

It is natural for parents and caregivers to wonder how best to talk to their children about dying and death. Talking about MAID is another aspect of dying and death that can be difficult for them to understand, including knowing what to tell your children, how much to tell them and when is the right time. You will not have perfect conversations or have all the answers, you can make mistakes and these conversations can happen more than once. As a parent or caregiver, remember you do not have to be alone, it is okay to ask for help including from the Provincial MAID Program.

You know your children best:

- You know their personalities and how best to communicate information.
- Use your own wisdom and instincts as to how best to talk to your children about these important topics.
- It is important to be honest, factual, clear and use concrete, age-appropriate language so children can understand and make decisions that feel right for them.
- Starting these conversations with your children early on in the MAID process will allow time for children to process complex ideas like dying and death.

There is no step-by-step plan or “right way” to do this. Being honest, supportive, genuine, patient and listening to your children are what matters.

Before introducing the concept of Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID), children need to understand that their family member’s:

- Life-limiting illness cannot be cured by doctors, medicines, treatments.
- Life-limiting illness will not get better –they will die from their illness.
- Life has been impacted and changed in so many ways including pain; shortness of breath; they can not do things they used to do; they can not take care of themselves (share other ways the person who has chosen MAID is suffering).

Inform yourself first about MAID. The Provincial MAID Team can provide you with important information.

Follow your children’s lead:

- Ask your child what information they want to know.
- Do not feel you have to offer more than your child is asking for. Some children will ask lots of questions while others will not want many details.
- Answer all their questions and if you do not know, tell them you will do your best to find out the answers for them.

You may wish to ask your children (based on age) what they know about MAID from friends, radio, media, internet etc. This is an opportunity to resolve myths or misunderstandings.

Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) is legal in Canada – “The Rules” are:

- Must be 18 years of age or older.
- Have a serious life-limiting illness that they will die from.
- Know about all the doctors, medicines, treatment options for care.
- Choose MAID without any pressure from anyone – it is their choice.
- Be able to make their own decisions; no one can make it for them.
- Two doctors or nurse practitioners must assess to determine if they can have MAID.
- Know they can change their mind right up until the first medication is given.

The Provincial MAID Team can support you in understanding and explaining the criteria that can be helpful for your children to know.

Explaining what happens in a Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) death:

- People with a life-limiting illness can let their body die from the illness or they can ask a doctor or nurse practitioner to help their body die.
- They have received information about their life-limiting illness and explored options to support their concerns and needs.
- They decide when they will die, have control of how they will die, where they will die and who will be with them when they die.
- People can choose many different locations for medical assistance in dying, including their home, in a hospital or a long term care facility.
- The doctor or nurse practitioner gives them special medication to help them die.
- The MAID death will not be scary. The person is awake and then they will be asleep and die in a peaceful way. This happens in minutes.
- When we die we no longer need our body – our body will stop breathing, our heart stops working, it will stop smelling, seeing, hearing.

They are not choosing death over life. They would like to keep living, being healthy and enjoying more time with everyone. Their life-limiting illness and health makes this impossible.

It is okay to not have all the answers when someone dies – explore with your child what they think or believe – people believe many different things related to their beliefs, culture, faith, spirituality etc.

Exploring ways your child can be involved in a Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) death – there are many ways they can be directly or indirectly involved:

- It is okay if the child does not want to be there. Not every person wants to be present at the death.
- If they choose to be in the room, explore how they will feel supported in the room (sitting close to family, want to sit close to the person, to touch them).
- If they do not wish to be in the room, explore with them where they would like to be (another room, school, with a friend, a close support).
- Explore ways they can express love and say goodbye if they choose to be in the room or somewhere else.
- Remind them that they can change their mind at any time.
- Prepare them for emotions they and others may feel at the death.



What happens after the death:

- After all the medications have been administered, the person will die within a few minutes.
- The nurse practitioner or doctor will check that the person has stopped breathing and their heart has stopped beating.
- Talking to children about whether they would like to spend time with the body is important.
- It can be a time for rituals (poems, playing music, prayers, expressing love, supporting each other or just sitting quietly).
- Explain plans for how long the person who has died will stay in their room (home) with family. Explain that the funeral home will take the body for planning the funeral and celebration of life.
- Remind children that even though the body has died and the person is no longer physically with us, they will always have many memories by thinking, talking about them and doing things they enjoyed.
- Explore with your children what they think about what happens when someone dies and share your spiritual, cultural or religious teachings relevant to your family.

Explore ways they can talk about person's Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) death with others:

- Explore with your child what they may tell those very close to them and perhaps others not so close. They can decide to tell them as much or as little as the child and you feel comfortable with.
- It is okay to say they do not feel like talking about it or that their loved one died because of the illness or disease that they had.
- It may be helpful to let school, principal and teachers know and your child can then decide how much they want to tell classmates or teachers. Or your child can see how it goes and decide what feels right for them.

Resources:

- **The Provincial MAID Program social workers** are available to assist you and your family in talking to and supporting children and teens in preparing for medical assistance in dying and children's grief. Please contact the Provincial MAID Program at 1-833-473-6243 and ask to speak with a social worker.
- **Kidsgrief.ca - Chapter 7:** Preparing for a medically assisted death - Explaining Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) <https://kidsgrief.ca/mod/lesson/view.php?id=211>
- **Canadian Virtual Hospice Medical Assistance in Dying Site:** Thinking about a medically assisted death (MAID) can bring up questions and deep feelings for everyone involved: the person considering MAID, family, friends, ways to support children and healthcare providers. Find answers to common questions, plus information about how MAID works, and about its emotional impacts. <https://www.virtualhospice.ca/MAiD>
- **Bridge C14:** Counselling supports for children/teen <https://www.bridgec14.org>