



When your child may be facing death...

My concern: It will be too frightening for my child to talk about the end of her life.

Response: Your child will usually suspect that something is seriously wrong and may have many unanswered questions. When pre-school children don't have the facts, they may substitute fact with fantasy. Sometimes fantasies are more frightening than facts. Then both the adults and the child are *scared and worried alone*. Parents may long to talk about it but are not able to. The child may not have a way of describing their worries.

My concern: It will be too hard for me to control my emotions in front of my child.

Response: We worry about expressing deep feelings publicly. It may seem that once the feelings start, they won't stop. We want to be in control in front of a child, especially when talking about important things. We worry that our own emotions will make it worse for the child. Our worries are genuine but may mean we are putting our needs before theirs. Even though it may be hard to do, showing true feelings in front of your child strengthens your bond, showing how deeply you care about them. (And you *will* stop crying.)

My concern: I've tried so many times and just can't get the right words out.

Response: Pre-school age children respond more to body language, the unspoken language, than they will to words. They read the worry, sadness and fear in your actions. At first, it will probably be easier if you start by playing together rather than talking. If the things you need to say are hard to say directly, you might be able to say them through a doll, teddy bear, or other toy. Getting started might seem hard, but children will willingly respond and begin to lead the play. For example, a big teddy bear might say to a little teddy bear, "I've been awfully sad because you are so sick". The child can respond to the bear's words or change the subject if he chooses. Let the child lead the play.

- ♦ Remember to keep it simple. Stop when the child chooses to stop. Don't over-explain. Share what's in your heart – sadness, fears, anger – and find out about the child's feelings too.
- ♦ Use symbols to talk about what is happening. You might use the child's favourite movie or book character, toy animal, star in the sky or flower to lead into the discussion.
- ♦ Try to be honest and real with the child. Children are naturally wise about the important things. Avoiding topics such as sadness, death or telling the truth may be confusing and frightening for the child but together you can get through these very hard times.

