Talking About Death and Difficult Subjects

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Preschoolers and early elementary children are very interested in talking about death and difficult subjects. Typically, children will ask parents a variation of one of these questions:

> Why did the insect die?
> Did my cat go to cat heaven? Can I see her?
> I know great grandpa was very old and sick? Why did he die? Where did he go? Will I see him again?
> Will you die soon?

A Parent's Response



When asked these questions, parents are typically overwhelmed about how to simply answer the question. When their great grandparents died, we told our preschoolers and early elementary grandkids that their great grandparents were very sick for a long time and that they died from old age and being very sick. We

assured them that we would not die tomorrow and are taking very good care of ourselves. We also do not project fear and were very loving about the fun times the grandkids shared with the older relative.

Talking About Feelings

Sometimes, however, children lose their parent at a very young age and the entire family is traumatized from this very sad situation. Children should be reassured with love throughout this difficult time. They should be encouraged to talk about their feelings of sadness, grief, fear, and despair. Families should celebrate the happy times they have shared with each other. Parents can purchase an age appropriate book or go to the library for a book about understanding the death of a friend or family member. When their great grandparents died, the preschoolers and early elementary great grandchildren attended the memorial services and sang a song that was shared over generations. Even if it has been several years, the great grandchildren remember visiting their sick great grandparents in the hospital and talking to their family about the memorial.

Creating Memories

Sometimes families plant a tree or go to a special place to remember their loved family members. I still go to a particular ice cream shop in memory of happy times with my family. The grandkids treasure these moments. It is a wonderful way to respect a family member’s memories!

Respectfully,

Mary Ann

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