

Kaleidoscope

How to Explain Life and Death to a Child

Death is a difficult subject to discuss with children; however, it is a natural part of life. Sometimes it is less stressful to talk about this topic when we are not experiencing personal grief and loss, but that's not always an option. Below is an interactive approach which helps children to understand that all living things grow and change and eventually die. Plants die, animals die, and people die too. Death happens when a body becomes very old, sick, or injured then stops working and breathing. Try to use terms such as "died" and "dead." Although phrases such as "went to sleep," and "passed away" may seem gentler, but they may also be confusing.

Participate in the following exercises to understand the differences between being alive and being dead:

Take a deep breath and slowly let it out. You are alive, which means you are breathing. When a person is dead, they do not breathe.

Put your hand on your heart and feel it beating. You are alive, which means your heart is beating. When a person is dead, their heart stops beating.

Hop in one place two times. You are alive, which means you can hop up and down. When a person is dead, they cannot hop up and down.

Pinch your arm (not too hard!) You are alive, which means you can hurt and feel pain. When a person is dead, they do not hurt or feel pain.

When someone or something is alive, it can move, breathe, and feel. Draw a picture of an animal, insect, plant, or person that is alive:

When someone or something is dead, it cannot talk, breathe, or feel anything. Draw a picture of an animal, insect, plant, or person that is alive.