



Talking to Children About a Loved One in Hospice

A Simple Guide for Families

When someone you love is dying, talking with children about it can feel overwhelming. This guide offers gentle, honest ways to support children during this difficult time.

Be Honest, Even When It's Hard

- Kids often sense more than we realize—it's best to gently tell the truth.
- It's okay to say, "We don't know exactly when she will die."
- Let them know it's normal to feel sad, confused, or even angry.
- Reassure them: They will be safe and cared for.

Use Clear, Simple Words

- Speak in ways that match the child's age and experience.
- Avoid confusing phrases like "going to sleep" or "passing away."
- Say "dying" or "he's very sick and won't get better."
- Only answer what they ask—don't overload them with too much at once and give time to process the information.

Encourage Shared Feelings

- Let them know it's okay to cry, to be upset, or to not know what to feel.
- Show that adults have feelings too.
- "It's okay to be sad. I cried earlier, and now I'm making lunch. We can feel things and still take care of each other."
- Create a safe space to talk, draw, or express in other ways.

You're Not Alone

- Ask for help—from family, friends, hospice staff, or grief counselors.
- There are people who want to support both you and your child.

Start the Conversation Gently

Open the door for honest, two-way conversations.

Use simple language. For example: "Your loved one has been very sick, and the medicine isn't helping anymore. The doctors have done everything they can."

Explain unfamiliar words:

- **Hospice** helps care for very sick people and supports the family.
- A **disease** is an illness that makes the body not work right.
- **Death** means the body stops working completely.

Let Them Choose How to be Involved

- Don't force visits or participation in caregiving.
- Invite them to help or be present in ways that feel comfortable.
- Some children may want to say goodbye; others may not—and that's okay.

Keep Routines, When Possible

- Stick to daily routines as much as you can—it helps kids feel secure.
- If changes are coming, explain them gently and ahead of time.
- Let kids make small choices to help them feel in control.

Prepare Them for What to Expect

Describe things they might see, like:

- Medical equipment (wheelchairs, oxygen tanks)
- Physical changes (hair loss, weakness)
- Unfamiliar smells or hospital settings
- This helps reduce fear and confusion.

It's Not a Secret

- Let teachers, coaches, and other trusted adults know what's going on.
- Encourage kids to talk to people they trust, like friends or counselors.
- Build a support network that includes family, school, and community.

Every child is different. Trust your instincts, listen with love, and keep the door open for questions and feelings.