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Guidance for schools on coping with the critical incidents of Covid-19

Hammersmith & Fulham
Educational Psychology 2020



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Introduction

Feelings of loss are a life experience common to us all. However, in the coming months, increasing numbers of people will experience bereavement through the effects of COVID19. This means that there is an increased risk of critical incidents within schools. Social distancing measures mean that the grieving process and related rituals are disrupted. People (including our students) may not be able to say goodbye to their loved ones in the way they wish. Schools are often looked to as hubs of support in challenging times. Senior leaders may wish to prepare their schools by developing a Critical Incident (CI) policy on bereavement unique to their resources and community. This guidance aims to provide the knowledge and tools needed to create this. Additional information is included about the psychological impact of COVID19 so that schools can create a policy to reflect the current challenges.

How to use this document

This is considered a working document and we hope to update it based on feedback from schools about what they would find useful. Every school works differently, and every bereavement situation is unique, so the following are guidelines only and the policy should be developed in a way that suits your school best. Work with your staff to identify some of the possibilities that may occur in your setting.

The first section will outline psychological theories that inform bereavement policies. Reflecting on these theories will help inform your response.

Headteachers have been provided with an additional section which provides them with information on responding to bereavement during and following COVID19. Much of what you will do will be the same as for any CI. However, recommendations need to reflect social distancing measures and additional pressures placed upon us all. This section also includes information on responding to bereavement not necessarily related to COVID19. It also includes a section on well-being for staff who support those who are bereaved. We hope to continue to add to the reading and resource list.

Support from the Educational Psychology Service

The Educational Psychology Service is available to support schools and settings to manage critical events. We use approaches based on evidence based good practice founded on helping schools to manage, and can offer advice and support on communication, practical arrangements and managing emotions. No two incidents are the same. However, there is a recognised pattern, and, over time, most adults and children will be able to move on with their lives without needing professional counselling.

We believe that help and support to children and young people is best delivered by trusted familiar adults as and when it is needed.

We offer:

- Help with communicating information to members of staff, children and families: Forms of words to express regret whilst mitigating against additional anxiety.
- Support to staff: How to talk about the range of responses to grief and loss and how to manage them.
- Advice on group support for students to share feelings.
- Identification of and planning for vulnerable children.
- Ideas about practical issues such as memorials / books of condolences.
- Follow up during the days following the incident to discuss any further issues that arise.

If, after a period of time, there are members of the school community who show signs of continued distress, the EP will discuss this with you and signpost to further sources of appropriate support.

You may also wish to refer to a number of existing and pending documents created by the Educational Psychology Service (EPS):

- Looking after yourself & child (COVID 19)
- EPS offer of support
- Post COVID 19 Forward Planning Guidance
- Post COVID 19 Forward Planning Guidance for Year 7

Critical Incidents related to COVID-19: assistance to schools

All our school communities will inevitably face increased risk of critical incidents, including bereavements resulting from deaths of members of those communities, as a result of COVID-19. As with any critical incident, we will be immediately available to assist in ways that account for the complexities caused by social distancing, remote working and isolation measures. We will help you restore a sense of hope and recovery after these incidents, without brushing aside or ignoring the appropriately strong feelings that accompany them.

Some COVID-19 specific guidance on helping bereaved children and young people understand what has happened is available here:

- www.winstonswish.org/telling-a-child-someone-died-from-coronavirus

H&F Educational Psychology Service will be differentiating our response by categorising types of incidents and offering support appropriate to each category, as detailed:

Category 1: In the event of the death of parent of a CYP on roll and/or family member of staff which may impact some of the school community.

We will:

- Offer help from the school's allocated EP by phone or through video links such as Microsoft Teams to the school's Head Teacher.
- In the event that your school's allocated psychologist is unavailable, please contact the team by telephone or email and we will ensure an EP is made available to contact you for a telephone consultation.

Category 2: In the event of the death of a pupil on roll and/or a staff member, impacting on the whole school community.

