

Talking to Children About Deaths by Suicide:

Telling a child someone they love has died is difficult enough, but explaining that they died by suicide can be even harder. Often adults don't want to talk about suicide, but we know from our experience that it is better to tell a child or young person the truth in a way that they will understand.

- Define suicide. For very young children: When someone hurts their own body, so it doesn't work anymore.
- Discourage the use of the phrase "committed suicide" because of the negative connotations of the verb commit (e.g. crime, sin); you could instead say the person completed suicide, died by suicide, suicided, or took his/her own life.
- Be honest and give children truthful information about a death by suicide
 - You might say "Mommy had a disease called depression that caused her to be very sad and she thought she would never feel better and she made her body stop working. She forgot she get help. There is always another way."
- You might explain to a young child that when a person dies by suicide, their mind was sick and they were not able to think clearly and make good decisions.
- Explain what's happened in a series of steps, building up information like a jigsaw
- Be honest and consistent with your explanation of how that person died
- Use language children will understand and be comfortable with
- Encourage them ask questions and be prepared to answer them
- Share more information as a child gets older and their understanding develops
- It's okay to admit you do not have all the answers