

When Someone Your Child Loves is Dying 10 Tips for Caregivers

1. Understand that you are “opening a dialogue” that will start, stop, and restart as your child absorbs new information. (Relax a little: You have more than one chance to do this.)
2. Remember that this is not a one-way conversation; your child needs a chance to reflect, ask questions, and express feelings.
3. Use simple, concrete language including the word dying. Avoid symbolic or euphemistic language like “She is going away from us.” or “He is going to sleep.”
4. Answer questions honestly and simply and offer only as much detail as your child requests.
5. Explain the illness and say its name.
6. It is OK to say you don’t know. “We don’t know when she will die.”
7. Give your child choices in what to do. Some will want to visit the patient and some will not.
8. If the child is seeing the patient: Prepare the child for changes in their condition. Describe changes in appearance, alertness, mood, and any medical equipment being used in advance.
9. Reassure your child that they will be safe and cared for and explain how this will happen.
10. Keep the dialogues open, but don’t force it. Create an environment where it is OK to talk or not talk.