We will:

- offer Headteachers and key staff in the school a video consultation with two educational psychologists – ideally your school's educational psychologist together with a colleague with particular expertise in the critical incident field.

Category 3: Where there is a critical incident that impacts on the wider community, for example death as a result of serious youth violence.

Category 3 events are usually responded to and co-ordinated by multiple agencies, for example the Police, Early Help and the Youth Offending Service. The Headteacher can contact the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) directly, or alternatively another agency may have alerted the EPS and we will make contact with the Headteacher to think through what support is needed.

Section one

Theory behind the policy

This section will provide an understanding of the following:

- **The psychological impact of a global pandemic**
- **Promoting resilience post pandemic**
- **Understanding psychological models for grief**
- **A developmental perspective on death**

The psychological impact of a global pandemic

Researchers are currently gathering data on the psychological impact of COVID-19. Preliminary findings from polls and lessons learned from previous virus outbreaks indicate that the societal impact of the virus will reach us all in some way. People are facing an extended period of social isolation, bereavements, unemployment, financial strain and uncertainty, increased domestic violence, families are separated, and our medical system is under strain. As such, we would expect that the well-being of our population will be comprised. Some temporary anxiety is normal and there is no reason to be alarmed by this. However, not much is currently known about the long-term effects of pandemics on the mental health of children and young people (Lancet Child Adolescent Health 2020).

We are continuing to learn about COVID19 and how it might impact us. For children and young people with existing mental health needs, social distancing and school closures can mean a lack of access to supportive relationships and resources. School routines can play an important role in coping mechanisms for many young people. Young Minds carried out a survey with young people (aged to 25 years old) with a history of mental health needs in the UK. 83% said that their mental health had suffered further due to the pandemic. 26% said they were unable to access mental health support; peer support groups and face to-face services have been cancelled.

Promoting resilience post pandemic

Resilience can be defined in a number of different ways and this means that it can sometimes be a confusing concept to understand. Most definitions refer to two things:

- Overcoming adversity
- Being able to adapt to challenging situations

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, it will be important to consider promoting resilience for pupils - supporting positive adaptation in the face of significant challenge. Resilience is a process as opposed to an internal trait. It can change over time depending on the context or the situation - it is not a case of having resilience. Therefore, it is important to support young people by fostering factors that promote resilience in this current climate. This paper should start the conversations between staff about the school community providing the framework and processes to support all staff and pupils to feel more resilient. Resilience is community focused and therefore support is often best placed within pre-existing relationships in school.

Research and practice reports that resilience is enhanced in schools where staff and pupils say that they:

1. Have a sense of Belonging
2. They can seek help easily
3. Are given opportunities to learn to cope with emotional health and well-being as part of the whole school curriculum

Children and young people's understanding of death

Children's understanding of death will vary with their age and stage of development. Young children may not have the language or cognitive ability to tell you how they feel, so adults have to interpret their behaviour in order to offer appropriate support. Likewise, for adolescents who, although they have the understanding and language, are often unwilling to talk to the adults around them.

Pre-school children

- Realise that someone they love is missing from their lives – but their response is more about the loss of the person, not their death. Are sensitive to the emotional atmosphere around them
- Do not understand the finality of death – they think that the person will come back or can be visited, so often react casually to bad news and continue to ask when they will return
- May show signs of anger or sadness, but often only for short periods before escaping into play
- May use play to act out their understanding of what happened– repeated play is often the way children try and make sense of life experiences.
- May seem to transfer their attachment to another person quickly for security.
- May regress in language and behaviour – the skills they had mastered may be lost for a while
- May ask the same questions repeatedly as they try and make sense of the "story"
- Will have a strong need for routine, structure, affection, reassurance – to feel safe.

