

Four Basic Concepts About Death:

That are helpful for children:

1. Death is irreversible.
2. All life functions stop at the time of death - no breathing, no pain, no heartbeat

Children may know that people can't move after they've died, but believe it is because the coffin is too small.

They may think people can't see after death, but believe this is because it is dark underground.

"When children can correctly identify what living functions are, they can also understand that these functions end completely at the time of death. For example, only living things can think, be afraid, be hungry, or feel pain. Only living things have a beating heart or need air to breathe."

3. Everything that is alive actually dies
When a child loses someone close to them this reality of what death is can no longer be hidden from them. When
Children usually fear that others close to them—perhaps everyone they care about—will also die.

Children, just like adults, struggle to make sense of a death. If they do not understand that death is an inevitable part of life, death occurred.

They may assume it happened because of something bad they did or something they failed to do. They may think it happened because of bad thoughts they had. This leads to guilt. They may assume the person who died did or thought bad things, or didn't do something he or she should have done. This leads to shame. confusion.

4. There are Physical Reasons Why Someone Dies
Children must understand why their loved one has died. If they don't, they're more likely to come up with explanations that cause guilt or shame. The goal is to help children feel they understand what has happened language.

Take your cues from your children, and allow them to ask for further explanations.

Graphic details aren't necessary and should be avoided, especially if the death was violent.