

Children have many questions about death. As they pass through different developmental stages and have different concepts of death & dying, these questions may change. Often parents get uncomfortable with these questions- children tend to be quite honest and focus on emotions or details adults may feel are “inappropriate”. The following questions and answers are designed to give parents tools to handle questions about death and to help parents understand that, for a child, there are no inappropriate questions about death, and the best thing to do is simply take any and all questions in stride and answer them concretely and matter-of-factly.

## Answers to a Child’s Questions About Death

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### When Someone We Love Dies

Death is the name we give to a very confusing part of life. We know that plants die in winter. We know that animals die too. We can understand that this is the way nature works. But it is much, much harder to understand why people die, especially someone we love.

A loved one’s death may make us feel terribly sad, or afraid, or even angry. But learning about this part of life can help us feel much better. This article answers the questions that most children ask about death.

### **Why Do People Die?**

Dying is a natural part of life. All living things-plants, animals, even people-are special parts of God’s natural world. Nature almost always gives us long, healthy lives. Like all other living things, though, people grow old and reach the end of life. This is called death, or dying.

### **Does Death Hurt?**

Doctors tell us that death is not usually painful. Especially with old people, dying is almost always quiet. When someone dies in an accident, they often feel no pain at all because death comes so quickly. Even when someone is sick and hurt for a long time before death, special medicines and treatments take away much of the pain.

### **When Someone Dies are They Being Punished?**

Death is never a punishment. It is almost always natural. Time wears out important parts of our bodies. After many, many years these parts cannot work anymore. People die when these parts-the heart, for example-stop working.

God has given us wonderfully strong bodies that usually last a long time. Sometimes sickness makes them stop working before a person becomes old. This is not punishment, though. No one dies because God is angry with them. A person dies when an important part of their body wears out and stops working.

### **Why Can’t Doctors and Hospitals Stop Someone from Dying?**

Many times they do. Yet sometimes, even though they have tried their best, someone dies. Doctors and nurses help people live long, healthy lives. Because of what doctors have learned, people live much longer now than they did when your grandparents were children. Hospitals help people too. Doctors and nurses work in hospitals to make sick and injured people better. People go to hospitals to become healthy, not to die.

### **Where do Dead People Go?**

Most people believe that when someone dies, part of that person lives on and goes to Heaven. This part of us is not like a brain or heart or any other part of us that doctors and nurses have to take care of. It is the part of us that lets us feel love and happiness. It never gets sick. It never wears out. This part is called the spirit, and/or the soul.

We cannot see someone's spirit and/or soul. We cannot see heaven either. But we have faith in them. Faith is believing in something we cannot see or measure.

People all over the world have always believed that our spirits and/or souls, live on. There is no reason to think this is not true.

### **Why did Someone I Love Have to Die? Why Couldn't It Have Been Someone Else?**

Sometimes death doesn't seem fair. Of all the people in the whole world, why did this one special person have to die?

Almost everyone, no matter who they are or where they live, is loved by others. Almost everyone will be missed by others when they die. Right now someone just like you somewhere else in the world is asking the same question: Why did someone I love have to die? Maybe if you were with that other person you could help them understand that we all will someday lose someone we love.

### **Is Death Like Sleeping?**

Death is **nothing at all** like sleep. People-animals too-sleep to rest and stay healthy. Sleep gives hard working parts of our bodies time to store up strength.

Think of how good you feel after sleeping. You feel good because your body is rested and ready for another day.

When someone dies, their body stops working. It is not resting. Its job is over.

### **Why Do Some People Die When They are Very Young?**

Sometimes, but not very often, death comes to a child. Illness can make this happen. So can a very bad accident.

A young person's death makes us especially unhappy. We feel it isn't fair. We feel like everyone should have a long, happy life. We know that we will miss a young friend, a sister, or brother more than we might miss anyone else. We may even feel sad because we sometimes argued or fought with that child.

All these feelings are normal. Every young person has them, just as you do. But you must leave room for other feelings too. Remember that you often made that child happy. Maybe you did argue once in a while. All friends do that. But all friends love each other too. Even though that child's life was not as long as yours will be, it was a mostly happy life, because of loving friends like you.

## **Grown Ups are Big and Strong. Why Do Grown-Ups Die Before They Get Old?**

Most grown-ups are strong and healthy. They will live until they are very old.

Sometimes, though, a grown-up's heart or other important part of their body stops working. Being big and strong doesn't always help.

It is not the person's fault. It is not God's fault. It is not your fault. Remember this too: Probably no other grown-up you love will die before they become very old.

## **How Long Will I Live?**

No one knows how long he or she will live. We do know that we will not live forever. (Imagine how crowded the world would be if people lived for ever!). We know that when we get old, death gets closer.

This does not mean that people worry all their lives about growing old and dying. As we grow older we learn more about living and dying. The more we learn, the less we have to worry. We know many old people who are very happy. They have learned not to worry about dying.

How long will you live? Probably a long, long time. Almost everyone does.

## **Do People Die Because They are Unhappy?**

Unhappiness can sometimes make us feel sick for awhile. But almost no one dies because they are unhappy. Remember the times when you have been unhappy? Sooner or later you feel better again. You are able to smile and laugh again. Everyone goes through times like this. It has nothing to do with dying.

## **Will I Ever Again See the Person Who Has Died?**

When someone dies they do not come back to life again. This is why people become so sad when someone they love dies. They miss the person who is gone.

Right now you may miss someone who has died. Maybe you will always miss them. But you will not always feel sad about it. You will understand after a while that the person has gone to heaven. Some day, a long, long time from now, you may be with that person in heaven.

## **How Can I Stop Feeling Sad?**

It is natural to feel sad when someone you love dies. You miss them. You feel lonely. You may feel confused too. Most people-not just children-feel the same way when someone they love dies.

Sadness is something like the pain you feel when you hurt yourself. At first it hurts a lot. But it will hurt less each day. Sooner than you think it will be gone. Then you will be able to think about the person who has died without feeling sad.

Right now you are trying to understand more about death. This will take some of your sadness away. It helps to ask questions. It also helps very much to tell your family and friends how you feel. It helps most of all not to pretend. If you are sad, don't pretend you are not. If you aren't sad, don't try to make yourself feel that way.

## **Why Are People Buried When They Die?**

After people die we place their bodies in cemeteries. This is a gentle way to say good-bye to someone we love.

A cemetery gives us a quiet, pretty place to come and think about that person. A visit to a cemetery can bring back pleasant memories.

#### What Are Funerals For?

One of the nicest things about being a person is that we are able to feel love for another person. This does not end when that person dies.

Funerals are for sharing loving feelings about someone who has died. They give us the chance to remember with others the goodness and joy that person brought to our lives. This takes away some of the sadness that we all feel. It also helps us understand how much others care too.