Primary school children

- Begin to understand the permanency of death – may lead to separation anxiety
- Begin to fear death for themselves and others – might worry about ghosts/the dark etc.
- May feel guilt or experience "magical thinking" (i.e. my thoughts/actions caused the death).
- Still may not have mastery over language to adequately express complex feelings.
- Often need to know details of the death and will ask specific questions to try and make sense of the situation. May need to go over facts again and again.
- May exhibit acting out, attention seeking or regressive behaviour as a vehicle for their feelings
- May have difficulty concentrating or settling at school – have aggressive or distressed outbursts
- May suffer from minor illnesses, or mirror symptoms that the ill person experienced
- Continue to have strong need for routine, structure, verbal and non-verbal expressions of affection and reassurance in order to feel safe in a world which has suddenly become unsafe and scary.

Secondary school young people

- Understand that death is final and irreversible – may become depressed/feel overwhelmed. Have appropriate language to identify feelings but may be unwilling to discuss issues.
- May become obsessed with thoughts of own death, or that of others.
- May act recklessly in defiance of death – drugs, alcohol, sexual activity, fast driving, etc.
- Dislike appearing different from peers so may deny feelings and reject offers of support.
- May question/reject beliefs, values and religion as a result of experiencing loss.
- Become aware of the impact of their loss on future life events which will never be shared.
- May withdraw from academic/social activities due to changed circumstances.



Children and young people's reaction to death

Grief is a distressing and overwhelming experience that affects us emotionally, physically, behaviourally and spiritually. Reactions vary, may not occur immediately, and will depend on a number of factors. It can help pupils to know that the following reactions are all normal responses to the death of someone we love.

Factors affecting the way children grieve

- Their age, stage of development and understanding of life and death
- Degree of attachment to the person who has died
- Previous experience of illness, loss and death
- Manner of death – long illness, suicide, accident
- How and what they were told of the death
- Availability of support networks – at home and at school
- Religious beliefs and practices
- Ethnic and cultural background – specific belief system/rituals.

Some of the normal emotional reactions to bereavement might be:

- **Shock/numbness:** pupil may not show any immediate reaction as they struggle to absorb the implications of the news. Young children may continue to appear unaffected for some time
- **Denial/disbelief:** Initially pupil may find it hard to accept the death – “I can’t believe she is not here” – and continue to talk about the dead person in the present tense
- **Panic/separation anxiety:** pupil may fear own or other’s death, feels vulnerable/world is unsafe.
- **Sadness:** pupil may be tearful /prone to sudden emotional outbursts
- **Anger:** may be expressed in words or behaviour – signals intense pain and frustration
- **Guilt:** pupil may feel something they did/said contributed to the death.
- **Exhaustion:** grief can be physically and emotionally draining – irregular sleeping or eating patterns
- **Despair:** pupil may feel emotionally overwhelmed, nothing will ever be right again.
- **Helplessness:** pupil feels out of control of events
- **Regret:** for things said/not said, for hopes and wishes that will not now happen
- **Loneliness:** there is no one else who is experiencing what I am feeling and going through.
- **Lowered self-esteem:** as a result of changed circumstances and abilities.

Some of the normal physical reactions to bereavement might be:

Distress, tiredness, minor illnesses, loss of appetite, self-neglect, decrease in activity, panic attacks, nausea, headaches, feeling cold, dry mouth, shivering, exhaustion, sighing.

Some of the normal behavioural reactions to bereavement might be:

Aggression, crying, restlessness, inability to concentrate, forgetfulness, detachment, loss of motivation, separation anxiety, school refusal, disorganisation, regression.

Models of Grief

The Five Stages of Grief

There are many models to explain grief. The five stage model proposed by Kübler-Ross (1969) is one of the most well-known models. Contrary to popular belief, the five stages of loss do not necessarily occur in any specific order. We often move between stages before achieving a more peaceful acceptance of death.

