

No one wants to have to tell a child that someone they love might die. It's even harder if you are still processing the news yourself. It may feel that it's kinder to shield your child from what is happening, but children pick up on atmospheres and know that something serious is going on. Experts generally agree that it is better to help them know the facts than to leave them misinterpreting what is going on.

Things that might help

- Think about what you want to say beforehand. Write something down if you are worried you might not remember.
- Try to find somewhere comfortable to have the conversation. Sometimes being side by side is easier than face to face. If possible, avoid bedtime.
- Use clear, simple language. Don't use euphemisms – they can be confusing and misleading.
- You might say, 'You know that X has been very ill with (coronavirus). The doctors have done everything they can to help him/her get better. Sadly, there isn't anything more they can do. This means X will probably die. We don't know when, but the doctors think it will be soon.'
- Be prepared for a range of reactions from seeming indifference to anger to disbelief. The child's age will make a difference as to how they respond and understand.
- Reassure your child that it is OK to feel the way they do. If they need to take a break from a conversation, let them know you will be ready to talk again whenever they want.
- Ask if they have any questions. Answer them as honestly as you can. If you don't know the answer, say so.
- Assure your child that you will get through this together. Everyone will be confused and sad and have questions, but you will get through this together.
- Reassure your child that nothing can separate us from God's love. When someone dies, it is painful and hard and desperately sad, but God's love is still with us (Romans 8:38).
- Books such as '*Waterbugs*' by Doris Stickney, '*Rabbityness*' by Jo Empson and '*I Miss You*' by Pat Thomas can help to open up conversations and feelings about death.

Our Christian faith

We all die – our human body comes to an end. But our Christian hope is that this is not **the** end. There is life beyond our earthly experience.

Throughout the Scriptures we are assured of this. In his encounter with Mary following the death of Lazarus, Jesus reassures her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live...' (John 11:17-27). And later, in John's account of the last supper, Jesus tells his disciples, 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?' (John 14:1-7).

Christians believe that physical death opens the way to a new life in God's presence. We do not need to be afraid of it; through Jesus, God promises us life beyond our earthly experience.

Additional resources

Scripture Union's Guardians of Ancora Parents Support has very helpful material around loss, death and bereavement (pages 26 – 39).

BRF's Parenting for Faith explores ways of talking about death and grief with children.

Marie Curie has suggestions for talking with children (including those with additional needs) about someone dying.

Winston's Wish has helpful advice specifically around coronavirus related illness and death.

Seesaw (a grief support charity) has downloadable booklets to help families talk about death and grief.

Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/faith-home/i-am-parent/how-do-i-tell-my-children-someone-they-love-might-die>