Learning about Death Card Game

Supplies: Standard 52-card deck, photos from the internet as per the questions in the game

(Modify or omit questions to suit the child's circumstances and level of understanding.)

It can be hard to talk about death and upset feelings, so let's play a game to make it easier. To play, pick the top card from the stack of cards. If you get a red card, I will read a question for you to answer. (The questions will help you learn about death. You can answer the question, say pass, or ask me for help.) If you get a black card, we will both follow the instructions from one of the items on the *Actions* list. If you get a queen or king, we will both follow the instructions from one of the items on the *Relaxation* list. Let's play!

Questions

What does dead mean? Dead is when the body of a person or animal stops working and can never work again.

When a person dies, can their body still breathe or move or feel emotions? When a person dies, their body cannot breathe, move, play, eat, talk, or sleep. They do not feel emotions like happy, sad, or scared, and they cannot feel hurt or pain because their body doesn't work anymore.

Can a dead person come back alive? A dead person cannot come back alive, even if we wish really hard. When a body dies, it stops working forever, and so the person who died cannot ever come back alive. You won't see the person who died alive again, but you can look at photos and talk about them.

What is a casket? (Include this question only if the person who died was buried.) A casket is a special box that holds the body of the person who died. Some people call the casket a coffin. Let's look online to find photos of caskets.

What is a burial shroud? (Include this question only if the person who died was wrapped in a burial shroud.) A shroud is a special cloth, sheet, or blanket that wraps around the body of the person who died when they're prepared for burial or cremation.

What is a viewing/visitation? After a person dies, there may be a viewing/visitation where we can see the body of the person who died one last time. The body of the person who died may be lying in the casket. It may look like they are sleeping because their eyes are closed and they are not moving. But their eyes are closed and they are not moving because they are dead. Family and friends come to the viewing/visitation and talk to the family of the person who died. They may say nice things to try to help the family feel better. Some children go to the viewing/visitation, and some children don't go.

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What is a funeral/memorial service/cremation ceremony? A funeral/memorial service/cremation ceremony is the time when family and friends come to remember the person who died. People tell stories and say nice things about the person who died. Some children go to the funeral/memorial service/cremation ceremony, and some children don't go.

What is a cemetery? (Include this question only if the person who died was buried.) The dead body is put in a special box called a casket and then buried in the ground at a cemetery. A cemetery is a place where people who have died are buried. The cemetery has headstones or footstones that families have put there to show who has died and been buried there. Each headstone has the name of the person who died. Sometimes the casket is not buried but put in a building in the cemetery called a mausoleum. Let's look online to find photos of cemeteries, headstones, and mausoleums.

Once the person who died is put in the casket, what happens to the dead person's body? (Include this question only if the person who died was buried.) The casket holding the body of the person who died is taken to the cemetery. A hearse is a special car that takes the dead body in the casket to the cemetery. At the cemetery, the casket holding the body of the person who died is put into a deep hole in the ground and buried (covered with earth). Although it may seem strange or scary to put the dead body in a deep hole and bury it, this doesn't bother or upset the person, because dead bodies don't feel anything. They do not feel scared, and they do not feel any pain.

What is cremation? (Include this question only if the person who died was cremated.) Cremation means the dead body is put into a special room that gets very, very hot. The room gets so hot that it turns the dead body into very small, soft pieces called ashes. In some cultures, the body is burned in the open air so that everyone can watch and participate in the ritual of saying goodbye to the physical part of that person. Being cremated may seem weird, scary, or gross, but the person who died cannot feel anything. It doesn't hurt because dead bodies don't feel pain or heat or cold. Let's look online to find photos of a crematorium and ashes.

Where do you put the ashes? (Include this question only if the person who died was cremated.) After the dead body is cremated and turned into ashes, the ashes are put into a container called an urn. The urn is buried in the ground or put in a building called a mausoleum or kept at home. Some people scatter the ashes in a special place. People may also put the ashes in special necklaces, stones, or teddy bears or inside other things. People can do many creative things with ashes. Let's look online to find photos of urns and other things that can be used to hold the ashes.

