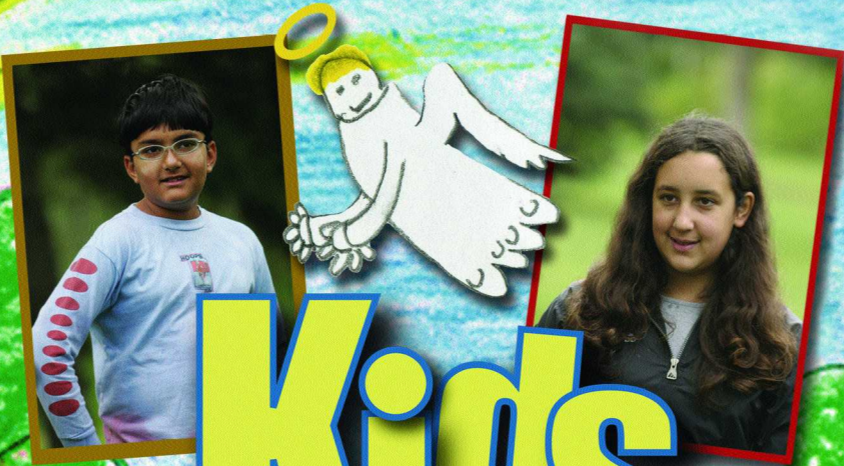


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Kids talkin' about DEATH



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Kids Talkin' About Death is an insightful look into how kids see and interpret death, from coping with the loss of a parent to helping a grieving friend. Candid, charming and astute, the kids bring death out into the open in a positive way. The taboo of death and the afterlife is explored through honest and at times playful conversations and animation.



Entertaining and heartwarming, this documentary teaches all of us that death should be an important part of understanding life.

Made especially for children aged 9-12, Kids Talkin' About Death is a safe and welcoming discussion starter for an often difficult topic.

A user guide is printed on the inside of this videojacket.

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Produced by Jennifer Torrance
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Location Sound Larry MacDonald
Original Music Michael Bradford

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User Guide

Kids Talkin' About Death is aimed at children between 9 and 12 but has also received a positive response from children as young as 6. It is strongly suggested that adults preview the film to determine if it is right for their children. Please keep in mind that this film is not intended for children who are currently grieving and may not be appropriate for children who have recently suffered a significant or traumatic loss (for example, the death of a teacher, parent or schoolmate).



Why do we need to talk about death with kids? Kids are surrounded by death in the media, video games, television and movies. Nevertheless, dealing with real death can be very difficult. The truth is that death happens and kids cannot be shielded from it for long: eventually the family pet dies, or a friend's grandma, a great uncle or someone they deeply loved passes away.

As children reach the age of 9 or 10, they begin to gain a more mature understanding of death: that it happens to everyone, that it is permanent, irreversible and cannot be imagined away. This video will facilitate dialogue between children and adults, to enable children to voice their concerns, thoughts and fears about death.



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Before screening the video in class

1. Preview the material.
2. Consider whether it is appropriate to show it at this time. If a serious loss has just occurred, it may be better to wait a while, or use only certain excerpts.
3. Be prepared for the follow-up discussion. Ask your principal what resources are available (i.e., guidance counsellors, books, community services). Consult the resources section at the end of this user guide.
4. Evaluate your own feelings about death. Does this film trigger emotions or memories for you? It is important that you, the adult, feel comfortable discussing this topic.
5. Parent input and support are vital in teaching about this topic. Draft a letter stating your intention to screen this film and ask parents to give consent. Ask them if their child has recently experienced the death of someone close. Offer parents the opportunity to preview the material. Give them the option of having their child “opt out” of the screening.