1. Denial and isolation

Denial is a common defence mechanism that buffers the immediate shock of the loss, numbing us to our emotions. It serves to help us minimize the emotional pain of our loss. It is a normal reaction to rationalise our overwhelming emotions. Denial is not only an attempt to pretend that the loss does not exist. We are also trying to absorb and understand what is happening. For most people experiencing grief, this stage is a temporary response that carries us through the first wave of pain.

2. Anger

It is common for people to experience anger after the loss of a loved one. We are trying to adjust to a new reality, and we are likely experiencing extreme emotional discomfort. Expressing anger is an emotional outlet for our pain. The anger may be aimed at inanimate objects, complete strangers, friends or family.

3. Bargaining

The normal reaction to feelings of helplessness and vulnerability is often a need to regain control through a series of "If only" statements. This is an attempt to bargain. When bargaining starts to take place, we are often directing our requests to a higher power, or something bigger than we are that may be able to influence a different outcome. Guilt often accompanies bargaining. We start to believe there was something we could have done differently to have helped save our loved one.

4. Depression

During our experience of processing grief, there comes a time when our imaginations calm down and we slowly start to look at the reality of our present situation. In those moments, we tend to pull inward as the sadness grows. We might find ourselves retreating, being less sociable, and reaching out less to others about what we are going through. Although this is a very natural stage of grief, dealing with depression after the loss of a loved one can be extremely isolating.

5. Acceptance

This is not a stage that everyone comes to. Some people struggle for a long time to accept what has happened. When we come to a place of acceptance, it is not that we no longer feel the pain of loss. However, we are no longer resisting the reality of our situation, and we are not struggling to make it something different. Sadness and regret can still be present in this phase, but the emotional survival tactics of denial, bargaining, and anger are less likely to be present.

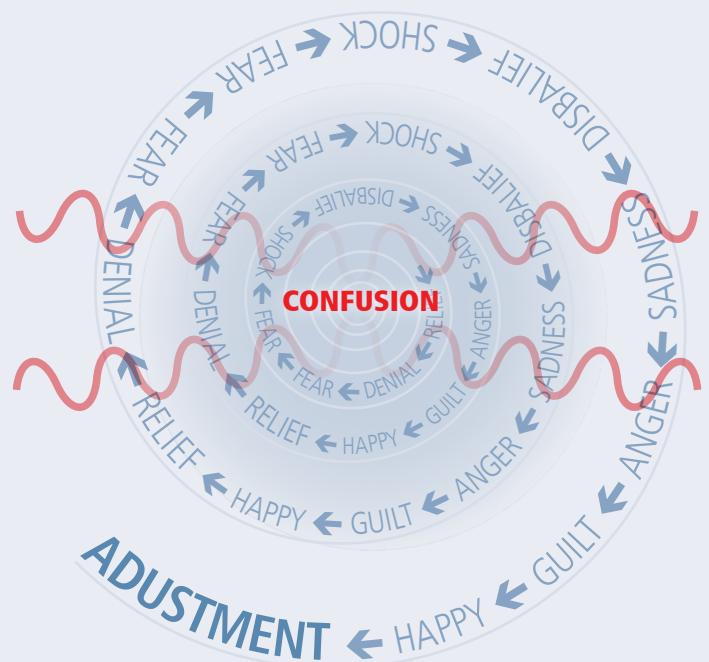


Figure one: The spiral figure of grief.

Attachment Theory and Grief

Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969) advocates that attachment is formed when affections or bonds with others are established and grief is then the reaction when these bonds are broken or threatened. British psychiatrist Colin Murray Parkes developed a model of grief based on Bowlby's theory of attachment, suggesting there are four phases of mourning when experiencing the loss of a loved one:

1. Shock and numbness

This phase immediately follows a loss to death. The grieving person feels numb, which is a self-defence mechanism that allows him or her to survive emotionally in the immediate aftermath of loss.

2. Yearning and searching

As we process loss in this phase, we may begin to look for comfort to fill the void our loved one has left. We may try to do so by reliving memories through pictures and by looking for signs from the person to feel connected to them. In this phase, we become very preoccupied with the person we have lost.

