

## Helping Your Other Children When Your Baby Dies

If you have other children, you may want to protect them from the sadness of life. However, most professionals agree that it is best to be open and honest with children about death. Regardless of age, children should be told when a death has happened in the family. Be open and honest in discussing death and grief with them. Children sense when they are being left out. They are more frightened and confused when they are left out. The truth is always better than any fantasy a child might produce.

Tell the children in simple terms about the child's death. Tears are a normal part of life, especially when we are hurting. Allow your sadness to show, and share your feelings with your children. Allow them to express their grief also. Realize that all of you will miss the child.

Use the word died. If children are told that we lost your brother, they may think that someday the brother might be found again. Younger children are very literal in the way they understand things. It is best to simply say that the child died. Sometimes children do not understand what dead is. If this is the case, reminding them of a dying flower or a pet that has died will help them to understand. You can also remind them of what alive means: breathing, talking, playing laughing etc. Tell them that dead means not being able to do these things. Never refer to death as sleeping. This can cause a child to fear going to sleep at night. Linking death too strongly to illness may also frighten children, and they may fear they will die if they become ill. Reassure them that most people do not die until they are very old.

A sleep related infant death will probably cause some fear of going to sleep in the remaining children. Provide reassurance that sleeping did not cause the death, but that something else was wrong with the baby. If SIDS is thought to be the cause of death, tell the other children this and explain that older children do not die of SIDS.



Funerals should be openly discussed with the children. The choice to attend or not should be left open to them. Never force a child to go to a funeral.

If children ask why the death occurred, answer honestly with clear, simple statements. If you don't know why, say so. If you do know some information which will help them understand, share it with them. Allow them to ask the same questions over and over again. Giving children the opportunity to repeat questions enables them to adjust better to the death. It is as if each time the child discusses the death, it becomes a little bit more bearable.

Sometimes children fear that they may have caused the death of their brother or sister because they felt jealous of him or angry at her at one time or another. Be sure to stress that thoughts and feelings could not have caused or prevented the death.

The reactions of children will depend to some extent on their ages. Preschoolers will view death as temporary because they have not come to understand the concept of permanence. Six to nine year olds have developed a clearer understanding of death and realize they can die too. They tend to be less willing to talk about death. By age ten and up, most children are ready to face the notion of death and can accept death as a part of life.

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