

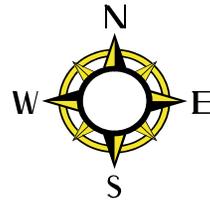
## Suggested Resources

Hospice has several publications on how to help children when a loved one is dying or has died. This series is called Navigating Your Grief. It

Includes:

- Answering Children's Questions about Dying and Grief
- How to Help Children When Someone Special is Dying
- Preparing Children to Attend Calling Hours and Funerals
- Resources for Grieving Children
- Sharing Sad News with Children
- Ten Things Everyone Should Know about Grieving Children

The material for the *Navigating Your Grief Series* came from Hospice and Palliative Care of St. Lawrence Valley and has been edited and reprinted with their permission.



## Compass Points

High Peaks Hospice: Essex County  
P.O. Box 192  
Port Henry, NY 12974  
518-942-6513  
800-639-8045

High Peaks Hospice: Tri-Lakes  
P.O. Box 840  
Saranac Lake, NY 12983  
518-891-0606  
877-324-1686

High Peaks Hospice: Warren County  
79 Glenwood Ave., 2nd Floor  
Queensbury, NY 12804  
518-743-1672  
800-730-9477

## Sharing Sad News With Children

Compass Points:  
Navigating Your Grief Series



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# Sharing Sad News with Children

Sharing sad news with children is painful and difficult. The best approach is a simple and direct one. State facts, anticipate questions, and be prepared to tell them the same story over and over again.

## Thoughts to Keep in Mind:

- Many children cope amazingly well when adults take time to talk honestly with them about what is happening.
- Children are concrete thinkers. Keep the information simple.
- Allow children to ask questions.
- Always tell children the truth. Never lie. You don't have to have all the answers to their questions, and it's okay to say you don't know.
- Give the same information each time you are asked. Younger children will ask the same questions over and over, which is normal.
- It's important to provide children with a stable and safe environment. It is important to set limits and keep family routines in place as much as possible. The predictability helps them to manage their stress.
- Each child will respond differently to

sad news. Some may initially respond to the news and then return to playing. This is normal because many children use play time as a coping tool. It does not mean they don't understand or don't care. They simply handle sad news differently than adults.

- Children will, however, respond to the emotional reactions of the adults in their lives. It's good to share tears, but be careful not to share loud and uncontrollable emotions in front of children. This can be scary and frightening to them.

## Helpful Things to Say to Children

Sharing sad news that a loved one has a serious illness:

- "They have a special kind of illness."
- "It's different than a cold or flu."
- "It's okay to tell them you love them."
- "It's okay to feel sad, scared, and angry."

Sharing sad news that a loved one is dying:

- "Their body is worn out from the illness."
- "Their body doesn't need as much food or water now."
- "It's okay to tell them you love them."
- "It's okay to feel sad, scared, and angry."

Sharing sad news that someone they love has died:

- "Their body stopped working because of the illness or accident."
- "When we die our body no longer works."
- "When we are dead, we can't see, hear, touch, feel, sleep, eat, talk, move, go to the bathroom or go out to play."
- "Because their body stopped working, they don't hurt anymore."
- "It's okay to feel sad, scared, and angry."
- "We never forget the people we love."

## Comments to Avoid

Because children think in exact terms, the comments below can confuse and cause unnecessary pain.

- ***"I understand exactly how you feel."***  
Grief is different for everyone who experiences it.
- ***"We lost Grandpa."***  
Children think literally. They will look for the loved one who is "lost".
- ***"You are too young to understand."***  
No child is too young to recognize that life is different after someone dies.
- ***"You'll get over it."***  
It's important to teach children to live with loss. This points children toward being healthy grievers as adults.