Where do dead people go? Death is a mystery, which means that we don't know for sure what happens after a person dies. But families have certain beliefs about what happens after a person dies. (What do you believe happens after a person dies?)

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Is it normal to have a lot of mixed-up feelings when someone dies? People usually have a lot of mixed-up feelings when someone dies. These mixed-up feelings are called grief. You might feel sad, happy, angry, or guilty. You might feel sad sometimes, and at other times you might feel happy. You might feel guilty or bad about the times when you feel happy. You might have lots of other feelings. Whatever you are feeling is normal and okay. It's okay to have fun, laugh, and play even when something sad has happened. (What feelings have you had since the person died?)

If you don't cry about the death, does this mean you didn't care about the person who died? Sometimes, people who cared a lot about the person who died don't show their emotions or they don't cry about the death. There is no "right" way to feel or react when someone in your life dies. Not crying does not mean you did not care for the person who died.

What if you feel angry or upset with the person who died or remember things about them that you didn't like? No one is perfect. It is normal and okay to have different feelings about a person who died. It is even normal and okay to be upset with the person *because* they died. If you had a difficult relationship with the person when they were alive, then you're probably experiencing a lot of mixed-up feelings. Coming here may help you talk about your feelings.

What are some ways children might react after someone dies? Children usually have upset reactions when someone dies. Some children feel really scared and want to stay close to a safe adult. Some children feel so angry that they have a lot of outbursts, or they get stomachaches, have trouble sleeping, have bad dreams, or wet their bed. Some children have a hard time concentrating. Coming here will help you learn ways to feel better.

What are some worries children may have after someone dies? Children may worry that more bad things will happen, that they or someone else will die. Or they may worry about who will take care of them. They may have other worries. This is a place where you can talk about your worries and learn ways to handle them.

What does *guilty* mean, and is it normal to feel guilty when someone dies? *Guilty* means feeling bad about something we think we did wrong. Some children feel guilty that they didn't treat the person better while they were alive, or they think they did something wrong to cause the person to die, or they think they could have stopped the person from dying. It's important for you to know that nothing you said or did made the person die, and you cannot do anything to make the dead person come back alive.

Is it normal and okay to feel relieved after someone dies? People sometimes feel relieved when the person dies. If the person was very sick or in a lot of pain, then they might feel relieved that the person is no longer sick or in pain. Some people didn't get along well with the person and are relieved that the person has died. Some people have mixed-up feelings of happy and sad when the person dies. Whatever you are feeling is okay.

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Is it best to pretend to be happy so you don't make your family more upset? Many children think that they should pretend to be happy so they don't make their family more upset. But it's okay to feel your feelings, show your feelings, and talk about your feelings. You don't need to worry about hiding your true feelings from your family, because adults can take care of themselves. Hiding your feelings will not stop an adult from grieving.

Is it normal to feel scared when you are reminded of the death? There may be things that you see, hear, or smell that remind you of the way the person died. It is normal to feel scared when this happens. Coming here will help you learn ways to cope with these scary reminders.

If someone asks you about the death and you don't want to talk about it, what can you do? It's okay to say "I don't feel like talking about that right now." You get to decide when you talk about it and when you don't.

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Actions

1. Hop on your right foot 3 times.
2. Jump forward twice, and then jump back twice.
3. Jump up and down 5 times.
4. Hop on your left foot 3 times.
5. Do 5 big arm circles.
6. Clap your hands 3 times.
7. Do 5 jumping jacks.
8. Jump to the left, and then jump to the right.
9. Do 5 small arm circles.
10. Stomp your feet 10 times.
11. Touch your toes.
12. Clap your hands over your head 3 times.
13. Wiggle your body for 5 seconds.
14. Clap your hands over your head 3 times.
15. Run in place for 10 seconds.
16. Touch your shoulders, then your knees, then your toes, and then your nose.
17. Give yourself a hug.
18. Give yourself a pat on the back.

