



## [The Importance of Discussing Loss with your Children Over Time](#)

At our Parents' Camp this summer, one of the moms told the story of how her husband died suddenly from a heart attack when her daughter was 6 years old. At age 12, her daughter confessed that she had no idea how her dad died. Her mother was shocked and felt horrible; she couldn't understand how her daughter did not know. At the time of the death, the mother had told her daughter in age-appropriate terms what happened, the daughter attended the funeral, etc.



It struck me how easy this can happen and how common it must be. We tell our kids what they need to know and what is age-appropriate at the time of the death, and what we can find in ourselves to bring up to them.

At the time of the death, our children may be quite young, they may not fully grasp the permanence of death and details may be unpleasant and filtered. Fast forward, a child who may have been 6 at the time of the death is now 12 and can process the information in a completely different way. When that same child is 15, or 18, or 22, they will continue to reprocess and revisit the loss through a new set of eyes and understanding.

Bare in mind, the loss is an automatic trauma to the child—it is a total shock to their lives, their bodies and their minds. Blocking out details is a coping skill; not comprehending or not wishing to comprehend is also a coping skill. I personally used to say I didn't remember details about my parents and their deaths when I did, because I didn't want to talk about it.

But knowing the full story, even if it is doled out over time, is part of our children's journeys to heal and move forward. It also helps them understand the impact the loss had on each member of the family, and the difference of each person's view on what happened at the time of the death, the funeral, and afterwards.

Retelling the story of loss over time also gives you the chance to correct any errors due to foggy memories. By only knowing a filtered version of the story, children will fill in gaps with their own assumptions or interpretations of what happened. Over time, these details may not be anywhere close to real truth.

By knowing many of our campers very well, and their parents, I know that kids often struggle with gaps in their stories but do not want to bring it up to their family members. Possibly out of fear of upsetting their loved ones, or because it's easier to avoid the gaps they have in their story. Some kids may not even realize there are missing pieces to their story, or that they have false information in their memory.

I ask you to consider sitting down and asking your child what he or she remembers about the loss. Take a risk and share your own version, and your own actions and emotions during and since the loss. It will help your family connect and move forward by filling in some of the missing pieces and unveiling some of the mystery surrounding the loss. Many children are HUNGRY for details but need you to bring it up for them.