

CHATS - Here to help

Sometimes, further support is needed for children and families.

The Children's Healing and Therapeutic Support (CHATS) Team at Birmingham Hospice offer free emotional support to children before and after a loved one dies. They work creatively with children to capture precious memories and develop resilience through both one-to-one and group sessions.

For further information and to get in touch with the CHATS Team

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TALKING TO MY CHILD ABOUT DEATH... DO I NEED TO?

When there is a loved one who dies or is terminally ill, naturally things change. These changes may be physical such as changes in daily routine for hospital visits or taking time off work. Emotionally, there may be mood changes and adults may not feel their usual happy selves.

Children notice these changes, even at a very young age. They may not be able to understand how those changes make them feel so they may not be able to tell an adult about it. Instead, feelings such as confusion, guilt, anger or rejection can grow.

As there may not be any behaviour changes for an adult to notice, it is important that adults talk to children openly and honestly. This will help their understanding of what is happening and relieve any strong negative emotions that could lead to low self-esteem.



WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO TALK?

Adults do not need to wait until a loved one is dying to talk about death with their child. Dying is a natural process in life and learning about this process when young can help children manage their emotions when they do experience bereavement. Using examples in the environment can be a great way to start educating children about death - leaves falling, flower petals wilting, when a pet dies or a dead animal is seen on the road.



MEMORY MAKING

Giving or making something with your child to remember a loved one is a nice way to open up conversations about death. Memory boxes, hand prints and journals are great tools to help children recall precious memories and feel comforted.



USEFUL TIPS

When a conversation about death has been initiated, your child may have many questions.

It is useful to:

- **Listen carefully** to the questions your child may have.
- **Answer questions** as soon as they have been asked.
- **Remember it is ok to tell your child that you don't know an answer.** Be honest and reassure them that you will try and find out the answer for them.
- **Remember it is ok to cry in front of your child** when talking about someone who is dying or has died. Sharing your own emotion can help your child feel safe to express their own feelings healthily.
- **Be clear in the messages you give** as children often understand things very literally. Using terms like 'passed away' or 'gone to a better place' can be confusing for children.
- **Check your child's understanding** before you end the conversation.
- **You may wish to use story books** about death and grief or pictures to help your child's understanding.