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Relaxation Techniques

1. Breathe in for 3 seconds, hold for 3 seconds, breathe out for 3 seconds.

2. Make your body go tight and stiff like a robot and then relaxed like a ragdoll.

3. Do neck circles by placing your hands on your hips and circling your head in one direction 3 times and then in the other direction 3 times.

4. Do the shoulder scrunch by scrunching your shoulders up to your ears and then relaxing them and moving them around 3 times.

5. Make a tight fist with your left hand, hold for 3 seconds, and then release.

6. Make a tight fist with your right hand, hold for 3 seconds, and then release.

7. Stretch your body by lacing your fingers together and raising your hands above your head, palms facing upward. Hold this pose for 5 seconds.

8. Hold up your index finger, imagine that it's a birthday candle, and then pretend to blow it out by blowing on it really hard and fast.

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Learning about Death Card Game:

Questions for Cancer/Other Serious Illness

(Modify for other illnesses, and change or omit questions to suit the child's circumstances and understanding.)

What is cancer? Cancer happens when unhealthy cells grow in the body. These cells make it hard for the body to work properly.

Why do some people get cancer? Nobody knows why some people get cancer. Even the best, smartest doctors in the whole world do not know why some people get cancer.

Can a child's misbehavior make someone get cancer? Nothing a child does or says can make someone get cancer. People's words, thoughts, or misbehavior never make someone get cancer. We don't know why someone gets cancer. But we know for sure that our words, thoughts, or misbehavior never make someone get cancer.

How do doctors try to help someone who has cancer? Doctors try to help someone who has cancer in different ways. For example, they might do surgery (a special operation where they try to remove the parts of the body that have cancer). They might give the person chemotherapy (also called chemo), which is a medicine that works hard to get rid of the cancer cells. Radiation is another cancer treatment doctors may use to try to get rid of cancer cells. Doctors try their very best to make the cancer go away, but sadly, sometimes the person does not get better, and they die.

What are the side effects of cancer treatments? People who get cancer treatments or cancer medicine may feel very tired. They may feel ill and even throw up. Their hair may fall out and they get a bald head. It can be confusing and scary for kids when this happens. (What kind of treatment did your person get and what side effects did you notice from the treatment? How did it make you feel?)

Can you get cancer from the person who had it? You cannot catch cancer from someone like you can get a cold from someone. A cold is an illness that is contagious. If someone has a cold, and that person coughs or sneezes near you, you may get the cold from the person who has the cold. Cancer is an illness that is NOT contagious. This means you cannot get cancer from the person who had it.

If someone in your family gets sick, will they die too? Everyone gets sick sometimes. Most people who get sick get better with rest and medicine. (Tell about a time you got sick and what helped you to get better.)

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Learning about Death Card Game:

Questions for Suicide

(Modify or omit questions to suit the child's circumstances and understanding.)

What is suicide? Suicide means someone makes their own body stop working so that they die.

After a suicide, how come some parents may not tell their children what really happened? Parents may not tell their children at first about the suicide because they worry that their children will feel very scared, upset, and confused. Instead of saying the person died by suicide, they may say that the person died another way, like from a bad accident. But with help, parents learn ways to talk to their children about suicide and to help them with any feelings they have about it.

Why would someone die by suicide? It's hard to know the exact reason that people die by suicide. Dying of suicide usually happens when that person is in so much emotional pain that they believe they can never feel better again. They think that death is the only way to stop the emotional pain. We know this isn't true, but the person who died by suicide probably felt like this was true for them in that moment.

Why do some people feel angry when someone dies by suicide? There are several reasons that people might feel angry. They may feel angry at the person for making their own body stop working or for not saying goodbye. They may think the person was selfish for ending their own life, but we know that the person was in so much emotional pain that this was the only way they felt they could escape the pain. Some people feel angry at themselves for not stopping the person from dying by suicide. Coming here will help you talk about your feelings and learn ways to feel better.

