# TALKING WITH CHILDREN AND TEENS ABOUT SUICIDE AND VIOLENT DEATHS

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

#### 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 Regressive behaviors, repetitive questions/play, Responses: crying, clinginess, increase in fears, acting out

behaviors, unclear about finality of death

#### 7-11 YEAR OLDS

Suicide: Your person ended their life.
This is called suicide.

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

How To Play, physical activity, creative outlets, maintain Help: routines and structure, answer questions

truthfully, address issues around fears and safety, validate their experience without judgement

Normal Grief Crying, shocked, confused, scared, angry, sad, acting Responses: out, regression, isolation, declining grades, curious,

out, regression, isolation, declining grades, curious, can feel stigma, is clear about finality of death

#### 12-17 YEAR OLDS

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Suicide: They died from suicide.

Homicide: She was murdered.

How To Help:

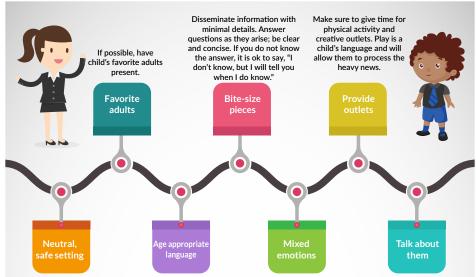
Give them space, connect them with peers who have experienced a death, maintain routines, disclose details when asked, be a good role

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



Deliver information in a quiet, familiar setting such as a living room or kitchen. Avoid euphemisms such as "passed away," "went to sleep," or "went away". These terms are confusing to a young child. Instead, use words like "died, "dead" or killed." Keep verbiage simple and easy to understand.

Be prepared for a variety of responses such as, shocked, confused, indifferent, angry, sad, anxious, stoic, withdrawn, and isolative. Children may wish to return to regular activities right away (i.e., school, sports, social engagement, peer interaction) while others will want a respite; allow them to decide

It's ok to talk about the person who died. Share memories but be respectful of child's desire to share/receive memories or stories. Make sure you aren't using your child as your sounding board for your grief work. Share truthfully, as a child is ready to hear more.

## EXPLAINING SUICIDE TO CHILDREN

"It is difficult to understand why someone would want to end his or her life on purpose. But what we know is that just like people can get sick in their bodies, such as pain in their stomach, people can also get sick in their brain. This can cause them to feel yery sad and lonely for a long time.

When people feel like this, they sometimes think about hurting themselves or even killing themselves. That is what your mom did. This is called suicide. Do you have any questions?"





### EXPLAINING HOMICIDE TO CHILDREN

"There are people in this world who might make a decision to hurt someone else on purpose. Someone killed your dad and he is no longer alive. It can be difficult to understand why someone would want to cause others harm like this. This is called homicide. Do you have any questions?



Source created by:



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