



WHEN KIDS ASK...

“What should I tell people?”

Why kids might ask:

When someone important has died, family schedules and regular activities were likely disrupted. Kids may have been out of school for a while, missed other activities they typically participate in, or have spent more time with family and less time with friends. Kids may anticipate going back to a regular schedule and routine and feel worried or uncertain about how to handle interaction with others, particularly if the death occurred over the summer or another long break. Kids may also be unsure about what information others in their life already have, how much they should tell, and how much they want others to know.

To some extent, the worries and expectations of what and how to tell others depend on age and development. Preschoolers are likely to talk about major events in the same way that they discuss small events or family business. Your child may tell strangers in the grocery store what happened to their person, or bring the topic up without context. The loss may also be reflected in their play, as this is the first language children use to process what happens to them. Elementary kids are more likely to understand that not everyone knows what happened to their person, and that details are information to share with safe people. As they get older, kids understand more about how others perceive them, and tend to want to avoid feeling different from others, and may feel shame or embarrassment, regardless of what happened to their person. Elementary kids might not want others to know that their person died, or may only want specific people to be aware. The nature of the death

also plays an important role in these conversations. If the person was ill for a while, or their death was very publicized, others may already be aware of what happened. Consider the circumstances of the death, and who in your kid's life is likely to know or has been informed already.

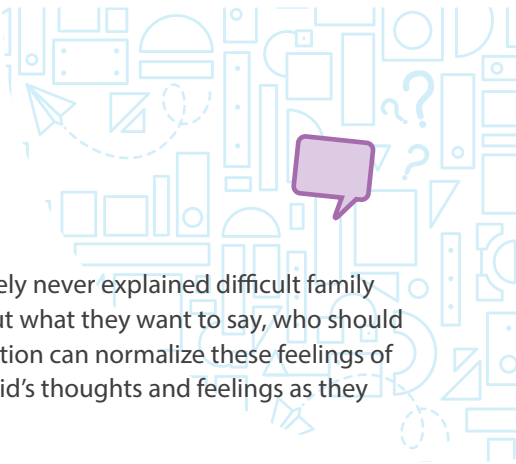
Kids might also struggle with how much information to give other people in their lives. They may have a hard time talking about what happened when their person died, or they may be more open than you feel comfortable with. These conversations often become more complex when a death was caused by violence, suicide, or another emotionally charged event. If others in their life have been hesitant to give them information, kids might perceive the death or cause of death as a secret, and not know how to talk about it. They may also recognize that adults are uncomfortable talking about death, regardless of the cause, and believe that they should not talk about their person with others. Kids may worry about upsetting the people around them, or simply follow suit when others avoid the topic of their person's death.



...➤ **What the Bible says:**

The Bible presents grieving not as a private weakness but as a shared practice within the people of God. The Bible actually encourages lamenting with others. This is the blessing that Jesus indicates is available for those who mourn. Jesus teaches, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Mourning with others can allow God and others to offer comfort. Mourning is not treated as failure but as a pathway where God meets people with mercy and hope. Early Christian communities practiced bearing one another's burdens, praying through suffering together, and comforting one another in times of loss. Lamenting together in community creates space for honesty, compassion, and expectation. Sharing with others can bring honesty about pain, compassion toward one another, and expectation that God listens and responds.

Throughout Scripture, grief is often expressed in community settings. The Psalms include many communal laments where the whole group brings pain, confusion, and loss before God together. The prophets call communities to mourn injustice and tragedy side by side, reminding them that shared sorrow can also build shared faith. In the New Testament, believers are instructed to "weep with those who weep," showing that entering another person's grief is a spiritual act of love, not something to avoid or fix too quickly. The Bible thus encourages us to share with others as we are able so that we can find the support that we need in those moments.



