



Guidance for adults supporting children with grief and bereavement

It is important that children are helped to understand bereavement in clear and unambiguous ways, and given opportunities to experience the full range of emotions that may accompany bereavement within a safe and supportive atmosphere.

Most grieving pupils do not need a 'bereavement expert', they need the support of familiar and trusted adults. Where the impact of the grief is more complex, referral to more specialist support may need to be considered.

Normal thoughts for children:

- Feeling angry towards the people/person who has died
- Worrying that their own angry feelings may provoke anger and hate in those whom they are close to
- Feeling betrayed, abandoned, forgotten, or unsafe
- Feeling irritable, panic, anxiety, fear, chaotic, confused
- Fearing the loss of other important people or things
- Worrying about who will be there for them in the future
- Deep yearning, sadness or despair, depressed
- Guilty at sometimes having fun, feeling happy or relieved
- Worrying that will lose memories of the person who has died
- Reminders of past losses or key events

Behaviours you might see:

This list is not exhaustive or seen in every child. You may see changes at certain times or situations or no change at all and this is also normal

- Regressive – babyish behaviour, wetting and soiling, cognitive regression
- Not eating
- Quiet and withdrawn - fear of asking/talking in case they upset others
- Tired and irritable
- Forming intense friendships or fighting
- Tearful
- Clingy
- School refusal
- Not engaging, poor concentration
- Angry/hostile/destructive
- Easily anxious
- Scared of the dark
- Repetition- questioning/reliance on routines
- Dependent on adults
- Egotistical - only concerned with themselves
- Physical Symptoms- complain of stomach upsets, headaches, lack of appetite, tiredness, comfort eating (hunger) - important to acknowledge- these are often manifestations of real emotional pain
- Changeable by moment- sad/distressed- playing and laughing

Golden Rules

- Give them time

- Acknowledge their loss, their feelings etc.
- Acknowledge the death- say you know what happened and how sorry you are
- Use words such as death, dead, died. Avoid euphemisms e.g. “gone to sleep” or “gone away”
- Ask the child what he/she wants, who they would like to know about or share their loss with - help feel in control
- Specific support - school, hospital, who child knows and can go to at any time about their bereavement.
- It can be comforting for the child to share your memories of the person
- Do not push children into talking
- It is important that a child of this age feels they can talk about their loss; let them know that they can talk to you
- Don’t be afraid to ask them, they will indicate whether they want to talk or not
- Understand the child’s reactions
- Don’t be nervous!

Returning to school after a bereavement

- It is helpful for the school and family (including the child if appropriate) to meet to discuss their return to school, including:
 - Acknowledging the death
 - Identifying what the pupil has already been told to provide clarity and consistency for the pupil,
 - Where there are religious considerations seek the views of family, and endeavour to respect those beliefs
 - Find out how/if the pupil would like to share their news
 - Organise a safe space/person for the bereaved pupil to go if they feel overwhelmed by their grief and need a ‘time-out’. How will they inform staff of this? For example, a ‘time-out’ card, a non-verbal signal or message and what the child may do during this time. How will this be communicated to staff?
 - Set guidelines for communication – with the pupil, between members of staff and between home and school
- This meeting should be with a familiar adult, such as the class teacher, SENCO, DSL or a member of the wider pastoral support team, head of year, Deputy or Headteacher
- Consider providing support for peers when they have a bereaved friend

Longer term support

- The child will continue to grieve for the rest of their life and may require ongoing support.
- Significant dates or anniversaries, Mother’s/Father’s Day, etc. may be particularly difficult. Suggest to keep a diary of significant days and ensure that this information is communicated (with consent) to the pupils next school.
- The grief may impact the pupil’s progress. Some pupils work really hard and may put themselves under extra pressure to succeed, while others may find it difficult to focus in class and on their work. There may be changes in their behaviour
- Bereaved young people can find change difficult, so preparing them in advance (where possible) may help them to voice their worries and ease the process.
- Vulnerable pupils and those with SEND may need additional support to identify and understand emotions, particularly on transition.

Additional COVID-19 considerations

- Losing someone close to us is never easy. But when some passes away due to a virus that we don’t really understand, or when we are not able to comfort each other as usual, or even attend funerals to say goodbye it is acknowledged that these feelings can become exacerbated. During this situation, it may be of comfort to know you are not alone. These feelings are normal.

- The support resources and websites below are all able to offer specific support with these challenging restrictions. Many have information which has been collectively compiled by those who have shared their experiences. It is also recommended that you find someone you trust or something that will support you through this devastating time.

Specialist agencies and useful links

- Wandsworth Bereavement Service: www.wandsworthbereavement.org.uk
- Child Bereavement UK: childbereavementuk.org 0800 02 888 40
- Jigsaw: Helpline and information. <https://www.jigsawsoutheast.org.uk>
- Barnardo's: Child bereavement service <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/>
- Young Minds: Information including downloadable guides and links to further help. <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-guide-to-support-a-z/parents-guide-to-support-grief-and-loss/?gclid=CjwKCAjw>

Child support resources:

- Winston's Wish- <https://www.winstonswish.org>
 - Includes information and support on how to deal with current difficult issues due to Covid, e.g. not being able to attend funerals
- Grief Encounter- <https://www.griefencounter.org.uk>
- Cruse Bereavement Care- <https://www.cruse.org.uk>
- Hope Again: The youth website of Cruse Bereavement Care <https://www.hopeagain.org.uk/>
- ChildLine: 'Calm zone' with activities and online games. <https://www.childline.org.uk/>
- Kooth: Online Counselling platform for children and young people <https://www.kooth.com/>

Specific for COVID-19 bereavement support:

- ELSA: <https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/category/free-resources/coronavirus-support/>

Children's Books about Grief and Loss:

The age suggestions are only a guide – please look at the book and see whether this fits with how your family want to talk about your loss and your child's understanding. We have a selection of these books to borrow.

All ages:

- Michael Rosen's Sad Book
- Helping Children with Loss
- Missing Mummy
- When Your Grandparent Dies: A Child's guide to good grief
- When Dinosaurs Die: A guide to Understanding Death
- The Day the Sea Went Out and Never Came Back
- I had a Black Dog
- The Huge Bag of Worries
- The Great Blue Yonder

Younger children:

- The Memory Tree
- Badgers Parting Gifts

- When Someone Very Special Dies
- Always and Forever
- Grandad's Island
- The Invisible String
- The Dragonfly Story
- A Monster Calls

Older children:

- Luna's Red Hat: A Storybook to Help Children Cope with Loss and Suicide
- When Someone Has a Very Serious Illness
- Vicky Angel
- Bridge to Terabithia
- The Scar
- The Red Tree
- Two Weeks with the Queen
- The Blackwater Lightship
- Lucas
- The Lost Boy's Appreciation Society