

# Tell Your Kids the Truth

Tony ([00:02](#)):

Erica and Sharon are sisters who began a Grief Journey in 2006, when Erica's 10-year-old son, Austin drown together, they participated in a grief education program were so moved by this experience. They studied and became specialists so they can help the broken-hearted find recovery. In 2015 tragedy struck the family once again, when Erica's oldest son, Donovan was killed in a motorcycle accident. Erica and Shannon are committed to sharing their experiences of love, loss, and healing through this podcast. Now your Grief Specialists, Sharon and Erica.

Sharon ([00:42](#)):

So, so many times we get asked this question, how do I tell my kids that their dad died? How do I tell my kids that their mother died? How do I have this conversation with my children? And the truth is what we're going to discuss today is not directly about having a conversation with your children about grief. It's about having a conversation with anybody about grief and the truth is, and Eric and I have said this until we were blue in the face. You tell the truth, always you tell the truth always.

Erica ([01:18](#)):

And the truth is that it's going to be hard no matter what. So sugar coating it. You know, pop, pop went to heaven. He went to be with Jesus only lasts for so long because like with what I witnessed with Jordan being so young, when Donovan died, he was three. As they get older and really learn about what death truly is, they start that grieving process all over again. So you might as well speak in the plain terms, pop, pop, died. He's not going to be with us anymore. We're going to be sad and we're going to miss him. And you just reaffirm that over the years. I find that that is a little bit easier for them because you're not changing the story. You're not having to add in more details as they grow. And as their understanding grows, you just can continue that dialogue with them and expand on it. As their understanding grows and help them come to a place of really knowing what it means to grieve someone.

Sharon ([02:22](#)):

I agree with you a hundred percent, but let's go back to the beginning, Erica, real quick. You and I made so many mistakes in the beginning because we didn't know and you and I make mistakes and we share our mistakes to help other people understand what those mistakes were. We didn't know what to tell Jordan. Jordan was three years old. His ten-year-old brother, Austin had died. We didn't know what to tell him. And so he was saying, we, we told him that Austin went to heaven.

Erica ([02:57](#)):

First. I told him Austin died. And that one day when it was just me and him in the bathroom, I said, Austin died. And he told me until the third day, remember that was the first day. That was the first thing. Then I started backpedaling because then he kept asking for him. So then I added in the heaven and all that other stuff, because I didn't understand. I should've just kept with that same thing. So then I started this whole time because remember you and I were so shocked that when I told him he put his head down and started crying. So I really thought his three-year-old old brain was totally understanding what I was saying. And I was so like blown away by that. But then he kept asking and kept asking for Austin every day. And then I started adding in the other things, trying to thinking that if I made it more simple, he's with heavy he's in heaven. He, you know, he's with God, then it would be easier, but it actually made it worse. So yeah, that's where we, we got into the mistakes.

Sharon ([04:00](#)):

Okay. I told him, I'm telling the story in reverse. So I'm sorry. So you originally told him he was in the bathtub. It was just the two of you. You said Austin died and he dropped us and he actually shed a tear. Like he got it. And we were totally shocked about that. But one of the things that was happening in his three-year-old old self, he got the word heaven and Kevin mixed up. And so he kept calling heaven and Kevin the same, which was fine. We, but we were laughing about it. We thought it was so funny and so cute. And the truth was you should have stayed with the story of the truth and continually to expose him to the truth. Right? So it ended up being a longer journey than it needed to be because you took the other path and that's the path that the average griever will take. I'm not going to say he died. We even have clients that don't want to say they don't want to hear the word died or passed away. And they asked us not to say it. Yeah, he's not here. They just want to say, he's not here.

