



Four Rivers Special Education District

Explaining Death To Young Children

*Sometimes it is best to talk to children while they are doing an activity such as drawing or other quiet play. Do not try to talk with television or radio on.

*Make sure you have their attention and look at them if they look at you. You could also hold them on your lap or hold hands.

*Keep conversation short and simple. Answer any questions truthfully. Explain that death is permanent.

A sample for young children:

Parent "Hey, kiddo, I need to talk to you about something that happened to one of your classmates.

Why don't you come over here close to me?"

Parent - "Remember (child's name), from your class?"

Child "Yeah, he's my friend."

Parent "Yes, I know. (Child) is not going to be able to come to school anymore"

Child "Why?"

Parent "Something very bad happened to (child) and his family. He has died, and we are all very sad. He was a very good boy"

Child "Why can't he come to school?"

Parent "When you die, it means that you can't do anything anymore. Remember so and so who died (or animal) and we can't see them anymore? It is the same thing with (child)."

This is a time when you could talk about beliefs in the family, but be cautious as this can also confuse children or scare them.

Answer any questions as best as you can, even about the nature of the death itself if they ask, but avoid being graphic. You can decide what your child is capable of understanding and what may scare them.

Now is also the time to reassure them that they are safe, and that the family is safe.

At the end, you can ask them if they have questions, and then to tell you what you just told them to see if they understood.

Adapted from the National Association of School Psychologists online resources for crisis, trauma, and grief.

Piechowski, P., *Coping with the Sudden Death of a Student*.

Schonfeld, D, *After a Loved One Dies-How Children Grieve*; and The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Dealing with Death*.