

Helping Children Say Goodbye From Afar

Children need opportunities to say goodbye to a loved one who is dying. But visiting them in the hospital may not always be possible. There are lots of other ways to help children “say goodbye.” Here are some ideas.

Remember to always be honest with children 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.” Use the word “dead,” and help children to understand what it means. Reading a children’s book about death can help, such as *The Goodbye Book* by Todd Parr for younger children, and *Lifetimes* by Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen for older children.

1. Write a letter to your loved one. You can have a grown up at the hospital read it out loud.
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. (Parents, make sure this item is safe, durable, and age appropriate for your child.)
6. Choose a piece of clothing that belonged to your loved one. 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.
12. Make a “hug” by tracing your hands onto paper, and then cutting them out. You can decorate the hands or write messages to your loved one. Measure a piece of string so that it is as long as your arms, from fingertip to fingertip. Attach the string ends to the paper hands. Now you have a “hug” that you can send to the hospital.

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

