

Explaining Suicide to Children

The suicide of a friend or loved one is a devastating experience. Suicide survivors are often left with many painful questions and emotions. Thus, it is understandable to be overwhelmed or unsure of how to explain suicide to children.

Children need the following when talking about suicide:

- Truthful information about what has occurred
- Encourage children to ask questions about the suicide at their own pace
- Provide love, support and reassurance

Suicide is very hard to understand – even for many adults. Talking about mental illness and suicide is important because it can help increase understanding. Many people that die of suicide struggle with a mental illness called depression. Depression can be explained to children as when a person feels very, very, very, sad and doesn't feel that there is anything they can do to make life better, so they do something to kill themselves. Sometimes people that die of suicide feel that their friends and loved ones would be better off without them. You may say "Mommy had a disease called 'depression' and it made her very sad. Usually people with depression do not kill themselves, but sometimes they do. However, there is always another choice."

Children need to know that they are not responsible for the death and nothing they said or did could have stopped it.

Children also need to know that suicide causes many feelings such as:

- Angry
- Sad
- Lonely
- Guilty
- Confused

Feelings such as these are normal and need to be shared with another caring and informed adult – such as a family member, pastor or school counselor.

The American Foundation for Suicide prevention is a great resource for additional information: www.afsp.org