

# Introduction

**Suicide is hard for many adults to understand.  
Explaining suicide to children is extremely difficult.**

As an elementary school counselor, I have counseled families in which a loved one has completed suicide. One of the most important factors in explaining suicide to children is to be honest with them. Children are very aware of their surroundings and they will know if someone is not being honest with them. Many children that have been lied to about a death grow up to feel resentful and wonder why they were not told the truth.

When explaining suicide to children, it is important to make sure the child feels safe and that he/she will be well taken care of. In addition, it is important the child know the death is not their fault and nothing they could have done would have changed the outcome of this situation. Let the child know they may be feeling many different emotions and that whatever they feel is perfectly normal and okay. The child needs to know there are many people he/she can turn to for guidance to help them express their feelings.

It is my hope that this book will help adults explain this type of death to children and open the lines of communication between adults and children.

– Rebecca

**Mommy said Daddy loved me so very much and when he talked about me, he smiled every time.**

**I asked her why Daddy died. She started to cry harder and so did I. She said Daddy was very, very sad for a long, long time – even before I was born. She said he didn't have any hope that things would get better. She said he didn't know he had lots of doctors and other people he could talk to about being sad to help him feel better. She said Daddy decided to end his life.**



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# Counseling Activities

## (To Help the Child Express Feelings About the Death of Their Loved One)

1. Have the child choose from a variety of colorful journals. Have the child draw pictures and write how they feel in the journal. Tell the child the journal can be private or the journal can be shared with a trusted adult.
2. Have the child take a paper plate and draw a face on one side that represents how they look to the outside world. On the other side, have them draw a picture of how they feel on the inside.
3. Have the child make a memory box. They can do this activity with the entire family so it encourages communication about the death. The memory box can be a shoebox that is decorated with the deceased person's favorite color. The family then puts things in the memory box that reminds them of the person such as pictures, toys the person gave to the child, eyeglasses, jewelry, cards and letters, etc. Have the child share the memory box with a counselor, other family members or a clergy member.
4. Have the child draw pictures of themselves expressing happy, sad, mad, scared and excited feelings. Discuss when they have felt each of these emotions and how they have helped themselves feel better when they feel sad, mad or scared.
5. Have the child draw a picture of themselves and the person who died and fun things they did together.
6. Play a game with the child that he/she played with the person who died. For example, if the child and his father played checkers a lot, play the game with the child and encourage him/her to talk about how fun it was to play with his father.
7. Have the child dip their fingers into ink to make fingerprints on a paper. Have them use these fingerprints to make people in their family. For example, the thumbprint could be the father, the pinkie could be the smallest child, etc. Have the child put arms and legs on the print and turn them into