Why do some children feel guilty or bad when someone dies by suicide? Children may believe that they did something or said something wrong to make the person stop their own body from working. But it's important for children to know that nothing they said or did made the person die by suicide.

Why do some children believe that the person who died by suicide did not love them or care about them? Some children think that the person who died by suicide did not love them or care about them because they don't understand why the person would make their own body stop working instead of staying alive and being with them. But when someone dies by suicide, their brain is not thinking right, so they may have a hard time thinking about their loved ones or feeling happy for all the wonderful things around them, like you!

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Learning about Death Card Game:

Questions for Murder, Mass Violence, Hate-Based Violence

(Modify or omit questions to suit the child's circumstances and understanding.)

What is murder? Murder means someone kills another person on purpose. They hurt the person's body so badly that they make the person's body stop working forever. When murder (or killing) happens, it can feel very sad and scary and hard to understand. Coming here will help you with your mixed-up feelings.

What is mass violence? Mass violence happens when several people are injured or killed by someone on purpose. When this happens, it can feel very sad, scary, and confusing. Coming here will help you with your mixed-up feelings.

What is hate-based violence? Some people hurt or kill others because of the color of their skin or their culture, religion, sexuality, gender identity, or disability. When this happens, it can feel very sad, scary, and confusing. It is wrong to treat other people so badly. Coming here will help you with your mixed-up feelings.

How come some parents may not tell their children what really happened? Parents may not tell their kids at first about the murder (shooting, attack) because they worry that their children may feel very upset, confused, scared, and unsafe. Instead of telling them what really happened, they may say that the person died another way, like in a bad accident. But with help, parents learn ways to talk to their children about what really happened and to help them with any feelings they have about it.

Why would someone murder or kill another person? It's hard to understand why someone would decide to murder or kill another person because it is so awful and wrong. Some people kill other people out of revenge, jealousy, or anger. Sometimes the person who did it gives an explanation, but no matter what happened, murdering another person is wrong and never a good decision. Sometimes we never find out what really happened, and that can be even more confusing and upsetting.

If the person who did the killing or the murder is someone in your family, is it okay to still love that person? It is normal to have lots of mixed-up feelings toward a family member who has killed. You may feel angry at the person for doing it. You may feel scared of the person who did it. It's okay to still love the person. You may have these feelings and other feelings all at the same time. Coming here will help you talk about your feelings.

Why do some children feel guilty when someone is murdered? Children may feel like they did something wrong to cause the death, or they believe they could have done something to protect or save the person. But the only one to blame for the murder is the person who did it.

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Why do some people feel angry when someone is murdered? People may feel angry at the person who did it, at the person who was killed for not getting away, or at themselves for not stopping it. They may want to hurt the person who did it. It is okay to feel angry, but it is important to let out anger in ways that don't hurt you or others.

Why do some children feel more worried when someone is murdered? It is normal to feel worried because something terrible and scary happened. Children may have scary thoughts or bad dreams about it. They may worry that other bad things will happen. They may feel afraid to be alone or to go certain places. Children can do things to feel safer, like thinking of a safe place, sleeping with a stuffed animal or nightlight, staying close to a caring adult, and telling themselves that they are safe right now.

Why do some children feel scared to go back to the place where the murder (shooting, attack) happened? It's normal for children to feel scared to go back to the place where something so terrible happened because they worry the violence could happen again. Talk with your caregiver about ways people are making your (school, neighborhood) a safer place.

How come the death is on the news/internet? When violence or murder happens, it might be on the news/internet so that others can learn what happened and, sometimes, help if they can. People with cameras may be trying to take pictures of your family. This can seem weird or even scary.

What is a murder investigation and what is a trial? A person who kills another person commits a crime. In a murder investigation, the police collect information to try to learn what happened. If a person is arrested, there may be a trial to determine whether that person is guilty of the crime and whether they should go to jail. You may have your own feelings about what should happen to the person who committed the murder. We can talk more about that in future sessions.

