

Talking about MAiD with Children

Children are often referred to as the ‘forgotten grievers.’ Guiding them through end of life experiences and modelling grief can be challenging work, especially when one is experiencing the loss of a loved one themselves. Assisted deaths can be especially tricky to explain to children, however because the death is planned there is opportunity to support and prepare them.

Important information to share with children

- The 4 C’s children and teens want to know:
 - Did I CAUSE it? Can I CATCH it? Can I CURE it? Who is going to take CARE of me?
- Children can find it comforting to know there are rules and safeguards, for example:
 - Only really sick people can have MAiD, and they have to meet the criteria
 - Teens may wish to hear more on eligibility criteria
 - At least two doctors and/or nurse practitioners do the assessment and have to agree eligibility is met
 - You have to choose MAiD for yourself, and can change your mind at anytime
- The person wants to be with them and watch them grow up, but their disease/illness makes this impossible.

*Visit the resource list below for resources for more on how to explain MAiD to a child *

Planning for MAiD with children

- Let your provider know the children that will be impacted by the assisted death, and if any are considering being present for the provision. Providers can help:
 - Connect you with resources
 - Answer the child’s questions
 - Explain the process and procedure to the child in advance
 - Become familiar to the child before the day of the death
- Create a plan and have a go-to person for the child to go to during the procedure:
 - Where they can sit
 - How to leave the room if needed and who will go with them
 - Who they can ask questions to
 - Ways to help and be involved (i.e. Decorate the room or play music)

Reminders

- It’s ok that this is a difficult conversation to have, especially with children. Just as important as considering the child is remembering to be kind to yourself and that you are doing the best you can.
- Follow the child’s lead. Ask them questions about what they want to know, what they are feeling, if they want to be present for the death and let them control their level of involvement.

- Be open and honest. As with all deaths, modelling grief and acceptance, as well as promoting understanding that death is a fact of life, is important to guide the child.
- It's OK not to have all the answers. Just validating the question by saying something like 'that's a great question, I wonder that too' is helpful.

Resources & References

- MAiD Activity Workbook:
[Canadian Virtual Hospice MAiD Activity Workbook](#)
- Explaining MAiD to children, discussion guide and FAQ section on including children:
<https://drjaychildrensgriefcentre.ca/programs/medical-assistance-in-dying/>
- Tips for health care providers: <http://thischangedmypractice.com/preparing-children-for-death-of-a-loved-one/#discussion>
- VCH Patient Health Education Materials Pamphlet: Talking about death with children:
<https://vch.eduhealth.ca/en/list?q=talking+to+children+about+death&p=1&ps=20>
- VCH Patient Health Education Materials Pamphlet: Preparing Children for Loss:
<https://vch.eduhealth.ca/en/list?q=preparing+children+for+loss&p=1&ps=20>
- When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death
 - Children's book written by Laurie Krasny Brown (available for purchase in hard copy, may also be found electronically or read aloud if searched on www.youtube.com)
- General information: <https://kidsgrief.ca/>
- General information: <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/death.html>

For more information please contact the Vancouver Coastal Health Assisted Dying Program at:

Phone: 1-844-550-5556 **Email:** assisteddying@vch.ca