

## Talking to young people about illness, dying and death

The serious illness or the death of a parent can be devastating for children and teenagers, and can bring multiple challenges into their lives.

Supporting children and teenagers at such a difficult time can often feel daunting, especially if you are finding it hard to cope with your own emotions. Therefore, it is important to ensure that you are receiving the support you need, and also to inform the nursery or school or college about what has happened; these settings may be able to offer additional support.

Talking to children and teenagers about someone who is dying or has died is difficult but it does not make things worse; ignoring what has happened can be isolating for them. It is important to think about the most suitable time and place for such conversations, and which adult should take the initiative.

It is important to be open and honest in such conversations but also to pitch it at an appropriate level, so think about your vocabulary and their level of understanding.

These conversations can help children and teenagers recognise that illness and death is a natural part of life, and to appreciate that some things in life can never be fully explained. It is better to admit that we do not always have the answer rather than being vague or hiding things. Also, if you are unable to answer a factual question, assure them that you will find out and let them know as soon as you can.

It is vital that children and teenagers understand that it is okay to cry and show difficult feelings, and to find ways of doing this which are not disruptive or destructive; a healthy expression of feelings when bereaved is a good thing.

If you are concerned about your child or teenager, please speak to the children & families support team at Thames Hospice for help and advice. We also have counsellors and bereavement support specialists to assist you.

You can phone us on 01753 847300 or e-mail us at [TH.PFSTeam@nhs.net](mailto:TH.PFSTeam@nhs.net)

Alternatively, you can contact your GP or other professional agencies for advice and help.