

The funeral

Providing children and young people with explanations and information about what will happen at the funeral can be helpful. Children need to have information that is clear, direct and concrete to help them make the right decision for themselves. When discussing the funeral with a child, it may be helpful to include the following:

- Where will the funeral take place?
- Who will be there?
- What will happen there?
- How long will it take?

Children can feel that they haven't had the opportunity to say goodbye if they are stopped from attending the funeral, however there are also children who feel resentful at being forced to attend. If a child makes the decision not to attend the funeral, they shouldn't be criticised for it. They may later regret their decision, but at least it was their decision to make and therefore no blame can be attributed to anyone else.

Be prepared for fears

Because of the sudden nature of a suicide children can worry that it will happen to others who they care about, or that they might be "destined" to die this way too. Listen to their fears and reassure them, you may need to do this more than once. To lessen confusion try to be consistent with your explanation about the death.

Inform the child's school

Sometimes children's behaviour can be affected by their grief and it is likely that their school life will also be affected. Informing the school will enable teachers to support a child if they are having difficulties, they can be excused from class without having to explain each time.

Mission Statement

We believe that we can make a difference in the lives of children who have been bereaved by supporting them through their grief using therapeutic play providing a safe haven for them to work out their feelings

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AFTER A SUICIDE

GLASGOW

INFORMATION
FOR SUPPORTING
CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE



Do you know someone who died by suicide?

If you do you are not alone. On average two people in Scotland die by suicide each day. They are mothers, fathers, siblings, grandparents and friends. Richmond's Hope has been supporting children and young people bereaved by suicide since 2003. This leaflet is to help you to support a child or young person who has been bereaved by suicide.

The truth

It is important to be honest with children. They don't necessarily need to know every detail about a death but they do need truthful answers and information. While we might think we are protecting children by pretending the suicide was an accident, children need to know the truth about a death to help them process the information. They may find out the truth, from other children, adults or news reports. If you are finding it hard to know what to say, think what you would say to a trusted friend. Telling the truth about a death can be hard, especially if the circumstances surrounding the death are unclear or difficult. If it is possible a parent is generally the most suitable person to tell their child about the death.

Talk openly about suicide

There is still stigma around suicide which can affect a family after the death. People still talk about "committing" suicide which comes from when suicide was considered a crime. Some people believe that suicide is a sin, or an act carried out by someone who is crazy. Using terms such as "died by suicide" can normalise how the person died and help aid understanding.

Why do some people choose to die by suicide?

No one knows why some people choose to die by suicide. Some may believe it is their only way out of what they feel is an impossible situation, some may have suffered from depression or an illness. Talking about them having a sickness in the brain could help a child understand why they couldn't see other ways to escape their particular situation. Some people choose to leave a note and others do not. If the child has a note left for them be prepared to support them through reading their note as the content could lead to more questions (if a note has been left and the police have taken it for evidence you are entitled to ask for a copy).

How to explain in more detail how the person died by suicide

Here are some explanations for the most frequent methods of suicide this may help you explain to a child how the person died.

- Hanging: Explain that the person used a rope to tie around their neck, and attached the other end to the place they chose to die. The rope pulled very tight and they stopped breathing; this is how they died.
- Drug overdose: Normally tablets and medicine from the doctor or the chemist are alright to take. When you follow the right instructions medicine can help to make you well when you are sick. If you take too many tablets or medicine it is hard for your body to cope, it poisons your body; this is how they died.

If the person has died by another method of suicide and you would like information on how to explain to a child/young person please contact us.

Viewing the body

Some choices can be more difficult to make than others. For example, many parents feel uncomfortable with the idea of a child viewing the body of the person who died, they feel that this may be too distressing for a child and want to protect them from further hurt. Children's imaginations can often be worse or more frightening than reality, and because children have a natural curiosity, viewing the body can help them understand that the person is dead.

It is important to use concrete words, like died or dead, as children can often become confused by other explanations. For example, a lot of people often use the term, "it looks just like they are asleep". Although this term seems kinder to use, children can often become confused and worried that when they, or someone else, go to sleep they too might not wake up.

Again, choice is important for a child. If a child decides they do not want to view the body, but everyone else in the family does, they should not be made to feel wrong. Children need permission to choose and reassurance that whatever they decide is alright. Again here is a list of facts that a child may find it helpful to talk about before viewing the body.

The Body:

- Is in an open or partially open coffin
- Is in a cool temperature
- Doesn't move
- Can't talk and doesn't see you
- Won't come back to life
- May be puffed up
- May have markings as a result of how they died
- Will look and feel different than the person did before the death
- May have a different smell