

Parenting charity offers useful suggestions on talking to kids about terminal illness and death

With the continuing coverage of Jade Goody's terminal illness and subsequent death covered across the media, parent support charity Parentline Plus is offering useful suggestions on how to discuss this sensitive issue with children.

Parentline Plus trustee and agony aunt Suzie Hayman said: *"Continuing media coverage of Jade Goody's illness and death is unlikely to have passed children by. It may prompt some to ask their parents or carers questions about terminal illness and death. It may also bring back distressing memories of someone close that they, or you, have lost.*

"However difficult you may find this, it's really important to give children a chance to discuss how they feel and to answer their questions, obviously in a way that is appropriate to their age. Ignoring the issue doesn't make sad or scary feelings go away but bringing it out into the open can help them to put what can seem overwhelming into a more balanced context."

For more support on dealing with any issues of change, loss and bereavement, call the free* confidential, 24-hour Parentline 0808 800 2222 or log on to www.parentlineplus.org.uk. Parentline Plus also holds telephone groups for parents with concerns about these

issues to come together, get support and share experiences with other parents in similar situations.

Useful suggestions for parents by parents

- *Find out what your child already knows. Your main instinct will probably be to try to protect them, but you may find that they know more than you think, and want to know more than you expect. Encourage them to ask questions, and find out what is worrying them – it may not be what you anticipate. In this way you will avoid frightening them by raising an issue they may not have considered or that worries you but not them.
- *You don't need to overload children with too much information but do answer their questions honestly. Respond to the questions that come up and talk them through rather than giving a pre-prepared speech. Make sure what you discuss is age-appropriate: younger children will be thinking about particular issues in much simpler terms than older children. They need information but what they may need most of all is reassurance.
- *Try to contain your own anxiety. Your children will be taking leads from you and will pick up on any fears you are displaying. If you are feeling anxious, talk to a friend or relative or call Parentline Plus on 0808 800 2222. Being able to discuss your fears with another adult may make them seem more manageable.

*If your child asks you a question you can't answer, don't be afraid to say you don't know. It is better to admit you can't control outside events any more than they can rather than to give false reassurances which may be reinterpreted as lies at a later date.