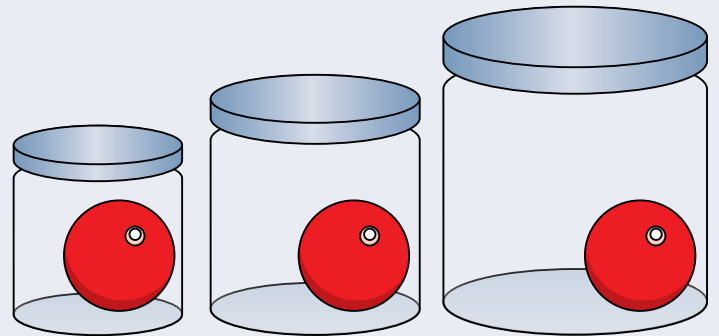
3. Despair and disorganisation

We may find ourselves questioning and feeling angry in this phase. The realisation that our loved one is not returning feels real, and we can have a difficult time understanding or finding hope in our future. We may feel a bit aimless in this phase and find that we retreat from others as we process our pain.

4. Re-organisation and recovery

As we move into this phase, our life feels more hopeful. As with Kübler-Ross's acceptance stage, this phase does not mean that we will not still feel sadness or longing for our loved one. However, this phase offers us a place of healing and reconnecting with important people in our lives for support. We find small ways to re-establish a sense of normalcy in our lives on a daily basis.

Monroe's Theory of Grief



Grief is constant in size but the individual grows to accommodate their grief in their lives.

This illustration can be really helpful for children in creating their own size griefs and the jars around them. There is one large ball with three jars of increasing size, one small, one medium and one large. Squeezing the large ball into the small jar is hard and barely fits (this is grief initially). The ball is removed from the small jar and placed into the medium sized jar. The ball can roll around and move. Finally the ball is moved from the medium sized jar and put into a large one where there is lots of room and places for other things and people. Grief does not get any smaller, it stays the same, however the jar of life gets bigger,

'No-one wants their grief to shrink. It's all they have left of the person who died. But if your world gets larger, then you can keep your grief as it is, but work around it'

Barbara Monroe has published a book titled: *Brief interventions with bereaved children*, 2009.

Section two

Procedure during the incident

Responding to the first communication of tragic news

This conversation requires a calm, steady, quiet and sensitive approach. It will be important to allow the person to tell their story, and to listen. You might want time to take a breath and steady yourself. It is okay to ask for a pause, for example to get something to note down contact details and important information.

Demonstrate that you are listening through occasional gentle responses. These could be empathetic sounds or short phrases like "Oh I'm so sorry", "I'm listening", "Take your time".

Leave pauses so that the caller does not feel hurried and has time to gather their thoughts.

Allow the caller to tell their story in their words and in their own time and avoid asking questions.

You can check that you have heard and understood by paraphrasing back, for example "You said that he died at home last night, is that right?" and again leave pauses so that the caller can correct you.

When the conversation reaches a natural break, explain that you need to take very clear notes of the important information. Obtain as much accurate, factual information about the critical incident as possible. Bear in mind that it is very easy for rumours to spread: uncertainty or misinformation can greatly add to distress levels, create confusion and will take time and effort to correct.

Before ending the call, check that you have collected sufficient factual information and the personal and contact details of the person you are talking to. (Please see Headteachers section).

As soon as the call ends inform the senior management team, who are advised to take actions in line with the planning checklist (Please see Headteachers section). After alerting others it is important that you give yourself time to process the information and your own thoughts and feelings before getting back to work. It may be helpful to share your reaction with a colleague.