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Learning about Death Card Game:

Questions for Military Casualty or Line-of-Duty Death

(Modify or omit questions to suit the child's circumstances and understanding.)

How are families usually told that the person died? Usually, people from the (military/police/fire department) come to the family's home to tell them the very sad news that the person died. Sometimes, the family hears something about the death on the news or on social media. (How did you find out that the person died? Who told you and what did they say?)

What are accidental or *friendly fire* deaths? Sometimes, the person dies by accident, like when they are training to do their job. When this happens, it can be very upsetting and confusing.

What is *repatriation*? Repatriation means that when someone in the military dies overseas, their body is returned to the city where they lived. The family may go to the airport to be there when the airplane with the person's body arrives. The dead person's body usually arrives in a casket. Children may feel sad or other upset feelings when they realize that the person is not returning home alive.

What are some of the things that happen at a military/line-of-duty funeral? Every funeral is different, but these are some things that may happen at a funeral for someone who died in the line of duty or while serving in the military. For example, the country's flag is draped over the casket and later it gets folded and given to the family. Some children may feel confused by what happens at the funeral. It's okay to ask questions and talk to your (caregiver) or another caring adult about your feelings.

How might a child feel if the person was away for a long time before they died? People who are in the military are often away from their families for long periods of time. This is called deployment. Children may think the person will come back, like they did before, but, unfortunately, the person has died and can never come back. Children usually have a lot of mixed-up feelings when the person dies, especially if they did not get a chance to say goodbye. Whatever you are feeling is normal and okay.

Why do some people feel angry when their family member is killed in the line of duty/while serving in the military? Anger is a common feeling when someone is killed in the line of duty/while serving in the military. People may feel angry at the person responsible for killing them or at the person who was killed for choosing to be (in the military/a police officer or firefighter). It's normal and okay to feel angry, but it is important to let out anger in ways that don't hurt you or others.

Is it normal to have mixed-up feelings that your family member chose to serve in the (military/police/fire department)? It's normal to have many different feelings about this. You may feel proud for their service. You may be upset that because they chose to (serve in the military/be a police officer or firefighter), they are now dead. Whatever you are feeling is normal and okay. (How do you feel about the person serving in the military/being a police officer/firefighter?)

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What does *guilty* mean, and is it normal to feel guilty when a family member is killed in the military/line of duty? Guilty means feeling bad about something we think we did wrong. Children may feel guilty or bad for not spending more time with their family member when they were home, for not treating the person better when they were alive, or for not being better behaved. They may think they did something wrong that caused the person to die. It's important for you to know that nothing you said or did made the person die.

What is *relocation*? Relocation means the family has to move after the death. It can be difficult to move to a new home and to change schools. It can be difficult to leave friends and to make new friends. Coming here will help you learn ways to cope with the many changes in your life.

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Learning about Death Card Game:

Questions for Substance-Related Death

(Modify or omit questions to suit the child's circumstances and understanding.)

What are drugs? Lots of people take medicine (also called drugs) when they are sick. Medicines are legal drugs, which means they are given by doctors to help people when they are sick or in pain. Stores can sell them, and people are allowed to buy them. But it's not legal, or safe, for people to use these medicines any way they want or to buy them from people who are selling them illegally. Alcohol is another kind of legal drug, but you must be a certain age to buy and drink it. Some drugs are illegal, like ecstasy, cocaine, LSD, crystal meth, and heroin. Some people struggle with drug or alcohol use because they take too much medicine or drink more alcohol than is safe for their body, or they use illegal drugs. *Substance* is another word used for alcohol, medicine, or drugs.

Why are drugs sometimes dangerous? Taking too much medicine, drinking too much alcohol, or using illegal drugs can damage the brain, heart, and other important parts of the body. While using drugs, it's often harder to think clearly. People can do dangerous things that could hurt them, or other people, when they take too much medicine, drink too much alcohol, or use illegal drugs.