On the day of the classroom screening

1. Introduce the topic and tell the students you will be watching a film together and then discussing their views on death. Assure them that you have seen the film already and it is not scary or overly sad. Tell them why you chose to show this film. (Perhaps there has been a death in the school community, or in the news, or it is tied into the study of life cycles, or is part of the health curriculum.)
2. Acknowledge that talking about death is difficult for most people. Ask the students why they think that is. With the class, make a list of rules for discussing sensitive topics. For example: *Respect each other's opinions and feelings. No making fun. It's okay to talk honestly about death. You can choose not to answer certain questions if they make you feel very uncomfortable. It's okay to cry.*

During the screening

Be aware of how the students are responding to the film. Crying is a completely natural reaction to death. However, any signs of prolonged distress should be addressed privately with the student and his or her parents.

2

After the screening

1. Start the discussion with safe, easy questions. *What was your favourite part? Did you think any parts of the film were funny?* Allow laughter to be a part of this conversation. It's a great way to relieve anxiety and tension.

2. **Identification:** *Can you relate to the kids in the film? Which ones? Have you had any similar experiences?* The students can discuss these experiences orally or in writing.

3. **Beliefs and customs:** *What do you believe happens after you die? Is it okay for people to have different ideas? What did the kids in the film say about differences of beliefs? What are some of the rituals or customs that people engage in following a death (funerals, memorial services, planting trees, dedicating memorial benches, etc.)? How do these help us?*

ACTIVITY: If appropriate, students can research and present information on different customs associated with funerals and mourning (monuments, flowers, stones, offerings of food). Or you could have them create artwork depicting what they believe happens after death.

4. **Emotions:** Brainstorm with the class some of the emotional reactions to death (sadness, anger, fear, denial, nervous laughter, disgust). Talk about these responses in more detail:

- *Why do we feel sad or angry when someone dies?*
- *How can you tell if someone is sad, or if you, yourself, are sad?*

Discuss how feeling sad can affect our bodies – for example, cause difficulty sleeping, concentrating, having fun, eating.

• *How do we deal with our emotions? What do we do when we feel overwhelmed by our emotions? Who can we turn to for help? Who helped Rio deal with his dad's death?*

ACTIVITY: Divide the class into four groups. Without letting the others in the class know, assign each group a different emotional reaction to death. Each group will create a short (1-2 min.) non-verbal movement piece showing how our bodies reveal emotions. Present the pieces to the class for discussion. Could the class correctly identify each emotion?

3

5. **Sympathy:** *How can we help a friend through a loss? How might a friend behave after the death of someone close to them? What can we say or do to help? What actions would be hurtful?*

ACTIVITY: Because it is very difficult to find sympathy cards for kids, have the students write and design ones for a child their age. Discuss these in the class.

Before the class ends

Acknowledge again that it's hard to talk about death but that the children handled it very well. Thank them for being sensitive and respectful to the other students in the class. Assure them that they can come to you, a parent or a school counsellor if they want to talk privately.

Additional ideas for grieving children

MEMORIES ACTIVITY: In the film, Payton talks about “never forgetting that person, but moving on with your life.” *How can we keep the memories of those we've lost alive? How can we “remember the good things,” as Rio said, and use those memories to help us move on with our lives?*

Creating a memory box: Supply materials for the children to make memory boxes. They may decorate them with pictures or special drawings. In the box, they can store keepsakes, photographs, letters, and so on.

For children who are grieving and need additional support, check your local listings under “bereavement counselling” or “hospice.” Most cities offer special bereavement workshops for children. Funeral homes, memorial societies and children's hospitals may also know of resources available in your area.

Recommended resources

- Griefworks BC Web site: <www.griefworksbc.com>.

- But Won't Granny Need her Socks? by Donald W. Knowles and Nancy Reeves (for younger children). Kendall/Hunt Pub., 1983.
- Explaining Death to Children by Earl A. Grollman. Beacon Press, 1968.
- Healing a Child's Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas for Families, Friends and Caregivers by Alan D. Wolfelt. Companion Press, 2001.

Visit <www.nfb.ca/kidstalkinaboutdeath>.

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4