

## What's next

Maintain or create schedules and routines to provide a sense of safety and control.

Encourage your child or teen to ask questions and share their feelings (verbally or through play, art or exercise).

Be patient. Sometimes children ask difficult questions or they may ask to discuss the topic a number of times. If it becomes more than you can bear, look to family, friends or professionals who may be able to help.

Be aware that children often will process their grief differently as they grow. New questions or concerns may arise.

Extra comfort or affection often goes further than words. Reassure the child that they will always be supported and loved throughout this time & into the future.

Spend time together as a family by sharing memories with the person who is ill.



## WE CAN HELP

Hospice Calgary Sage Centre can provide additional information, counselling and group support for families who are facing advanced illness or grieving a death.

To access support which can be provided to you at our office, in your home or any convenient location, call Hospice Calgary at 403-263-4525.

## CONTACT US

**Hospice Calgary**  
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**Alberta Health  
Services**

Charitable Registration #118963669 RR0001



**FAMILY  
CONVERSATIONS  
ABOUT MEDICAL  
ASSISTANCE  
IN DYING**

When Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) is being considered, you may have questions about **what**, **how much** and **when** to share information with children and teens.

Open, honest conversations can be tailored to fit your unique family needs and communication styles. The following tips may be helpful.

When an adult in the family has an advanced illness, talking about the losses and the decisions that need to be made are difficult. Many adults want to shield children and teens from the truth in order to protect them.

If children & teens are not informed, they may feel isolated, alone and confused. Including them can help them feel a sense of control and gives them the opportunity to process their thoughts & feelings while maintaining trust within the family.

**You may want to consider professional help when your child or teen..**

- Experiences significant changes in behaviour and/or mood
- Asks to speak to someone
- Talks about wanting to hurt themselves
- Has past concerns with mental health

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For detailed information on talking with children or teens about advanced illness, visit: [hospicecalgary.ca](http://hospicecalgary.ca) and [kidsgrief.ca](http://kidsgrief.ca).



**Where to begin**

**Consider what they already know about the illness.** Do they know that the person has an advanced illness and is dying?

**Consider the individual needs of your child, such as their age and maturity level.** Many preschool age children do not understand that death is permanent. However, some older children may have a more refined understanding of the seriousness of the illness & death, depending on their past experiences. They may ask more questions about why this person's choosing MAID. Reassure them that this isn't their fault.

**Where possible, avoid talking to your child before a major event, like school, a party or field trip.** Begin the conversation when you have sufficient time so that your child can have time to think about what was said and come back with questions.

**Choose a comfortable nurturing setting,** such as their room or the kitchen.

**Share your experience** so your child knows it's okay to have their own thoughts and feelings.

**What to say**

If your child or teen doesn't know that the person has an advanced illness and is dying, you could consider the following suggestions to begin the conversation.

**Explain that this person has a serious illness and they will not get better.**

- "Most people who are sick get better. This person's illness is stronger than all of the treatments and they will not get better. This means the serious illness will cause their body to stop working and they will die."
- "When a person has an illness that will cause their body to die, they can choose to wait for this to happen. Or they can choose to ask a special doctor to give them medication that will help their body die. This will not cause them any pain."

**Use simple, truthful language that is appropriate for their age.** Be open and let their questions guide you. Some children or teens may want more details than others.