



What to say to kids when bad things happen?

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Calgarians, along with the whole country, have been impacted by the tragic accident involving the Humboldt Broncos junior hockey team. We are grieving, individually and as a community, for their deaths and the impact on families, friends, and communities.

We are reminded that life is fragile and that our world can change in an instant.

We feel sad, scared, helpless, and perhaps numb or angry. We ask ourselves "How do I handle this? Where to from here?"

Here are some things you can do for yourself and your family:

Take care

- Allow space to grieve, to feel the sadness and the pain. You don't know these families, but your world has been shaken and it's a normal reaction to feel sad, scared, angry and vulnerable.
- What do you need? How do you look after yourself? Do you remember to breathe? Do you allow yourself to put everything aside for a few minutes to do something that feels good? It doesn't have to be big: deep calm breathing stretches, sitting down for 10 minutes to drink a cup of tea or coffee, a 10-minute phone conversation with a friend, a walk in nature. These are all examples of how we can maintain or increase our well-being and they will be different for each of us. *What's in your well-being toolkit?*

Do I talk to my children about this? If so, what should I tell them?

- **WHY tell them?** People, young and old, are talking about the players and the community. They will hear about it in some form or another.
- **WHO should tell them?** Information is all over media and social media. Is your child or teen on social media? We do not want our children to feel scared and vulnerable by hearing of bad/sad news without the support and reassurance of family. It is best for children to be hear bad news directly from their parents/caregivers. It strengthens the trust between child and parents/caregivers. Avoid watching the news in your children's presence and limit your own

exposure. Keep in mind that images are very powerful and tend to be more difficult to let go of than a story we hear about or read.

- **WHEN should I tell them?** It is best to do it sooner rather than later unless you are fairly certain that your child will not be exposed to this topic from other sources. Avoid having difficult conversations when running out of the house in the morning or at bedtime. They may have trouble falling asleep or have bad dreams. Instead, choose a time when you can be together and engage in a conversation.
- **HOW to tell them?** Children will take their cue from our tone of voice and body language. Tell them that you have sad news to share with them and use simple terms. Choose a time when you can cuddle or just hang out with them. Maintain some physical proximity to provide comfort and reassurance as often as needed.
- **WHAT should I say?** Tell them as little as possible. Answer their questions without giving more information than what they are asking. “*Did they die?*” “Yes, some of the people on the bus died.” “*How did they die?*” “I don’t know but they likely got badly hurt in the accident and they died.” Remember, we can add more information but we cannot take information away.

Give reassurance, but be careful not to make promises that you cannot keep. It’s perfectly acceptable to say that these are rare events. This may lead to a conversation about “feeling safe” which is important to address on an ongoing basis with our children in various contexts (e.g., new friends, new activities, new responsibilities, and new parental boundaries such as curfews or using public transport alone).

Highlight the support people and communities have been giving the grieving families in different ways. Talk about the support you give each other and others in your community. Take the opportunity to remind them of sharing their feelings and recognizing what they need and what helps them feel better when they are sad, upset, angry, or just not feeling good.

How do we hold our children tight while giving them space to discover the world and themselves? Isn’t it the question we ask ourselves every day?

Hospice Calgary’s Child & Family Grief Services offers professional grief counselling support services for grieving families. We provide services that guide children, teens, adults and families through the grieving process as they face advanced illness or the death of someone close to them (including sudden or accidental deaths).

Wherever you access our services, we promise to journey with you, through end-of-life and grief, as long as you need us. We promise to have the difficult conversations about death, dying and grief, hearing your unique story and responding with compassion. We know transitions take time—we are here as long as you need.

For more information on our services, please contact our team: info@sagecentre.ca or 403-263-4525.