

Talking about death to children and young people with learning difficulties

- Everyone is different therefore no simple one-size-fits-all recipe
- General principles:
 - Consult with all interested parties – e.g. to establish what child already understands, what families' wishes are etc.
 - Consider child's cognitive capacity
 - Find the right person to do the telling
 - "Telling" is more than just words
 - Experience – seeing body, attending funeral
 - Repetition, consistency of information/vocabulary
 - Be creative – use pictures, photos, calendars, use models, computer programmes, social stories, visual timetables, comic strip conversations
 - Find the right time (generally as soon as possible) and place – to feel safe and secure, no interruptions, enough time etc.
 - Use appropriate method of communication – use objects of reference, signs, symbols or pictures to reinforce if needed
 - Use simple language – no euphemisms or jargon
 - Tell in chunks – telling is a process not an event
 - **What** to say – build on what's already understood, consider what the death **means** for the child – i.e. implications for child's day to day life, changes to routine etc
 - Give honest, accurate information
 - Don't avoid in misguided attempt to "protect"
 - Check the child's understanding
 - Give time for questions and answer honestly
 - Make sure you understand the question asked!
 - Provide support for the "teller"
 - Regular communication between all involved – information may change, prevents misunderstandings

Reference

Irene Tuffrey-Wijne, (2013) *"How to break bad news to people with intellectual disabilities: a guide for carers and professionals"* Jessica Kingsley Publishers: London and Philadelphia.

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