



Talking things through

When a pet dies, the most important things we can do for a child is talk to them about it. This is difficult when we are also grieving because we are hurting, too, and we don't always have the answers they are looking for.

Talking about a loss helps us process it and it's helpful to gives kids a safe space to do that. It's okay if you don't have all the answers or if you are sad as you talk about it – kids benefit from someone who can role-model healthy grieving, which includes crying and feeling sad.

Approach your conversations with an open-mind, honesty, and love. Keep in mind that clear and accurate language is best for kids and try to avoid euphemisms. For example, explain that a pet died and that it means their body stopped working, which is clearer than saying they went to sleep or went to a better place. While we aren't used to talking about death so concretely, it is helpful for kids to understand exactly what is happening so that they aren't confused or fearful.

Consider these prompts if you're not sure where to start:

- "Do you know what it means when someone dies?"
- "What have you been wondering about since Buddy died?"
- "Do you know why I have been sad?"
- "What do you miss most about Buddy? I will miss....."
- "Do you want to draw a picture of Buddy? What should be in the picture?"
- "When I am very sad, it feels like it hurts right here (pointing to heart). How do you feel when you are really sad?"

Give your child space to ask questions. If they ask you something that you don't know the answer to, it's okay to say you aren't sure. You might answer with "I'm not sure, but I wonder about that, too. What do you think?"

Remember, talking with your kids helps them process, learn, and heal. It shows them that you are there to answer their questions and that they aren't alone. Not only are you helping your child heal, but you are giving them coping skills they will use throughout their lives.