



WHEN KIDS ASK...



“What if I want to be with my person?”

Why kids might ask:

While this may not be a question kids ask directly, the thought of wanting to be with the person who died is a very common one. It's hard to be separated from someone we love, and a natural response to missing someone is to try to figure out how you can be with them again. Especially if this is the first major loss a kid has experienced, they are used to the sadness and loneliness of missing someone being a problem that can be solved. If they miss a grandparent or a friend who lives far away, they can call them, video chat, plan a visit, or send a card. The finality of death is a difficult concept to grasp, and many children find the belief that their person still exists in a place they cannot visit to be confusing.

This can also be a scary question to hear as a parent or caregiver. It's important to distinguish between the possible meanings of this question.

The first possibility, especially in the case of a very young child, is that they do not understand that death is permanent. Through early elementary school ages, kids struggle with the concept that death is not reversible, as their thinking is very concrete. In that case, kids may simply be communicating that they miss the person who died and want to spend time with them, without any thought about what the question implies.



The next possibility is that a kid is expressing deep sadness and desire to connect with the person who died. They may understand that it isn't possible to both stay alive and see their person, but they miss the person and are not focused on logical thought. This is similar to a kid saying that they never want to leave summer camp, or want to adopt a friend. The emotion is real, important, and worth time and validation, but they are not suggesting any real action. There may also be a specific reason the kid is saying this in the moment, such as wanting to tell their person about something, apologize for something, or ask an important question.

Another possible reason a kid might say they want to be with their person is that they are struggling with coping with this new reality. They want things to go back to the way they were, and one way for that to happen in their mind is to be with the person who died. Grief is hard to live with, and kids may simply want a break from the intensity of what they are feeling. The idea of being with the person, and not being in their present reality, sounds easier than learning to live with their person's absence. Kids often don't have the language to be able to say things like, "I don't want to die, but I don't want to feel like this anymore," and it can come out in some confusing ways.

Finally, a kid may be struggling with thoughts of suicide. They may see death as the way to stop what they are feeling, or may truly feel that they would rather be with their person than stay alive. If this is the case, it's important to get help from someone who is trained to assess suicidal thoughts and plan for how to keep the person safe, such as a mental health professional or crisis line.

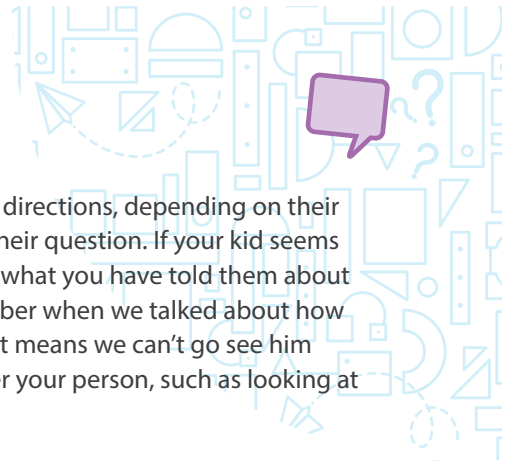
...➤ **What the Bible says:**



The biblical texts make it clear that God is the one who determines the length of our lives. God created us, and God knows what is best for us. God understands what our lives will hold and walks with us when we are grieving the loss of someone we love. God not only sees our pain but also shares in our sorrow. Scripture encourages us to receive comfort from God and to trust that God's purposes for our lives are good and loving.

The biblical texts also make clear that taking our own lives is not an escape from pain or a way to be reunited with someone who has died. It is true that death is not the final word because

God has the power to raise the dead. It is also true that death is not a way to interact with others who died. Many passages teach that the dead are not able to speak or interact. Those who are alive are able to remember and carry on the memory of those who died. God promises to bring resurrection at the end of time, just before the final judgment. God alone is the judge and will decide what happens in the end. Rather than waiting for that final moment, we can speak with God now and seek guidance for the path ahead. In this way, Scripture reminds us that God's plan to reunite God's people unfolds according to God's timing, not our own.



…➤ **What you could discuss with your kid:**

- The conversation you have with your kid could go several directions, depending on their age and understanding, as well as the reasoning behind their question. If your kid seems confused about the permanency of death, you can revisit what you have told them about what death means, saying something like “Do you remember when we talked about how Dad died, and that means his body stopped working? That means we can’t go see him and he can’t visit us.” You can talk about ways to remember your person, such as looking at pictures, or telling stories about them.
- If your kid seems to understand what death means, validating their emotion is the next step. You could say something like “You really wish you could see Mom, and you’re missing her a lot right now. What would you want to talk to her about?”
- It may also be helpful to acknowledge the changes your kid is going through and what is hard about them. For example, “When your brother was here, he took you to school every day and you had so much fun blasting the radio. It was more fun to ride to school with him, and it feels like if you could go see him that would make everything better.”
- If you are concerned that your kid is thinking about harming themselves, it’s important to be direct and ask questions. You could say something like, “Sometimes when people are really sad and missing someone, they think about wanting to die too, or how they could die. Is that something you’re thinking about? Part of my job as your caregiver is to keep you safe. That includes getting help to deal with these feelings in safe ways.”

…➤ What you could do:



Share memories of your person: When we are missing people, it can help to think and talk about what it was like to be with them. Kids are likely to have different memories than adults, and theirs may be more limited if they did not have as much time with the person. Look at pictures, share memories, and consider sharing stories your kid may not remember. You can also talk about what you wish you could say to or do with the person. Your kid may want to write a letter to your person, or create art about what they miss.

Talk about changes that have happened since the person's death: If your kid is struggling with new routines and frequent reminders of their person's absence, it can help to acknowledge that. Ask your kid when they miss the person the most, or when things feel strange to them.

Look for new supports: Since your person isn't able to do the things they used to do, your kid may want others to help fill those gaps, especially as they adjust to new routines. Talk about the roles your person played, who is doing those jobs now, and if there are other ways your kid would like to be supported by others. Kids may have ideas about what pattern or traditions they would like to maintain or change, or who could be present for them.

…➤ Where you could look for more information:

- ✘ **Verses about God being sovereign over life and death:** Deuteronomy 32:39 • 1 Samuel 2:6 • Job 1:21 and 14:5 • Psalms 139:16 and 104:29-30 • Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 • Isaiah 46:10 • Ezekiel 37 • Daniel 5:23 • James 4:14-15
- ✘ **God being near to those who are grieving:** Isaiah 15, 41, 43, 57 • Psalms 34 and 147 • Lamentations 3 • Matthew 5 • John 10 and 14 • Romans 8 • 2 Corinthians 1
- ✘ **Verses about God valuing life:** Genesis 1:27 and 9:6 • Isaiah 49:15-16 • Psalm 139:13-14 • Proverbs 16:9 • Matthew 10:29-31 • Luke 12:6-7 • John 10:10 • 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
- ✘ **Chapters about resurrection at the end of time:** Job 19 • Isaiah 26 • Daniel 7 and 12 • John 5 and 11 • Acts 24 • 1 Corinthians 15 • 1 Thessalonians 4 • Revelation 20-21
- ✘ **Verses about the dead not interacting:** Psalms 6:5, 30:9, 88:10, and 115:17 • Ecclesiastes 9:5-10 • Isaiah 38:18 • Job 7:9-10