can feel stigma, is clear about finality of death

12-17 YEAR OLDS

Suicide: They died by suicide or, he killed himself.

Homicide: She was murdered.

How To Help: Give them space, connect them with peers who have experienced a death, maintain routines, disclose details when asked, be a good role model, ask them what they need

Normal Grief Responses: Angry, confused, scared, acting out, promiscuous behaviors, isolation, tearful, declining grades, can feel stigma, depressive like symptoms, changes in sleeping, eating and moods

Be In A Neutral, Safe Setting

Have Some Of Their Favorite Adults Present

Use Age Appropriate Language

Deliver Information in Bite-Size Pieces

Be Prepared for Mixed Emotions

Give Physical And Creative Outlets

It's Ok To Talk About The Person Who Died