

What can we do to soothe death related anxiety?



- ❖ Take it seriously. Be present and available when a child talks about death. Make sure that the child hears and sees that their thoughts or worries on this topic matter to you.
- ❖ Be calm and reassuring. Try not to join in with their worry - they need you to be the adult, the strong person in charge who will keep them safe.
- ❖ Be honest and use clear and simple language. It is so important to be clear and kind. Try talking about the inevitability of the life cycle, and how it applies to everything that is alive - plants, animals, humans. This practical biological truth will be reassuring and will develop a relationship based on trust and respect.
- ❖ Be honest and positive. A fear of parents dying soon is a very big burden and especially so at such uncertain times. A conversation that centres on the idea that parents plan to be around for a long, long, time is positive and it can also be sufficiently honest to say a long time can mean 100 years old, until they have children of their own, and their children have children.
- ❖ If a child asks what happens after someone dies, respond as positively as possible and try not to pose too many questions. Remember a child is looking for reassurance in this situation. Talk about the ways a person (or pet) lives on in people's memories. "My Grandma /pet dog will always be with me, in my heart. I don't see her / him anymore, but she's / he's still here, in my memory."
- ❖ Look for actions that affirm life. Talk about how being alive is a blessing, something to be grateful for every day. Talk about things that have happened recently – rainbow drawings, clapping for NHS - that express gratitude and actions that can be taken, ways to express that gratitude every day. It can be as simple as giving a hug, drawing a picture, taking a walk, and appreciating things that you see - the people, the pets, the trees, the plants, even the annoying insects. It can also be bigger, like expressing appreciation to all the people who make our lives better, as we encounter them. It can take the form of artistic expression, or learning something new, or participating in challenging physical activities.
- ❖ Talk about how important a healthy routine is whenever possible and even though keyworkers might be working more and school isn't quite the same, it is healthier to have a reasonably predictable routine that includes healthy meals, snuggles,

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playtime, learning time, chores, outdoor time, and a regular bedtime. This is, of course, the adult's responsibility but, depending on the child's age, it can be helpful to explore why these things are so important and what they can do to support parents to make them happen.

- ❖ Model an attitude of gratitude and encourage an appreciation of what's good in their life. This will encourage a focus that is less about fears as they find the pleasure in helping others and focusing on the well-being of others. Gratitude has many benefits, including increased well-being, happiness, energy, optimism and empathy.
- ❖ Institute a daily worry session. Set aside a special ten-minute "Worry Session" every day—at the same time each day and indicated with a visual if appropriate - to discuss fears. Talk about what they're worrying about. Be present, available, and reassuring. It can be very reassuring for a child to know that they can share worries each day and give them more confidence during the other parts of their day. Particularly if they don't feel able to share their worries at home, for fear of causing upset.
- ❖ Share children's books about death. These include *And So It Goes*, by Paloma Valdivia; *Goodbye Mog*, by Judith Kerr; *The Goodbye Book*, by Todd Parr; *Ida Always*, by Caron Levis and Charles Santoso; and more.
- ❖ Consult a professional. If the worries get too big.

