

Talking to Your Elementary Child About Death and Christian Hope

The Reality of Death

When a loved one who was a believer in Jesus dies, it's important to be **clear and concrete** in your language, while also comforting your child.

- Avoid confusing phrases like "went to sleep," "passed away," or "lost." Use the words "**died**" and "**death**."
 - **What to say:** "Grandma's body stopped working. Her heart stopped beating, she stopped breathing, and she can no longer feel pain, talk, or move. Her body is finished." Euphemisms can make children afraid of sleep or worry that the person is just "lost" and might come back.
- **Acknowledge Sadness and Grief:** It is right to be sad, it is a sign of our love. Death is not how God intended the world to be; it came because of sin (Romans 5:12). Even Jesus wept when his friend Lazarus died (John 11:35).
 - **What to say:** "It is okay to be very, very sad. We are sad because we miss them so much, and we won't get to hug them or talk to them right now. Crying and feeling angry or confused are all normal ways to grieve."
 - **Scripture for Comfort:** "*The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*" (**Psalms 34:18**)
- **Answer Questions Simply and Honestly:** Your child may ask the same questions many times. Answer simply, and don't be afraid to say, "I don't know."
 - **Possible Question:** "Will I die?"
 - **Honest Answer:** "Yes, one day all of our bodies will stop working, but God decides when that will be. We are safe in God's hands every day."
 - **Possible Question:** "Why did God let this happen?"
 - **Honest Answer:** "I don't know the exact reason, but I know that God is still loving and in control. He loves us and promises to be with us even in the saddest times."

The Hope Christians Have

Our grief is real, but as Christians, we "do not grieve as others do who have no hope" (**1 Thessalonians 4:13**). This hope is in **Jesus' resurrection**.

- **The Soul is With Jesus:** For a person who loved and followed Jesus, when their body died, their **soul went immediately to be with Jesus in Heaven.**
 - **What to say:** "When Grandma died, her body stayed here, but her spirit—the part of her that loves, thinks, and knows God—went to Heaven to be with Jesus. The Bible says for a Christian, to be absent from the body is to be '**at home with the Lord.**'" (2 Corinthians 5:8)
 - **Heaven is a Perfect Place:** Remind your child that there is no more sadness, crying, pain, or fear in Heaven.
 - **Scripture for Hope:** *"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."* (Revelation 21:4)
- **Jesus Conquered Death (The Resurrection):** Our hope is not just a spirit being with Jesus; it is the promise that death is not the end. Jesus died on the cross for our sins and was raised to life, conquering death.
 - **What to say:** "Just like Jesus rose from the dead, one day, God will raise up the bodies of everyone who believed in Jesus, and they will be perfect and live with Him forever on a new Earth." "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.'" (John 11:25)
- **We Will See Them Again:** The greatest comfort is the promise of eternal reunion.
 - **What to say:** "Because Grandma believed in Jesus, we have the wonderful promise that we **will see her again** when Jesus comes back! Until then, we keep loving Jesus and trusting His promise."

Ways to Remember and Process

- **Pray Together:** Encourage your child to talk to God about their feelings.
- **Create a Memory Box:** Fill a box with photos, drawings, and small items that remind them of the loved one.
- **Keep Routines:** Maintaining normal schedules as much as possible helps a child feel secure.
- **Read Together:** Find age-appropriate Christian books about Heaven and grief.