

# How we talk about death with our children

Our sons were 5 and 3 when their cousin **Georgie** died in utero, and they still ask some of the same questions about his death that they did then. Today we visit his grave and pray for him and ask him to pray for us. We never met him, but we miss him. Not too long ago, one of our sons was wondering aloud what Georgie would be like if he were still alive. I wonder too.

Death is a difficult but familiar topic in our household. It's something we discuss frequently, more frequently than I wish we needed to. Two weeks ago we unexpectedly lost our brother-in-law, my sons' Uncle Eric, the father of four of their cousins. Since then, I have been fielding many questions and answering some better than others. I struggle to find the answers sometimes. But I would always rather have questions than silence.

Just to be clear, I am not in any way an expert. I am just feeling my way and trusting that the Holy Spirit is leading us through these conversations. But this is my general approach:

1. **We aren't scared to talk about death.** Death is part of life. We don't have to know the answers or have a deep understanding of a topic to discuss it with our children. And talking about death makes it less frightening for our children—and for us—especially if we talk about it before they encounter it in a personal way.
2. **Death is an end, but it is not *the* end.** Death is a bridge between life on earth to life in heaven. God has planned a place for each of us in Heaven. He is with us always. We might stop in Purgatory for a little while, but He wants each of us to be with Him in Heaven. And one day we hope and pray we will be there with Jesus and Mary and the people we love who have gone ahead of us.
3. **Even though death is not the end, losing people we love still makes us sad.** It's hard to be sad, but it's all right to be sad. Even grown-ups get sad and cry. Sometimes it helps to talk about how sad we are—and to realize

other people are sad, too. And sometimes hugging or being with someone who is sad too helps us feel better ourselves.

4. **I don't have all the answers."** Even though doctors can try to explain it, we don't really understand why people die. Why do people get cancer? Why are there earthquakes and hurricanes? Why does a baby die before he even has a chance to be born? Why does someone we love so much die? Why can't we have the people we love with us always? Why do we have to say goodbye? Some questions only God can answer. We can ask Him those questions over and over and over again. He might tell us now, or He might tell us when we get to Heaven. But one day we will understand.
5. **We pray for people who die.** We pray for people all the time, of course, but praying for people who die is a special thing we can do. It might help people get to Heaven. We assume they are there, but it's nice to pray just in case. We can also talk to people who have died and ask them to intercede for us, too. Prayer helps us stay connected to the people we love even when we can't see them. I like to tell our children that we know their cousin Georgie is a saint, but because he's not in a saint book, he's our special friend in Heaven. Many people are asking St. Joseph for help—including us. But not many are whispering prayers in Georgie's ear. We have his full attention.
6. **When people die, we try to comfort the people who miss them the most.** We pray for them—and tell them we are praying. We go to viewings and funerals. We don't have to have the right words to say. Sometimes all we can do is be with them. We give hugs. We send notes and Mass cards and gifts and food. We tell them we're sorry—and talk about the person who died. And we keep on praying.
7. **We find ways to celebrate the people we love.** We hold onto the memories. We look at photos and tell stories. We visit the cemetery, and we bring flowers and pumpkins and little balloons to leave there. We light candles and write their names in intentions books at church. We think of the people we miss in special ways on the anniversaries of their deaths, mark their birthdays, and keep them close to our hearts. We never really lose people when they die. They are part of who we are, and our lives are richer because we know them. And they will never forget us either.



There are many better, more complete resources out there to help with this.

This is just how I approach these conversations as a mother who knows she doesn't have it all figured out.

You can find other Catholic bloggers sharing their thoughts on this topic [here](#).