

EXPLAINING DEATH TO CHILDREN

THE DEAD INSECT ACTIVITY

As death can be a difficult concept to understand for children, particularly for younger children. This activity can be a helpful way of helping them to understand what it means when something or someone dies.

Step 1 - Point out the living things you see

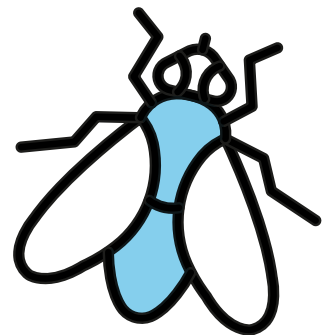
When you are next out for a walk, notice the living creatures, talk about what you can see with your child and what they can see; the birds, the bees, the butterflies etc. Alternatively, you can point out a fly in the house, or a bird they can see out of the window.

Step 2 - Notice what it does

The butterfly can flap its wings, the birds can tweet and fly, the grasshopper can jump, the squirrel can climb etc.

Step 3 – Explain that this is because they are alive

Then explain that they can do these things because the bird or insect or animal is alive - 'just like you and me'. Explain that the insect, for example, is alive and so it can move, flap its wings, eat and think. Its heart is beating and its brain is thinking – 'just like yours and mine'. These are the things that keep all creatures alive.



Step 4 – Feel our hearts beating

Show the child how to feel its heart beating. Maybe they can listen to your heart, or feel their pulse in their wrists or chests? Explain how it is our heart that is beating that keeps us alive.

Ask your child to think about the things they are able to do because they are alive? For example, run, walk, talk to you, shout, play etc.

Step 5 – Find a dead insect

If possible, find a dead insect. Talk to your child about what they notice about it: for example, it doesn't move, fly away or buzz, or run away.

Step 6 – Explain that this is because it is dead

Explain that it has died and that it is dead. Using the right words is important as it helps children begin to understand that the insect isn't simply asleep and that these are new words for a new concept.

Step 7 – Make links to the person who has died

Now you can explain that this is the same when people die. When their hearts are beating, they are alive and they can do all the things like moving, laughing, eating and hugging. When their hearts stop beating, they die. They cannot walk, talk, hear anything or feel anything with their bodies.

You can then make the connection to the person who has died, explaining that this is what has happened to them, their body has stopped working and they have died.

Usually, people and creatures are very old when they die.

You may find that you need to go back to some of these steps a few times and you may find your child asks more questions such as 'What makes the heart stop beating?' or 'What happens to someone's body after they die?' These questions are normal and natural and, where possible, it helps to answer them as clearly as possible, using simple, straightforward language.

We know that it can be difficult to answer those questions. You can contact Winston's Wish on the Freephone National Helpline, email or live chat service and a practitioner will help you to think about how you can explain it.



Giving hope to grieving children