Why do people misuse legal drugs or use illegal drugs? Some people take too much medicine, drink too much alcohol, or use illegal drugs because they like the feeling it creates, even though it can harm their bodies or brains. Then, because of what those drugs do to their brains, it's very hard for them to stop taking them, even when they could die.

If people get sick and take medicine (drugs), will they die too? Medicine is almost always safe when someone takes the amount the doctor says.

What is drug addiction/substance use disorder (SUD)? SUD is a disease that makes someone use more (alcohol, medicine, or drugs) than is safe for their body. This disease tricks the brain into thinking that the body needs drugs/alcohol to survive. It's very hard for the person to stop using drugs/drinking alcohol even though they know they could die.

What does *getting high/getting drunk* mean? You may have heard the words *getting high/getting* drunk. This means using a lot of drugs/drinking a lot of alcohol. When someone uses a lot of drugs/drinks a lot of alcohol, it's hard for them to think properly. This can make them act weird, or they may even become mean or scary. This change in their behavior doesn't mean that they are a bad person—the substance use disorder makes it hard for them to control how they behave.

How might children feel when someone in their family has a substance use disorder? If someone in a family has a substance use disorder, things at home might not feel calm or safe. Kids may feel worried, scared, angry, sad, embarrassed, guilty, confused, or other feelings. All feelings are okay. Coming here will help you talk about your feelings and learn ways to feel better.

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What can help a person who has a substance use disorder? With help and support, many people can stop using substances that are dangerous for them. This is called *recovery*. Different recovery plans can help people with a substance use disorder. Recovery is a decision the person has to make for themselves. No one else can make the decision for them. So, you did nothing wrong to make the person get the substance use disorder, and nothing you could have done or said could make the person stop using substances.

What is a substance-related death? It happens when someone dies from using more (alcohol/medicine/drugs) than is safe for their body.

Why do some families want to keep it a secret if someone dies from substance use? The family may worry that others will think badly of them. Sometimes children think if they talk about a family member's substance/alcohol use, they will cause trouble. This is a place where you can talk about anything, and you won't get in trouble.

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Learning about Death Card Game:

Questions for Natural Disaster

(Modify or omit questions to suit the child's circumstances and understanding.)

What are natural disasters? Natural disasters are bad things that happen to the Earth that cause a lot of damage, like hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, wildfires, and tsunamis. Natural disasters are very rare in most parts of the world, which means they don't happen often. Sometimes people get badly hurt or die during a natural disaster. It's normal to have a lot of upset feelings when someone gets badly injured or dies in a natural disaster. Coming here will help you learn ways to feel better. (Add additional information that is specific to the type of natural disaster.)

Who are first responders? When a (type of natural disaster) happens, many people come to help. Doctors, nurses, ambulance workers, firefighters, and police are the first helpers to arrive. Firefighters put out fires. First responders and others look for missing people, clean up the damage, and keep people safe. People provide food and shelter. Many people come to help and support a community affected by a natural disaster.

Is it normal to have scary memories of what happened? It is normal to have scary memories of the (type of natural disaster). Certain things might remind you of what happened, like loud noises, the sound of sirens, the smell of fire, people running or screaming, or storms. Coming here will help you learn ways to cope with scary memories.

What does *evacuation* mean? In an evacuation, you must leave your home because it's not safe to stay and you go somewhere that is safe.

Where do people go if their home is damaged? Some people move to a place called a *shelter* or a *settlement camp*. You might experience many different feelings if you cannot go back to your home. It can be hard to leave your home, especially if you could not take the things that are important to you like favorite toys, stuffed animals, clothes, electronics, family photos, or other belongings. But you are in a safe place now.

What can kids do if they're worried that the (type of natural disaster) will happen again? What happened was really upsetting and scary. It's normal to worry that it will happen again. It's important to know that you are safe right now. Coming here will teach you ways to help your body be calmer and control worry thoughts.

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