....> What you could discuss with your kid:

- **Acknowledge that this is complicated.** Your kid has likely never explained difficult family circumstances to others before, and may be unsure about what they want to say, who should know, and how much detail to give. Initiating a conversation can normalize these feelings of uncertainty, as well as help you know more about your kid's thoughts and feelings as they think about resuming normal routines.
- **Who does your kid want to tell?** Kids may have strong feelings about who should get this information, as well as who should not be told. Your family can make choices about who to give information to. Consider asking your kid if they want their teacher, classmates, teammates, or other people they interact with regularly to know why they have been gone. Talk about who should tell them – does your kid want to bring it up themselves, be present but not say what happened, or have someone else, such as their teacher or coach, tell others?
- **How much should others know?** Depending on your kid's age, development, and personality, there is a huge range of how much information your kid might have or want others to have. With a very young child, you may be giving more information to adults in their life. For example, you might tell your child that dad's heart got very sick and he died, while you may tell his preschool teacher that his dad had a sudden heart attack, spent several days in the hospital, then died, and your child was able to visit him. Older children are likely to have a more complex understanding of what occurred, and may have stronger feelings about how much to share with others. If the cause of death was more complicated or stigmatized, they may feel unsure how much to share, or may have a different idea than you do about what others should know.
- **What if others ask questions they don't want to answer?** Some people may ask more intrusive questions than your kid is comfortable with, especially peers who may be curious and unaware of social norms around talking about death. It's a good idea to talk with your kid about how they want to respond if they are uncomfortable giving the information they are asked for, or don't know the answers. It's okay for your kid to say they don't want to talk about what happened, to change the subject, or to give a vague response to an intrusive question. Practice how to do this kindly and firmly with your kid, and consider what other kids might ask as well as typical adult responses to loss.

...➤ What you could do:

Make a hard day plan: Create a plan with your kid for how to handle days at school, time with friends, or times at church that feel harder to handle. Think about what resources are available and who could be helpful to your kid if they are having a hard time. Are they able to go to their school counselor, let their teacher know they are struggling in a less verbal way, or ask for a break from their coach? Is there a signal they want to work out with you or other adults to say that they need help in a conversation, or need to leave soon? Consider if your kid needs a way to check in with you during a school day or a long activity, especially if they seem worried about safety following the death. Ask your kid what situations they think might be difficult, as well as bringing up others you may be concerned about. You can't plan for every scenario, but having a basic plan gives your kid a better sense of control and recognition that they have choices.

Practice telling others what they want them to know: Anyone who has grieved a loss knows that sometimes people say unhelpful, or simply strange, things. This can be even more true for kids who are interacting with others their own age, who may not have encountered loss before. At the same time, kids can be unbelievably kind and supportive in ways you may not expect. Work with your kid to create scripts for what they want to tell adults who are important to them, friends, and peers or other acquaintances. For very small children, this might be just a few words, while older children may want to give more information. Practice what they could do or say if they don't want to give much information, or if others ask questions they may not be comfortable with. Look for available adults or people they trust who may be able to help, and practice asking for help.

...➤ Where you could look for more information:

- ✘ **Passages where people share their grief and others join them:** Genesis 33, 37, 45, 46, 50 • Numbers 20 • Deuteronomy 34 • Judges 11 • 2 Samuel 1 • Jeremiah 31 • Ezekiel 9 • Job 2 • Luke 7 • John 11 • Acts 20 • Revelation 5
- ✘ **Poems where grief is shared with a community:** Leviticus 10 • Numbers 14 • Judges 5 • Jeremiah 8 and 9 • Joel 1 and 2 • Amos 5 • Job 16 • Psalm 6, 22, 38, 42, 77 • Ecclesiastes 4 • Lamentations 1 • Zechariah 12 • Revelation 18
- ✘ **Passages with benefits of sharing:** Deuteronomy 28 • Isaiah 15 • Jeremiah 13 and 14 • Matthew 5 • Ephesians 4 • 1 Thessalonians 4
- ✘ **Passages encouraging a sharing of grief with others:** Exodus 32 • Judges 9 • Isaiah 1 and 40 • Micah 1 • Matthew 11 • Romans 12 • 1 Corinthians 12 • Galatians 6 • Hebrews 10 • James 5