Information related issues

- The School Improvement leads will be able to support with contacting the LA and other agencies. Other agencies able to provide support or access to resources include Educational Psychology, Clinical Support, CAMHS, Early Help, the school nurse, local faith centres etc. It would be helpful to maintain an up to date list of local agencies and their contact details on the template provided.
- It is highly likely that the media will be in contact with the school. It is vital to consider how this will be dealt with and it is highly recommended that contact is made with the LA press officer (LA Comms). This officer will be able to act on the school's behalf (if requested to do so) and provide appropriate support regarding press releases etc. Where schools wish to deal directly with the media this should be channelled through a member of staff who acts as the nominated media liaison representative. Other staff members should pass on requests for information to this nominated person.
- Prepare a brief, written statement (using that prepared for the press for guidance) which can be used by the school secretarial staff to respond to phone calls from parents etc. Such a statement should be updated as appropriate when new information becomes available. This is to ensure the consistency of the information being disseminated.
- It may be advisable to ensure that school-based records or information about the children who have been involved are collated and removed to a secure place for a time in case there is a need for further investigation.

Informing parents

- Prepare an email informing parents/carers of the facts of the incident as soon as you are able. Depending on the circumstances, it may also be necessary to provide additional health information or contact numbers where such information can be obtained. This is particularly important where parents/ carers may have concerns for their own child's health or well-being.
- The families of close friends or class members of the pupil(s) / staff who have died may also be reassured to be provided with information about how to support each other regarding loss and bereavement.
- Remember that churches or other religious or community based groups may be able to provide remote support at this time but be sensitive and alert to religious and/or cultural sensitivities for individual families.
- Consider the possible involvement of Early Help/ Family Support.

Supporting pupils and staff

- It is generally felt that keeping as much 'normal structure' as possible is beneficial – this is to ensure some stability in the lives of pupils at a time of crisis. Discuss with parents if they would like their child to continue to access your community classroom.
- Remember that Feelings and expressions of grief are normal, appropriate and healthy.
- As with any 'emotionally charged' experience, it is important for staff to remain aware of confidentiality issues and respond appropriately to information or concerns shared with them by their pupils.
- Identify and make available designated places for children to go for reflection time or for expressions of emotion (on line/school web link during COVID19).
- Consider contributions to a virtual book to share memories and thoughts.
- Keep staff regularly updated and supported.

- Providing comfort for distressed pupils is a difficult and draining task; all staff – including the senior management team, need the opportunity to express their own feelings. Having the time and space for this to happen is essential. The Educational Psychology Service will be available as a point of contact for members of staff throughout the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Please liaise with the School Improvement lead to ensure that we signpost people to the most appropriate form of support to meet their needs. Be alert for individual staff or pupils who may be particularly vulnerable to such events due to their own circumstances.

During the days following the event

- Contact families directly affected to express sympathy.
- Ensure that a member of staff makes contact with any pupils who may have been affected.
- Establish procedures for identifying and monitoring the wellbeing of vulnerable pupils.
- Encourage pupils and staff to be open with their feelings and memories e.g. collections of photographs. Some children may not know that they are 'allowed' to talk about the person who died. They should be.
- Ascertain details of the funeral arrangements. Many are being streamed on line for people to observe when they cannot be there in person. Allowing children and young people to observe the funeral may help in their grieving process. Permission of their parents needs to be obtained.
- Activities that promote community solidarity can be helpful during stressful times.
- Continue to ensure that staff members have the opportunity (perhaps with the help of outside support) to deal with their own feelings, both about the incidents and the distress of the pupils.

Subsequent weeks and months

The impact of the 'critical incident' is likely to continue to be felt for a considerable time.

