Helping Children Say Goodbye From Afar

Children cope best when you are honest about the death of a loved one. Use the words "dying" and "dead." Young children can be confused by vague terms like "in a better place" or "went away." Reading a children's book about death can help, such as *The Goodbye Book* by Todd Parr for younger children, and *Lifetimes* by Mellonie & Ingpen for older children. *Fire in my Heart, Ice in my Veins* by Enid Traisman is an interactive journal for grieving teens.

Children need opportunities to say goodbye to a loved one who is dying. Visiting in the hospital may not always be possible. Sometimes a video chat or phone call is possible. You can also help your child express their thoughts and emotions through play. Here are some ideas of other ways to "say goodbye."

1. Write a letter to your loved one. You can have someone at the hospital read it out loud for you.
2. Draw a picture of your loved one.
3. Write a poem or a song about them. Share it out loud – alone, for your family, or make a recording to send to the hospital.
4. Read a book or poem that reminds you of your loved one.
5. Choose a special item that belonged to your loved one that you can keep. (Make sure this item is safe, durable, and age appropriate if your child is young.)
6. Choose a piece of clothing that belonged to your loved one. You can wear it, or make it into a pillow.
7. Make a list of things you learned from your loved one.
8. Plant a tree, flower, or bury a time capsule. Make a stone garden in memory of your loved one.
9. Try out an activity or hobby that your loved one used to enjoy.
10. Look at photos of your loved one. Make a scrapbook. Talk about your memories of them.
11. Listen to music that reminds you of your loved one. Make a playlist of their favorite songs.

These ideas are just a place to start. There are as many creative ideas to say goodbye to a loved one as there are children to remember them. Ask your child what they would like to do to say goodbye, to grieve, and to remember their loved one.

Learn more at www.urmc.rochester.edu/childrens-hospital/bereavement.