

# EDUCATION CORNER

## Supporting Children in Grief & through Donation

*Pace yourself, pause the conversation, and know you can return to this conversation over time.*



### Developmental Stages & Ages

#### Birth – 2 Years

- No understanding of death
- No words for feelings
- Notices changes in family emotions and routines

**How to help:** Meet needs, maintain routines, offer physical contact

#### 3 – 5 Years

- No understanding of permanence of death
- May wonder what will happen if other parent dies
- Magical thinking and fantasies may be worse than reality

**How to help:** Patient with regressive behaviors, repetitive questions, and emotions, simple & truthful answers

#### 6 – 9 Years

- Understands death is final
- His / Her thoughts, actions, or words caused the death
- Interested in biology of death

**How to help:** Answer questions truthfully, peer & education support

#### 9 – 12 Years

- Denial
- Processing their own milestones without their loved one
- Developing a death and spiritual awareness

**How to help:** Expect and accept mood swings, encourage expression of some sort

#### Teenagers

- May sense own impending death
- Internal conflict about dependence and independence
- Need to be in control of their own feelings

**How to help:** Allow regressive behavior, hidden feelings, and mood swings, watch for high risk behavior

### Talking about Death with Children

- Be concrete, honest, and age-appropriate.
- Share what has happened in a concrete, simple manner.
- Provide a simple explanation of death.
- Remember to avoid euphemisms.
- Be open to questions.
- Remember that younger children have had less exposure to what death means.
- Answer only the questions that a child has asked.
- Children will have many different reactions (and they are all okay!).



### Talking about Donation with Children

- Gather information from nursing/ancillary staff.
- Arrange a quiet moment with a parent in a comfortable room.
- Things to consider:
  - Parents are experts of their children.
  - We are another stranger.
  - Information is best shared by parent or someone the child loves and trusts.
  - Location of conversation is important.
  - Timing of conversation is important.
  - Build rapport – books, coloring, etc.
  - Provide small bits of information at a time.

Taken from a webinar presentation by Ashlei Brooks MSW, LICSW (Donor Family Aftercare Program Manager, LifeCenter Northwest, WA), Nettie Jensen CCLS (Donation and Family Advocate, LifeCenter Northwest), and Valerie Maury CDC, NCAC II (Family Support Specialist, LifeCenter Northwest). Special thanks to Ms. Brooks, Ms. Jensen, and Ms. Maury for their contributions to this inservice.

#### References:

*The Invisible String* – Patrice Karst  
*A Terrible Thing Happened* – Margaret M. Homes  
*When Dinosaurs Die – A Guide to Understanding Death* – Laurie Krasny Brown & Marc Brown  
*Badger's Parting Gifts* – Susan Varley  
*I Miss You – A First Look at Death* – Pat Thomas  
*The Giving Tree* – Shel Silverstein  
*Straight Talk About Death for Teenagers – How to Cope with Losing Someone You Love* – Earl A. Grollman  
*Draw It Out (journal)* – An Art with Heart Publication  
*Ink About It (journal)* – An Art with Heart Publication  
*Fire in My Heart, Ice in My Veins* – A journal for teenagers experiencing a loss – A Centering Corporation Resources – Enid Samuel-Traisman  
[www.whatsyourgrief.com](http://www.whatsyourgrief.com)  
[www.dougy.org](http://www.dougy.org)  
[www.artwithheart.org](http://www.artwithheart.org)  
[www.moyerfoundation.org/camps-programs/camp-erin](http://www.moyerfoundation.org/camps-programs/camp-erin)

This inservice is also available on The Alliance blog:  
<http://organdonationalliance.org/education-corner-child-grief/>