



ANSWERING CHILDREN'S QUESTIONS ABOUT DEATH  
A GUIDE FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS



**HILLSIDE**  
MEMORIAL PARK AND MORTUARY

Experiencing the loss of a loved one is always difficult. It's a time when we instinctively look for answers. For children this can be an especially confusing experience – full of questions and sadness or even anger. At Hillside, we understand how challenging it can be to answer children's questions about death. We offer this booklet as a guide during this time to help you and the children in your life.

The most important thing during this time is to remember to be patient with your child and yourself, and to understand that recovering from grief is a process.

Children may ask many questions and the same questions over and over again. It is best to answer honestly, giving information in a way that is appropriate for the age of the child.

Listen carefully, and answer only the question the child is asking. Try not to overwhelm the child with information. If you're not sure you understand what the child is asking, ask for clarification. After you have responded to the question, make sure the child understands the answer you have given.

Not all questions about death have easy answers. It is OK to say, "I don't know." Most important is to give the child an opportunity to share his or her thoughts and feelings.

Very often after the death of a parent or significant person in the child's life, children become concerned about the death of the remaining parent. This is a very common and natural response.

Often children want promises that you, too, will not die. Never make promises to a child that you cannot keep. Instead, reassure the child that you plan to be with them for a long time, and that they will always be cared for.

## ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS CHILDREN HAVE ABOUT DEATH

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### WHAT IS A FUNERAL?

A funeral is a way to say goodbye to someone we love.

Usually family and friends gather together at a funeral to honor the person who died, to say goodbye and to show their love.

At a funeral, people may talk about the person who died, say prayers, laugh and cry. All of these are ways of saying that the person who died was special.

## **WHERE DO DEAD PEOPLE GO?**

When someone dies, his or her body stops living.

Many people believe that there is a special part of people that exists after the body dies. This part is called the soul or spirit. The soul or spirit is not a part of the body, but rather is the part of us that makes us special. It allows us to love and be loved.

All over the world, people believe that the soul or spirit lives on in our memories and hearts, so that in a way, the person who died is always with us.

## **WHAT CAUSES DEATH?**

Many things may cause death: Illness, accidents or disease may all cause the body to stop working and die. Sometimes growing very old results in death.

Some things never cause death: wishes or thoughts will never ever cause death.

Sometimes we may not be sure why someone we love has died, and that may leave us with many questions.

## **WILL I DIE TOO?**

Eventually all living things die, but usually children are healthy and strong and live long full lives. Usually children don't die until they are much older.

## **WILL YOU DIE?**

After the death of someone we love, it is very common for children to wonder if others around them will die too.

At some point in our lives, we will all die.

Fortunately, most people live long lives, and don't die until they are much older. The way the world works, as children are growing up they have grown-ups around who care for them. There will always be someone to care for you.

## **WHY DO I FEEL THIS WAY?**

All things change, and with change comes loss and grief. Grief is what we call all the different feelings we have after someone we love has died.

Grief may come and go. Sometimes you may feel it very strongly, and other times not so much.

Lots of feelings are part of grief: sadness, anger, fear, guilt and loneliness. No matter which you feel, all feelings are OK.

### **WHAT CAN I DO WHEN I FEEL REALLY BAD?**

After someone we love dies, it is natural to feel sad or angry or scared. Sometimes these feelings can be very scary. The best way to take care of yourself is to find a grown-up who you trust and let him or her know how you are feeling.

Sometimes just letting someone hug and hold us reminds us that we are not alone. This can really help.

### **WHAT HAPPENS AFTER SOMEONE DIES?**

After someone dies, it is time for us to say goodbye to him or her. People around the world do this in many ways. Usually there is a funeral or memorial service.

## WHAT IS DEATH?

Death is the end of living. All living things eventually die. Just like flowers, trees and animals die, so do people.

When someone dies, they don't breathe; their hearts don't beat; and they don't need to eat or drink.

Death is not like sleeping, death is for always. When someone dies, his or her body stops working forever. When something dies, it doesn't come back.

## WHY DID SOMEONE I LOVE HAVE TO DIE?

We know the "how" of someone dying—the body stops working—but the "why" is much harder to understand.

All over the world people have different beliefs about this question. It doesn't seem fair that we have had to say goodbye to someone we love, and we may never know the answer to why this had to happen to us.

All we know is that although it may be very sad, death is part of nature just like birth and life itself.

## TEN TIPS TO HELP CHILDREN THROUGH GRIEF

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- 1 Return to a normal routine as soon as possible. This will help the child regain a sense of security.
- 2 Reassure the child that he or she is protected, safe, and will always be cared for.
- 3 Be patient with your child. Understand that he or she may not always be able to verbalize his or her feelings, and will often express them through behavior.
- 4 Allow the child to have the opportunity to say goodbye to the loved one, either at a funeral or with another ritual.
- 5 Do not be alarmed if the child plays at death. This is a way for children to work through their feelings.
- 6 Give the child mementos of the person who died.
- 7 Be sure to praise the child when he or she is functioning well. This will help them feel more in control of themselves and their world.

- 8 Let the child help out in age appropriate ways.
- 9 Let the child stay a child. Do not use him or her for emotional support.
- 10 Be patient with your child and be prepared to answer questions many times.



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Courtesy of Hillside Memorial Park and Mortuary  
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