



# Talking with Children about Suicide

Talking with children about suicide can be intimidating. However, it is important for children to know the truth first from someone close to them, preferably the parent or guardian. If they happen to find out from someone else, which happens in today's social media world, it has the potential to damage trust between the child and guardian.

Help children know that it is okay to talk about this topic with trusted adults. Children learn very quickly what topics make adults uncomfortable or are off-limits. When we let children know it is okay to talk about these tough things, we can find out what they may be struggling with and how to best support them and clear up misconceptions.

It is important that children know that their thoughts or actions did not cause the person to die and that the person still loved their family and friends. Remind them it is not their fault. Children often internalize feelings of guilt thinking and may blame themselves for the decision of others.

In addition, please note that age and development is important to take into consideration when talking with children about the topic of suicide.

Below are some ideas on how to explain suicide to children.

- First, be honest, heartfelt, factual, and brief. Less is more.
- Ask if the child has any questions.
- Let the child lead the conversation and answer their questions one at a time. They may surprise you in what they want to know. If you give information they don't need you may end up providing more information than they can process.
- It is ok to answer with "I don't know." As the adult or parent you do not have to have all the answers.
- Periodically check back in with children to see if they have new questions.

Some ideas on how to explain suicide.

- “His brain was very sick and he died by suicide.”
- “The brain is an organ of the body and her brain was sick and she died by suicide.”
- “The person who died by suicide had an illness in his/her brain.”
- “...this sickness in his/her brain made them feel like they could not live anymore, he/she died by suicide.”
- “Someone dies by suicide when their emotional and mental pain becomes greater than their ability to cope with it.”

Finally we listen. Suicide can bring up a lot of questions. These questions may never be answered. The most important thing to do, once you tell the child what happened, is to support them emotionally. Let them know that any emotion is okay and you are in this together. Remind them they are safe, loved, and it is not their fault.