

Explaining Loss to Our Children

(Rabbi Earl Grollman shared these thoughts regarding children and loss)

1. Children are the forgotten population when death occurs.
2. Children know a great deal about death and dying – more than we realize – especially from TV and other news media. By high school graduation, the typical child will have seen 18,000 deaths on television.
3. Most often children have no one to talk about death with, to share feelings – they need to talk about death – they need us to *listen!*
4. So, talk about death – share feelings about it – when the time is unstressed – before death is an issue immediately before them – when you're not caught up in death and loss and grieving yourself.
5. What do we tell the child? *Ask what the child wants to know. Ask what the child thinks.* Try to determine what is the child's real need. Let them articulate their feelings.
6. **Be aware of words you use:**
 - “passed away” – what does that mean???
 - “expired” – driver's licenses expire!
 - “gone on a journey” – what happens if you go on a journey Mommy?
 - “fallen asleep” – child may develop fear of naps or bedtime
 - “got sick and died” – what happens if I get sick? Will I die?
7. Dead – dying – died – the “ultimate” 4 letter words, but they must be spoken.
8. When talking about death with a child, try to sit on the floor with them, or with them very close – with your arm around them, or hold the child on your lap.
9. For the small child, death is a game. *Bank-bang, you're dead.* Ok, now get up. It's reversible. The child does not understand sadness of others.
10. Children often grieve *longer* than adults – because as they continue to grow, they realize that deaths are not reversible. So sadness is more sporadic. Grief might come out in regressive behavior (reverting to babyhood) or in physical reactions.
11. When a death occurs, tell the child about it in a loving, close atmosphere – one that is safe and secure.
12. What is mentionable is manageable!!
13. Talk about what happened in straight forward language on the child's level. Be honest. Again, ask what the child wants to know. Listen to words the child uses. What is the child's need?
14. Do not exclude the child. They understand inclusion better than exclusion.
15. Allow the child to see your feelings – your sadness - let the child know it's okay to grieve – it's okay to talk about it – about the person who has died – they were a part of your life and you loved them – don't stop memories.

16. Reassure the child that the person didn't die because the child was bad. This can be a child's feeling.