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.

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**References:**
- The Invisible String – Patrice Karst
- A Terrible Thing Happened – Margaret M. Homes
- 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
- www.dougy.org
- www.artwithheart.org
- www.moyerfoundation.org/camps-programs/camp-erin

This inservice is also available on The Alliance blog: