

Talking to Children About Medical Assistance in Dying

Many parents and caregivers wonder how best to talk to their children about death and dying. It can be especially challenging when someone in their life chooses **Medical Assistance in Dying** or MAiD. While every family has their own way of talking with each other, use this as a guide to help you talk to your children.

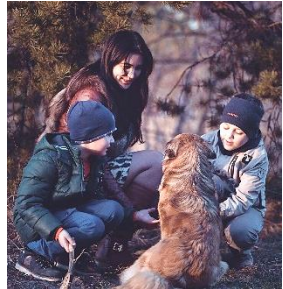


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Follow their lead

Some children will ask many questions about how MAiD happens while other children don't want the details. Ask your child what they want to know. As with other types of death, it is important to be honest with children. Give them facts.

Explain MAiD

- The person has an illness or disability that cannot be cured and they will not get better. The person is going to die even if they do not have a medically assisted death.
- MAiD: "In Canada, when someone has an illness that their body is going to die from, they can either let their body die from the illness, or they can ask a doctor or nurse practitioner to help their body die in a safe and painless way."
- Reassure them that a medically assisted death is painless and peaceful.
- Share your thinking or wonder about the dying process with your child. This often involves talking about suffering.
- Clarify what it might look like if the person's body died from the illness.

Explain the MAiD rules

- Some children are comforted knowing there are rules as to who can get a medically assisted death.
- A medically assisted death is only allowed if all of the following conditions exist.
The person must:
 - have a serious illness or disability that they will die from
 - be at a point where death is expected soon
 - be aware of all the other options for care
 - be choosing MAiD themselves and not under pressure from anyone else
 - be assessed by 2 doctors or nurse practitioners

Clarify 'choice'

- The word 'choice' can be a problem if not understood. The person is not choosing death over life. The person is choosing when and how to die.
- The person would prefer to keep living, be healthy, and enjoy more time with the child. The illness and the person's overall health make this impossible.

Give options

- The person who is dying decides who will be there at the time of their death. Even if the person wants the child to be there, let the child decide if they want to be there.
- Give the child time to think about their choice. Support them in whatever they decide.
- If the child is not going to be there, explore other ways they can be involved.

With thanks and appreciation to Andrea Warnick, RN, MA Registered Psychotherapist for sharing her work.

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This information does not replace the advice given to you by your healthcare provider.

Explain the dying process

- Prepare them for what to expect. Ask them what they want to know. Don't leave it to their imagination.
- Explain who will be there and what medical equipment might be used. If you are not sure, ask for this information.
- Explain how the medicines are given and what the medicines do:
 - relieves the person's pain
 - sedates the person (it looks like sleep but it is different, the person will not be able to talk or respond)
 - eventually stops the person's breathing and stops their heart beating
- Reassure them that the person is asked if they still want a medically assisted death before the medicine is given.

Help them to be with the person

- Help them think about what they might help with. Some ideas:
 - Decorate the room
 - Decorate blankets and/or pillow case
 - Choose music
- Help them think about what they might do. Some ideas:
 - Read aloud or to themselves
 - Share stories
 - Watch a movie or TV program
 - Do homework
 - Hold the person's hand
 - Give the person mouth care
 - Sing together
 - Pray together

Support them in their grief

- Explain that grief is all the different feelings we have when something difficult happens in life.
- These feelings are normal.

Invite questions

- Make sure you understand the question they are asking:
 - "What do you think?"
 - "Help me understand your question better. You would like to know _____"
- Validate the question: "That is a great question!"
- Answer honestly using simple, concrete language.
- It is okay not to have all the answers. Wonder with the child.

Help them create their story

- Explore with the child how they will respond should someone ask about the death.
- Help them create the language of their story.
- Let them know it is okay to share **or** not share.
- Suggest ways they can politely stop the conversation if needed.
- If you think they will encounter people with strong feelings about MAiD, prepare them.

Added supports and resources

- Your local palliative care or community social worker
- The book 'When Dinosaurs Die – A Guide to Understanding Death' by Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown
- Online:

KidsGrief.ca



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(Dr. Jay Children's Grief Centre)

[Andrea Warnick Consulting](#)
supporting grieving children

