

TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE MURDER-SUICIDE

Domestic violence murder-suicide can devastate family, friends, and even the community. Explaining it to children can be challenging, and leave adults feeling helpless and grasping for explanations. Consider the following suggestions.

HAVE AN ACTION PLAN

Think through the entire scene, including when and where you want to start the conversation, what you want to ask, and what you want to say.

When: *Talking soon after the occurrence is important or you will risk children finding out through the news or social media. When you have a conversation will depend on the circumstances surrounding the murder-suicide and if the child witnessed the incident. They might need to talk to law enforcement first.*

With Whom: *It may help to have extra support present, such as an advocate, professional therapist, or someone close to the child.*

Where: *If possible, find a safe, familiar, and non-public place to speak with the child.*

MEET THE CHILD WHERE THEY ARE

Start the conversation by asking, "What do you think happened?" Help clarify any misconceptions and encourage children to ask questions.

BE TRUTHFUL

Murder-suicide is hard to understand – even for many adults. You can admit that you do not have all the answers. Provide the child with truthful information about what has occurred. Use age appropriate language and sensitivity. For example, "He used a gun to make her body stop working and then used it to make his body stop working."

MONITOR TV AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Seeing the story on social media may further traumatize or upset children, as the details may be graphic or inaccurate. Older children may search for their parents' names on the internet and read the story online.

HELP CHILDREN FEEL SAFE

As soon as possible, let the child know with whom and where they will be staying. Retrieve the child's belongings from the house, when possible.

PROVIDE LOVE, SUPPORT, HONESTY AND REASSURANCE

Reassure the child that it is okay to have all different kinds of feelings. Assure the child that what happened was not their fault. Children need to know that they are not responsible for the death and nothing they said or did could have stopped it.

BE CAUTIOUS WHEN DISCUSSING EITHER PARENT

Avoid talking negatively about either parent. Children need a well-rounded picture of both parents to help resolve their own identity questions. For example, they may think, "If dad is bad, then half of me must be bad." They may fear they will inherit "bad-ness" from their parent.