

# Helping children through bereavement

## How do I talk to my children or grandchildren about the coronavirus?

Your child may be worried by what they see, read or hear in the news or online regarding coronavirus.

It's good to talk to your child honestly but calmly about what is happening. It can be tempting to try to shield children from difficulties but this has been found not to be helpful.

Children look to adults in their life for comfort when they are distressed, and will take a lead on how to view things from you.

Remember, you don't have to have all the answers, but it is better to have a gentle conversation to reassure your child that they can talk to you so they don't feel like they're on their own.

The main thing is to be led by their questions and thoughts as each child will have a different level of understanding and concern about the situation.

It's important to respond to their questions and concerns, so that anxieties don't build up. You could start by asking them what they think is going on, if their friends are talking about it and what they are saying, and if they have any questions.



# Helping children through bereavement

Older children may have already read or seen a lot of information about coronavirus in the news, on social media or online. If they are feeling overwhelmed by what they are hearing or reading, encourage them to acknowledge what they are finding difficult. You could help them limit the amount of times they check the news, and encourage them to get information from reputable websites. The Government website is the most up-to-date and reliable source of information, and the NHS common questions has useful information if they are worried about symptoms or family members.

## Suggestions for parents/carers

Try not to shield your child from the news, which is going to be nearly impossible at the moment. The amount of information on the internet about coronavirus can be overwhelming, so ask your child about what they're seeing or hearing online and think together about reliable sources of information.

Talk to your child about what's going on. Find out how they're feeling and what they're thinking about, let them know it is okay to feel scared or unsure, and reassure them that this will pass.



# Helping children through bereavement

Try to answer their questions in an age appropriate manner. Remember, you do not need to know all the answers, but talking can help them feel calm.

Your child may be worried about becoming ill themselves. Reassure your child that if they do you feel ill you will look after them.

Your child might be concerned about who will look after you if you catch the virus. Let them know the kind of support you have as an adult so that they don't feel they need to worry about you.

Give some practical tips to your child about how they can look after themselves. For example, show them how to wash their hands properly, and remind them when they should be doing it.

Keep as many regular routines as possible, so that your child feels safe and that things are stable.

Spend time doing a positive activity with your child (such as reading, playing, painting or cooking) to help reassure them and reduce their anxiety. This is also a great way of providing a space for them to talk through their concerns, without having a 'big chat'.



# Helping children through bereavement

Be aware that your child may want more close contact with you at this time and feel anxious about separation. Try to provide this support whenever possible.

Remember to look after yourself too. If you yourself are feeling worried, or anxious about coronavirus, talk to someone you trust who can listen and support you.

If you are also experiencing a terminal illness or bereavement within the family this brings with it more challenges for you and your children. Talking to a child about someone close to them dying can be difficult. You may worry that you will frighten them or say the wrong thing. But it's important to be open and to answer any questions they have as honestly as you can. What children imagine can be far worse than the reality.

Here are some suggestions that may help you talk about death:

- When they ask a question, you could start by asking: “What do you think?” Then you can build your answer on their understanding of what's happened.
- Be honest. Use language that is appropriate to their age but is clear.
- Use plain language. Saying someone has died is clearer than using terms such as “gone to sleep.” This can make



# Helping children through bereavement

the child worry about sleeping or not understand that their loved one won't wake up.

- Try to avoid telling the child not to worry or be sad. It's normal that they should get attached to people. And, like adults, they might find it hard to control their feelings. You might find that the child doesn't seem to be sad. Sometimes they need time to absorb what's happened.
- Encourage questions. Children can be curious and ask the same questions over again.
- This may be distressing for you but it is normal for them as they look for reassurance and process the information.
- Reassure them that the person has not died because of something the child has done; this is a common worry for children. Perhaps give a simple explanation e.g. their heart stopped working,
- Don't try to hide your sadness, either – it's alright to cry in front of the child.
- It can help to let them know why you're crying. You might want to say to them that people cry for many reasons, and sometimes they cry to express their pain or sadness when someone close to them dies. Let them know that it's also OK not to cry, if that's how they feel.
- Be sure to give the child plenty of reassurance. Let them know they're loved and that there are still people who will be there for them. A cuddle can make a big difference and



# Helping children through bereavement

make them feel cared for.

- Encourage them to talk about the person who died and their relationship with them.
- Be prepared that their grief may be different to yours. If they start playing and interacting as though nothing had happened, don't worry. Just be aware their grief may show in a different way over the coming weeks and months.

If you need help, or you think your child may need further support, there are services available, such as:

[Childhood Bereavement Network](http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk)

[www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk](http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk)

[Child Bereavement UK](http://www.childbereavementuk.org)

[www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org)

[Winston's Wish](http://www.winstonswish.org)

[www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org)

