

Helping Children Say Goodbye from Afar

When visiting the hospital isn't possible, children still need opportunities to say goodbye to a loved one who is dying. Allowing children a safe space to ask questions and express their feelings through talking and playing can be helpful. It is important to always be honest with children about the death of a loved one. Using concrete terms like "dying" and "dead" are less confusing to a child than vague terms such as "passed away" or "in a better place." It also might be helpful to read an age-appropriate storybook about death with your child to help them better understand.

Here are some other ways that you can help children say goodbye when visiting the hospital is not an option:

- Draw a picture of your loved one, or of a favorite memory with them.
- Write a letter to your loved one. You can have a grown up at the hospital read it out loud.
- Write a song or poem about them. Share it out loud, either alone, for your family, or make a recording to send to the hospital.
- Read a book or poem that reminds you of your loved one.
- Choose a special item that belonged to your loved one that you can keep. (Parents, make sure this item is safe, durable, and age appropriate for your child.)
- Choose a piece of clothing that belonged to your loved one. Make it into a pillow.
- Make a list of things you learned from your loved one.
- Plant a tree, flower, or bury a time capsule, or make a stone garden in memory of a loved one.
- Try an activity or hobby your loved one used to enjoy.
- Look at photos of you and your loved one. Make a scrapbook. Talk about your memories of them.
- Listen to music that reminds you of your loved one. Make a playlist of their favorite songs.
- Use a book or a journal to write down your feelings and your favorite memories of your loved one. If you want, you can even share these thoughts with others.
- Make a "hug" by tracing your hands onto paper, then cutting them out. You can decorate the hands or write messages to your loved one. Measure a piece of string so that it is as long as your arms. Attach the string ends to the paper hands. Now you have a "hug" that you can send to the hospital.
- Cook a special food that you used to make or eat with your loved one.
- Hug a teddy bear or favorite toy and tell them a special message you want to tell your loved one.

There are many creative ways to honor a loved one. You can ask your child what they might like to do to say goodbye as you help them to begin grieving and remembering their loved one.



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