

BEREAVEMENT, LOSS AND GRIEF—GUIDANCE 2

Information for Parents/Carers: How to support your child with bereavement, loss and grief

What might I notice?

Your child may react in different ways to the news that someone has died. In the next few days, and maybe for longer, you may notice some of the following behaviours :

- ♦ **Feelings** – upset, sad, depressed, guilty, helpless or confused
- ♦ **Physical symptoms** of stress e.g. headache, feeling sick, trembling, palpitations, dry mouth, needing to go to the toilet more frequently
- ♦ Being angry or on a **short fuse** with family members and friends
- ♦ **Separation difficulties** – not wanting to let parents or siblings out of sight
- ♦ **Sudden thoughts** about what has happened – these can be triggered at any time and can make it difficult to concentrate and make decisions
- ♦ Finding it **harder to relax** and sleep disturbances
- ♦ Finding it **difficult to talk** about what has happened. When children find it difficult to talk they will often express their feelings through their behaviour instead.
- ♦ Feeling **afraid and vulnerable** – children may try to hide these feelings
- ♦ **Denial** – they may seem surprisingly unaffected. This can be because they are unconsciously avoiding the emotional pain.
- ♦ **Guilt** – this is a common response to death, especially if the child is unable to express their sadness about the loss. They will need reassurance that nothing they did had anything to do with the death that occurred. In the event of an accident it is important to emphasise that no-one was to blame.



All of these behaviours are normal reactions to hearing about a death.

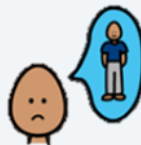
What Can I Do to Help?

Acknowledge what has happened. Talk about the death. Do not be afraid to use the word dead/death.

Be patient. Listen and allow expressions of grief.

Be clear, open and honest. Use simple concrete language that is suited to your child's age. If required, give basic facts without giving too much detail. Be guided by the child's questions.

Accept their feelings. It is OK to feel peculiar, afraid, guilty, angry, sad – or any other feeling – and it is OK to cry and be upset. Reassure them that their feelings are understandable and normal. Giving the feeling a name can help "Name it to tame it".



Expect questions – children will ask questions to help them make sense of what is happening. This can be challenging. You do not need to have all the answers and it is OK to say when you do not. Some questions may be asked repeatedly when children need reassured.

Be available – when your child needs to talk. They may break off from conversation. This is fine. They will come back to it if they want to /when they are ready. Do not be surprised that they can set their grief aside. Play helps children express themselves and release anxiety. Children need to know it is ok to feel happy.

Let your child know how you feel too – do not try to hide your emotions.

Provide space and time – children will also need opportunities to be quiet and process their thoughts.

Provide reassurance – being supportive and predictable helps make children feel safe.

Try to keep to normal routines and provide stability at home.

Look after yourself – your capacity to help is related to how well you feel. Make sure you take steps if you feel you need help by reaching out to others. Regular sleep, a healthy diet, exercise and staying connected with friends and family all help.



What should I say?

Children have very literal interpretations of language, more so than adults, and for this reason it is important to be mindful of the words and phrases we use. For example, **avoid** saying the following:

- ♦ 'Went to sleep'
- ♦ 'Passed on/away'
- ♦ 'Gone to the other side'
- ♦ 'Now you have to be a big boy/girl'
- ♦ 'You are not the man/woman of the house'
- ♦ 'Your family needs you to be strong'
- ♦ 'I know just how you feel'
- ♦ 'At least...'
- ♦ 'Your mum/dad would not want you to be...'



When will my child feel better?

All children and young people and their circumstances are different. There is no right or wrong way to feel. Allow your child the time it takes them to feel better. Experiencing death is a normal part of being a human being. Your child should eventually feel better.

The grieving process can last up to a year or longer with periods of 'normal behaviour' interrupted by spurts of grief.

Some children and young people have difficulty grieving and moving on:

- ♦ Excessive and prolonged periods of crying
- ♦ Extreme changes in behaviour
- ♦ Noticeable changes in school performance
- ♦ Withdrawal for prolonged periods of time
- ♦ Lack of interest in friends and activities they used to enjoy
- ♦ Frequent nightmares and sleep disturbances
- ♦ Frequent headaches and/or physical complaints
- ♦ Weight loss
- ♦ A general lack of interest in life
- ♦ Prolonged negative thinking or lack of interest about the future



Persistent symptoms may need help. You can seek further advice and support from your GP.

Where can I go for further support?

Childhood Bereavement UK

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>
Helpline 0800 02 888 40 (Monday-Friday 9am-5pm)
Email for bereavement support: support@childbereavementuk.org
Live chat via the website



Cruse Bereavement Care

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/>
Helpline 0808 808 1677 (Monday-Friday 9.30am-5pm, excluding bank holidays and extended hours on Tue/Wed/Thurs when they are open to 8pm)
Email helpline@cruse.org.uk
Information on Coronavirus:
<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief>

Richmond's Hope

<https://www.richmondshope.org.uk/>
Phone: 0131 661 6818
Email: info@richmondshope.org.uk
Address: 227-229 Niddrie Mains Road
Edinburgh
EH16 4PA



Winston's Wish

<https://www.winstonswish.org/>
Freephone National Helpline 08088 020 021 (Monday-Friday 9am-5pm)
ASK Email service ask@winstonswish.org
Online chat – click the 'ASK US' image on the website, available Wednesdays & Friday from 12-4pm
Free 24/7 text crisis support Text WW to 85258
Resources for talking to child about Coronavirus:
<https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus-supporting-bereaved-children-and-young-people/>



This guidance is part of a 'Bereavement, Loss and Grief' collection that aims to provide parents, carers and school staff with information to help them understand and support any bereaved child or young person.

Parents, carers and staff might also find the following helpful:

- ♦ 'Bereavement , loss and grief: Developmental stage and understanding'

School staff might also find the following helpful:

- ♦ 'Bereavement , loss and grief: Developmental stage and understanding'
- ♦ 'Information for staff: How to support a child or young person with bereavement, loss and grief'
- ♦ 'Bereavement, loss and grief: Staff support and self-care'