Erica ([05:00](#)):

Well, you know, I witnessed this live yesterday. My father-in-law passed in may and we all, we miss him so much. And my mother-in-law has been with us for the last two weeks. We just brought her home to Louisiana. And last night it was a conversation with my mother-in-law and sister-in-law. And my mother-in-law said, you know, well, he's dead. He can't, he was, she was going through her mail and it was, he got a lot of mail and she's like, he's dead. I need to tell the people. And my sister-in-law said, no, he's deceased. And you could tell that that was hurting her heart, you know? And it's like, we can be adults and still feel, you know, when it comes to our parents passing away, we could still be the very much the child. And it does hurt us to have to say those words, you know, our dad is dead. Like it's, it's hard to say that if you're, especially, if you're not ready and if you haven't really started your, your healing journey. But the thing that us parents bottom line is we would all want to see our kids hurt. Right? We want to see them crying. You don't want to see them hurting. So we try to buffer all of this information for them. But like you said, Sharon, we

got it. Expose them to it because it happens every single day. The one thing we know to be true and absolutely a fact is that people are going to die. People we love are going to die, and we are going to be really, really sad and heartbroken over it. But if we start speaking in real language to our children early, by the time they get to the point that they lose someone significant in their life, they're going to be a little bit more prepared. Right?

Sharon ([06:36](#)):

And that is the whole thing that what we're always talking about is preparing our children. So hear me out on this. Can you imagine what life would be like if when you came into this world and you went into preschool and you ended up crying all day and when you got home, mama mom said, Hey, honey, I know you had a bad day. You want to talk about it? I know that the, and using emotional words, I know you were sad. And I know you felt that I'd left you or I abandoned you, but mommy came and got you right after we talked in grief from day one, that probably the first conversation of grief you're going to have with the kid, with your kids in a normal transition, I'm saying in a normal transition is that either their pet is going to die first, their grandparent is going to die, or someone's going to steal their bike or break their computer. Those are the, the, the, in a normal transition, typical way things should go, right? It's not always that we have to explain to a three year old that their brother has died. But if we had the truthful, honest grief conversations early, we could understand that it's okay to go there with our kids, that this is a part of living, that this is a part that they have to understand. And I don't know about you, Erica, but I want my kids to hear it from me. I don't want them to hear it out in the street from someone else.

Erica ([07:55](#)):

That absolutely. Cause then, then they're more prone to get misinformation. Cause based on, you know, whatever Jenny's family beliefs or George's family beliefs, they're going to get that piece. And it may not necessarily be in line with your beliefs. So you better be the first line of defense and giving your child that information to prepare them, which like I said, align with what you believe, whether it's your faith or your spirituality or whatever it is. And it might be that they're, you're an atheist. You know, you just prepare them so that they're not getting the wrong information from the wrong people.

Sharon ([08:32](#)):

So let's start at the beginning of that though. Erica, before you can tell your three-year-old that his brother has died, you have to tell the truth to yourself. You have to be able to say the words he passed away, he's dead or he's deceased. One sits with you. You have to be able to say those, hear it out loud, say it out loud and know it. Be true to yourself. we have, we can't sugar coat our own story because how the heck are we going to explain it to our kids or share it with them?

Erica ([09:04](#)):

Yeah. That is a huge part of it. If you're not able to say the word in whatever fashion, dead to cease passed away, you got to do some, some preparation for yourself because you need to be able to give a real honest, authentic con you know, have a real honest, authentic conversation. and that's hard for a lot of people i.

Sharon ([09:28](#)):

In the beginning. I hear a, we hear a lot of grievors say, I can't even say he's dead. I can't even say she's dead. And that's okay in the beginning. But if I meet you 6, 8, 9 months, five years later, and you're still not saying it that we have a problem, sister, you are stuck in a big way.

Erica ([09:46](#)):

Yeah. That is very, very true. And you know, I think a lot of times it helps. If you have like a practice conversation, then you can, you can kind of work it out, which one, cause you don't want to give too much based on their age. Just like with the sex talk. You don't want to give too much information too much detail. If they're not prepared. Like I wouldn't tackle three-year-old Jordan, Austin drown. They had to bring in divers.

Sharon ([10:12](#)):

You know, I wouldn't do that.

Erica ([10:13](#)):

You know exactly. That's also on my list to talk about too. Yeah. You want to give him, give them what they can handle for their age immaturity level.

Sharon ([10:24](#)):

100%. It has to be an age appropriate conversation. So let's go back to something that you and I have been talking about a lot this last month and that's suicide. So we had clients that actually said, well, do I tell them that it was suicide? And my answer is yes, 100%. I go back to the same thing. I want my children to hear it from me. So they, I create a safe place for them. They know they're always going to get the truth for me. I'm not going to lie. And I will answer the questions. Do I need to give them gory details? No. Right. No, because here's the thing that's going to happen at three-year-olds you say Austin die. And he kept coming back to you. And that's when you changed your story at six year old, you at a central, you say us and died at a nine-year-old you say, we're getting a divorce. You tell them the truth and you give them as much information as you think they can handle within their spirit and their soul. And then you shut up. You don't add any more. You don't add the where the, when, the time, the place, everything that they need to know, they're going to come to you. And have you answered that question for them? They don't need to know that divers went in the water to get Austin. He will ask that question when he's 12, 13 and 14, not at three.

And at that time, when the question is asked, you answer as much as you feel that you want them to know.

Erica ([11:52](#)):

Well, and this is the thing. If you don't answer the question or you don't give them that information in this type of Google, they're going to find it on their own. Yeah. Well imagine how hard that would have been for, like you said, 12, 13 year old Jordan to Google search his brother's name. The whole story is on the internet forever and read the details for himself and then not know what to do with that information. Not know how to process his feelings about that. And sometimes the information is not factual. Like in the case of when they wrote Austin story, they wrote, so they had missed some mistakes in the story. So he's reading something that's not factual and thinking that it's the God's honest truth mask to how much that is going to break his heart to think, you know, I don't know. I don't, I can't remember what the details were that were wrong, but let's just say for a story that they would have said that Austin was left by himself. You know what I'm saying? If that's the case, he had at least 40 family members with him at the time, it was just an accident.

Sharon ([12:57](#)):

Yeah. this keeps reminding me of a side story that I just have to throw in there is that I wanted my kids to know that Santa Claus wasn't real hope. There's no little kids on here. I wanted them to know that for me. I didn't want them to hear it on the world. Like that was really important to me sometime this end with this, because I wanted my children to hear it from me. And so I sat them down to tell them about it. And they cried so hard and told me I was lying. It was a whole grieving experience, all that stuff. But anyway, this whole, one of the things you have to remember, we have to remember when we're telling the truth is that grief is an emotional experience. And so it's going to come from pain in our heart. We're going to experience it through our heart, but our brain tries to help us solve it. And this, by saying he hasn't passed or he hasn't died or he is deceased is one of those ways that the brain is trying to help us ease into the truthful conversation. And that's where I think some of the times we make the mistakes is when we follow the brain and we do what's right. But as a parent, don't you think you could sit here for five seconds, know what you feel like and know that they're going to feel that, you cannot shield them from that.

Erica ([14:10](#)):

Nope. We, although we, our ultimate goal as parents is to protect our children from all hurts. We can't, we can't stop the way that they process their feelings over a grieving event or situation. And that this word.

Sharon ([14:26](#)):

I'm just sitting here thinking about, you're saying that we didn't realize when we signed up for this, we thought we signed up for it. The cute little baby and the bunny, the bow, the bows, and the little boots, boots, and I'm want to dress him so cute. And she's going to go

to the perfect school and where we're going to go to the perfect playgroup. And everyone's going to love my kid. He's going to be an eight plus student, but we didn't realize one of the things we signed up for was also to teach them about pain. We signed up to teach them about pain, life grief, and a broken heart. Yeah. That's part of being a parent. Yeah. Part of our job,

Erica ([15:00](#)):

absolutely. For those families. And there are a lot that have not experienced a significant grieving event, like as a death or, you know, a major accident or there's going to be situations where their best friend moves away or their favorite teacher goes to another school or a bullying situation. Those are grieving events for children. And they every day in school, absolutely do need to prepare them how to talk about it and how to be able to openly express themselves without a saying, well, no, you shouldn't feel like that. You know, Jenny didn't mean to be mean to you. She probably was just having a bad day wrong. Don't do that. You know, rewind that conversation and make it sound like I'm so sorry. You had a rough day with Jenny. I know how much you like you guys being friends. I'm sorry. You, you were sad that she didn't want to eat with you today. And she ate with her other friends. You must have felt very lonely.

Sharon ([16:01](#)):

And the other thing is related back to yourself as well. So you can tell the story. I was thinking about how far, how much fun you and Jenny are having on the playground yesterday with the story you tell me, how was it today? Like, did you have fun? Where were you happy use some emotional words in there so that they get used to expressing those emotional words. Erica, we wrote an amazing book called the griever sky. And in that griever's guy, we, and it's an in an ebook format. We have this whole section on how to talk to your kids about grief and it can be used on a spouse. Sometimes we have to talk to our spouse this way, or our adult children this way. We need to have the conversation with these rules in place. You know, go first as the adult use emotional words, listen, listen to what they're saying. Even if they're being silly, listen to the words. So in this podcast today, we can attach this ebook, the griever's guide and give it to all of our listeners for free.

Erica ([16:58](#)):

Absolutely. You know, cause that's the thing. Even as adults, children, you know, we're still our kids at heart. So when you have an experience where your parent passes away and their surviving parent, they still need to do the same thing. They need to talk about their feelings. And I've seen that with my mother-in-law. She really does talk about my father-in-law's. She's very honest about how much she misses him. She's very open. I mean, they were married for 63 years. 63 years. It was another body in the house. It was someone to have conversation with. It was someone to drive in the car with, you know, and they fussed a lot. She's very open about, you know, the reality. She's very honest about their relationship. She just not trying to make, put them up on a better store. Like he was the

best thing since sliced bread. She's honest about where she was. And I I'm in all watching her grieve at 83 and wishing we all had some of that in ourselves because she really has it down pat. And she says, I've seen a lot of stuff in my life and I've grieved a lot of stuff, but I'm still here. And I know I still have to go on. I mean, it's like, it's beautiful.

Sharon (18:11):

Well, but then, and that goes, that goes straight to my point with it's our job to teach our children. She still showing her children how to grieve and how to grieve properly. She's still in her 83 years, it's showing her children how to do this job. Unfortunately, that's our job and we're never going to change this world. And the conversation of grief. If we don't start now and start with our levels, we have to start with the littles. We have to understand that death is a part of living.

Erica (18:41):

And I want to, I want to add, I don't know if we're getting close to the anytime, but I want to also bring this point in. I hate it. When I see movies where the father has died and someone goes to the son, the young son and says, you're the man of the house. Now you have to be strong. I hate that because it happens. We know it happens every day in real life and you and I have clients that get, but I just, it really irks me because I, it always brings me back to that. I know this happens every day in the real world, please stop doing that. Putting the pressure on these young boys to feel like they have to be responsible. You are literally putting the weight of the world on that kid's shoulders. And that's not fair. It's not fair. Someone needs to grab that little boy and say, I am so sorry. You must be so mad, sad, confused, whatever word comes in there and normalized that it is okay for him to be a kid. He does not have to feel like he has to take care of his mother or his siblings or his grandmother. He just needs to be who he is and feel the way he feels. And that's okay.

Sharon (19:51):

Yeah, for sure. I love that. I'm glad that's a perfect ending to this because those, those guys, those little guys grow up to be men that become our clients and they never grieved their dad dying at 10 years old, which completely changed the trajectory of their life and set them off in a different direction. 100%. Yep. Friends tell the truth. Tell the truth to yourself and tell the truth to your children. Have a great day.

Erica (20:22):

Bye friends.

Sharon (20:23):

Erica so many friends don't know where to meet us at or where to find out more about us or what they need to do next. Let's give them a tip,.

Erica ([20:34](#)):

the easiest way to find us is to click on the link and you will have access to all of our places, our podcasts or Facebook, private group, our and our email.

Sharon ([20:49](#)):

Yeah, exactly. It's that simple. And our free blog friends, click the link tree in the link below, and you'll find everything you need to know about us there. Thank you for allowing us and for this minute. Thank you so much. Thanks for listening to our podcast.