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# HELPING A CHILD DEAL WITH DEATH

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We are all aware that the loss of a loved one is part of life. Dealing with it ourselves or comforting someone close to us may not be so easy. This seems particularly true when it comes to helping a child deal with loss.

Seeing a child in pain is painful for us. That should not mean that we as parents should stop the child expressing their sadness. A child may appear to adapt more quickly to a loss than an adult but that does not mean that the loss has not affected them. If a child is given the right support it can help them to cope much better.

Children need to know that their feelings of anger, shock and disbelief in the early stages are normal as well as the physical expressions of tears. They may be aggressive, withdrawn and less able to learn.

As they tumble through these emotions they need the comfort and time of a parent to encourage them to vent those feelings in whatever way they find most suited to them. They may want to talk, look at photos, ask questions sit quietly and reflect. Whatever way they feel is right for them to begin to process the loss then parents should accept that.

Be on the look out if a child appears to become overly absorbed by a death and does not appear to be coping at all. That is the time to talk it through with your GP or Health Visitor.

**Q**

**We have had a number of deaths in the family and my seven year old is asking loads of questions. They were elderly relatives that he didn't know. He takes all of it in his stride. We find it quite upsetting that he talks in such a practical way about it.**

**A**

Usually between the ages of 6 and 8 children have grasped the fact that everyone will die some day. The idea that it can be unpredictable and that people can die at any time may not be grasped until much later.

Your son seems to be getting it sorted in his head what death is all about, whereas you are coming from an emotional perspective with attachments to those who have died. Let the questions come freely.

Talking gives you a chance to help him get his head round this issue. Children usually have a lot to say about this topic and it is helpful for them to know that it is not a taboo subject for their parents.

