

BEGIN AGAIN LIVING MINISTRIES

Preparing Children for a Loved One's Decline

Age-appropriate honesty, reassurance, and inclusion for families

A COMPLIMENTARY GUIDE FOR HOSPICE FAMILIES

Compassionate guidance for caregiving, grief, and end-of-life transitions.

From Diagnosis to Goodbye™

Preparing Children for a Loved One's Decline

Children notice changes even when adults try to protect them from difficult news. Calm, truthful, age-appropriate communication can reduce confusion and help children remain connected to the person they love.

Use this guide as a starting point for conversation. Individual needs and care plans may differ.

1. Use clear and honest words

Explain that the person is very sick and that the healthcare team does not expect the illness to be cured. Avoid confusing phrases such as “going to sleep” when discussing death.

2. Offer information in small portions

Share what the child needs to know now, pause, and invite questions. Children may return to the same question as they process the information.

3. Reassure without making promises

Let children know who will care for them, what routines will continue, and that the illness is not their fault. Avoid promises that the person will get better.

Practical Guidance

1. Prepare them for visible changes

Before a visit, gently describe changes they may see, such as more sleeping, less talking, weight loss, medical equipment, or different breathing.

2. Give choices about involvement

A child may want to visit, draw a picture, share music, write a message, pray, or stay away. Offer options without forcing participation.

3. Watch for support needs

Changes in sleep, school performance, behavior, physical complaints, or intense anxiety may signal the need for added support from a counselor, pediatric clinician, school professional, or grief program.

My Next Steps

- ☐ Choose one trusted adult to give consistent updates.
- ☐ Tell the child what will happen during a visit before entering the room.
- ☐ Invite questions and say “I don’t know” when appropriate.
- ☐ Maintain familiar meals, school, bedtime, and activities when possible.
- ☐ Inform relevant school or childcare staff so they can provide support.

You do not have to carry this journey alone. Support is available, and asking for help is an act of care.

About Begin Again Living Ministries

Begin Again Living Ministries offers compassionate education and support for individuals, families, caregivers, churches, and organizations navigating grief, caregiving, stress, and end-of-life transitions.

Visit: balministries.org

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