

Teach me to say goodbye

Common queries adults have about the
grieving process in children

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Atención Emocional

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Does my child know what death is? How do I tell them about it?

The idea and concept of death in children is a continuum that starts out from the belief that death does not exist or is temporary (up to 8-9 years), to the idea of death as irreversible (from 10 years of age). These stages of child development will mark how the child feels and understands the absence of a loved one at any given time. When informing them of a death or talking about death, language must be adapted to the child's level of development and understanding, allowing them to freely express their emotions.

"Let me cry, and if you don't know what to say, hug me"



 *Hoy tengo la edad de mi padre*

Remember that even if your child does not understand the concept of death, he or she is able to perceive the family environment and an adult's emotions.

Would it be a good idea for my child to come to the funeral parlour/crematorium with us?

What do the experts say?

Children participating and being able to take part in the farewell in these places helps them go through a much healthier grieving process.

Tell them what they are going to experience.

Children need to have prior information **prior information** about the event: what the place and the ritual is like, what feelings people will express there and what they can do at any time.

Accompany them during the ceremony:

It is important for the adult to accompany the child during the ceremony, allowing them to express their feelings and ensuring they say goodbye in their own way.

Express emotions:

Emotional expression in adults will help the child understand that expressing emotions is natural, that there is no need to be scared or ashamed and that it strengthens social and family ties.

Always remember that if your child wants to visit the funeral parlour, it is best to respect their decision and accompany them in the process. The important thing is that the child says goodbye to the deceased properly if they choose to do so.

Is it a good idea for my child to see the sick person in hospital?

In hospital:

Children sometimes need to know how the hospitalised family member is, so it is good **that they can visit and communicate whatever they wish to the sick person.**

Tell them what they are going to experience:

It will be very important to tell the child how the person is going to be: their appearance due to illness, hospital care (healthcare personnel, probes, medicines, machines, etc.). Explain to them that, sometimes, sick people can't get better, despite the care they receive in hospital.

Experts consider that children can fully participate in any ritual from 6 years of age.

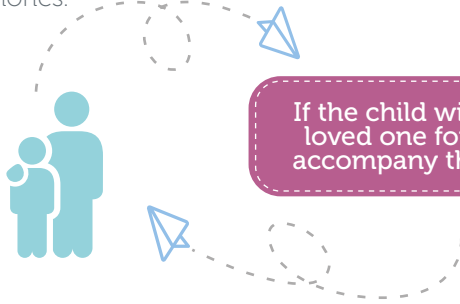
Would it be a good idea for the child to see the body of the deceased at the wake?

At a wake:

It is a very emotional moment for the whole family. Seeing the body of the deceased person at the wake can be decisive **for the child to assume that the person is no longer alive**, as they knew them, and it will be easier for them to say goodbye.

What can the adult do if the child wants to see the body?

Give the child precise information on what the deceased person will be like: their appearance will be different, thinner, deteriorated, tranquil etc. Accompany them, answer their questions and encourage them to say goodbye in their own way: expressing their emotions, giving some kind of gift or homage to the deceased person and reliving nice memories.



If the child wishes to see their deceased loved one for the last time, it is best to accompany them, they are entitled to it.

Is it a good idea for children to say goodbye?

Attend and participate:

If the child wishes to attend, **no matter how old they are**, you should facilitate their attendance and understanding of the ritual. If they decide not to attend, there are other ways to say goodbye: dedicating a letter or drawing to the deceased, planting a flower, setting up a space with photographs and so on.

What is a forgotten mourner?

Some adults feel that **they are "second degree" or "forgotten mourners"** when, as children, they were not offered the possibility to say goodbye to their loved one, and they were excluded from rituals, thus, perceiving from adults that their sadness and pain is less important or intense than other people's.

Remember that even if your child does not understand the concept of death, he or she is able to perceive the family environment and an adult's emotions.

How do I give my condolences to a child?



Loss in the child:

A child undergoes an emotional experience of loss equal to that of an adult and even more intense. Insecurity regarding the future can lead to disturbances in sleep, crying, anger, poor school performance, social withdrawal etc.

How I give my condolences to a child:

Find a calm and quiet place. Don't overwhelm them with kisses or hugs and don't insist on them expressing their emotions; they might not want to talk at that time. A simple affectionate gesture (holding their hand) will relieve them, as well as giving them support with one or two clear and brief messages, such as "I am with you, I will be by your side," avoiding unreal or fictitious messages that are not going to be fulfilled.



It will be very important for the child to feel that they will be surrounded by adults who will help and care for them, that their life will go on and that there will be people who will accompany them at all times.

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You can do a drawing or write a story starring the deceased loved one. You can also write down a nice memory that you have shared with that person.



Let's release coloured balloons into the sky full of messages of thanks and nice memories of our relative?

Let's play superheroes. What would your superhero do in this situation?
LET'S DO IT TOO!!



Shall we dance together? And shall we play musical instruments to express how we feel?
Isn't it fun and relaxing?



Activities

We recommend doing fun games and activities with children in order to express our emotions along with theirs.

Here are some ideas:

The Book of Remembrance: we can make a book with photos of the best moments we had with them and... we can include drawings, poems and any memories we want to give to them!



Let's relax... close your eyes with me... let's concentrate on our breathing... from our feet, our hands, our shoulders... You feel better now, right?



You can access them here

