Euphemisms are not, as many young people think, useless verbiage for that which can and should be said bluntly; they are like secret agents on a delicate mission, they must airily pass by a stinking mess with barely so much as a nod of the head.

Quentin Crisp, English author


Death is another topic around which we tread lightly. Pass away. Curtains. Called to join the Lord. Carried away by angels. Bought the farm. Pushing up daisies. Perished. In the horizontal dirt bed. With the ancestors. Departed. Examining the radishes. Shuffled off the mortal coil. Gone to the big (whatever: e.g., bowling alley, cricket pitch, football game, card game, fishing hole) in the sky. Hundreds of euphemisms for death exist, some cruel, some funny, some so gossamer one can barely discern the referent.

Several books have been written about our penchant for softening the linguistic blow, and as with most interesting aspects of language, the earliest references go way back. John Ayto’s (2007) book Wobbly Bits and Other Euphemisms: Over 3,000 Ways to Avoid Speaking Your Mind and Robert Holder’s (2002) How Not To Say What You Mean: A Dictionary of Euphemisms detail the history, but a newcomer is Euphemania by Ralph Keyes (2010). Keyes’ book also generated a spirited review and comments on the NPR radio network as well. What the authors mean by euphemisms...

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A euphemism is a word or phrase used as a way of saying something without actually saying it directly. Some euphemisms are metaphors, while others are only substituting one word for another. Although euphemisms are common in many languages, they are especially frequent in British and American English. Euphemisms may be used to avoid offence, to put a certain 'spin' on a situation, or to avoid referring directly to something which is considered taboo, such as sex, death or bodily functions. Sometimes Definition & Examples. When & How to Write a Euphemism. Quiz. I. What is Euphemism? Euphemisms are polite, mild phrases which substitute unpleasant ways of saying something sad or uncomfortable. Euphemism (pronounced yoo-fuh-miz-uhm) is derived from the Greek phrase euphēmismos, meaning "to sound good.". II. Examples of Euphemism. Euphemisms are often used in everyday speech to soften difficult situations. Here are a few examples of euphemism: Example 1. We have to let you go, Tyler. Definition of Euphemism. A euphemism is a polite or mild word or expression used to refer to something embarrassing, taboo, or unpleasant. Euphemisms are especially common in reference to bodily functions and illegal behavior, and to substitute for curse words. For example, we use many words and phrases to refer to urination: "I have to use the little boys' room," "I have to go to the bathroom," and "I have to see a man about a horse" are all evasive ways of referring to the same thing. The word "euphemism" comes from the Greek word "euphemo", meaning "good, fortunate, kind". Etymologically the eupheme is the opposite of the blaspheme (evil-speaking). Linguists suggest different groups of euphemisms. Such scholars as A.S.Kurkiev, L.P.Krysin, V.P. Moskvin give their classifications of these words. Taking everything into consideration we believe that euphemisms can be divided into several groups according to their spheres of application. The most recognized are the following: 1) moral.