- School-based memorials and ceremonies that may normally be held are unlikely to be possible in the normal way. Such events may also appear untimely if carried out once schools re-open beyond their current capacity. Always check this out with the family first. This could take the form of a service or ceremony, dedicated piece of equipment or furniture, an award, an area of the school grounds etc. Planning a memorial can in itself be a therapeutic act, even where a period of time must elapse before the event can happen. Such an event can acknowledge that an incident is over.
- Further suggestions for remote support include – setting a time and date to have a minute of reflection and remembrance/lighting a candle for the person, memories and drawings of remembrance being uploaded to the school website and a message from the head teacher on the school's website.
- It will be important to be vigilant and to monitor pupils and staff so that any signs or symptoms of delayed grieving can be identified, and appropriate action taken. Pupils should be clear about who they can talk to, and those providing the listening service need to be clear about their role, boundaries and confidentiality issues.
- Good home-school links will encourage the early reporting of difficulties being experienced in the home.
- Be aware of the potential power of anniversaries of the incident, or of the deceased person's birthday etc. in reawakening feelings of distress.

Section three

Supporting children and young people through grief

General tips for supporting bereaved children and young people

Most grieving children do not need specialist help. Much of the support needed is similar to that which you would give to any vulnerable child and is simply an extension of your existing professional teaching and listening skills. Therefore, you might find the following reminders helpful (adapted from "Healing and Growing Through Grief" by Donna O'Toole).

Be there. Grieving children need your support and presence more than advice. Support may be needed over a long period of time. Children often jump in and out of the "puddles" of grief – lack of obvious grief reactions does not mean that grief has gone away.

Initiate and anticipate. Intensely grieving children often don't know or can't ask for what they need, so watch out for behaviours which might indicate that the child is struggling and perhaps offer special times when they could talk to you if they wished.

Listen. Grieving children often need to tell their stories repeatedly. Listening without judgement or interruption can be the most important gift you can give.

Silence is golden. Sometimes there are no words that bring enough comfort to take away the pain. Presence and touch can sometimes say what words cannot

Accept and encourage the expression of feelings. Reassure the child that grief encompasses many different feelings including anger, sadness, confusion, helplessness, guilt – all are normal and sometimes it helps to talk about or find ways to express what they are experiencing.

Offer opportunities for remembering. Often grieving children (and adults) find that having the opportunity to talk about special memories can be helpful. Young children worry about forgetting.

Learn about the grief process. Knowledge helps allay anxieties.

Help the child find support and encouragement. Help the bereaved child explore what support they need and who will give it to them. Think about social as well as academic support.

Allow the child to grieve at their own pace. Grief is an individual process. Your ability to not judge the length of time it takes will help. Reactions may not occur until sometime after the death

Be patient. With yourself and with your pupil. You may need to give more of yourself over a longer period than you imagined. Make sure you too have some support.

Provide for times of fun. Grief can be exhausting. Let the child know that it is still okay to laugh and have fun – it does not mean they are being disloyal to the person who died, or by enjoying themselves they will forget what happened, but living is important too.

Give a child choices. When the rest of life feels out of their control it helps if children can be involved in decisions about what sort of support can be given at home and at school.

Believe in the child's ability to recover and grow. Your faith in their ability to recover and heal may be needed when theirs fails them. Help them identify their strengths and build on their inner resources, as well as identifying those around them who can offer support.

Be yourself! You are a child's best resource – your ability to understand, stay constant and keep school routines and boundaries in place will create a sense of safety when all else is in chaos

Supporting children and young people grieving, COVID19

Supporting a pupil following a family bereavement

Children and young people do suffer when someone they love dies, so the death of a member of a pupil's family can have a profound effect on their life in school. It is therefore so important that they receive appropriate support from teaching staff to enable them to cope within the school setting. However, teachers do not have to be "bereavement experts" to help grieving pupils – you can do much by just being yourself and showing that you care. You can make a real difference by listening, trying to understand what it might be like to live in a world where someone you love is now missing, and by helping to find ways in which pupils can cope with their altered lives. (See section on "Helping Children through Grief") You may find the following suggestions helpful when devising a plan to support a bereaved pupil in your care.

Step 1: Initial Action Plan

- Identify the member of staff who will be the contact point for the bereaved family.
- Acknowledge the death with the pupil and family by phone, card – most pupils derive a huge sense of support and comfort from this act.
- Decide with the pupil/family how the information about the death is to be conveyed to the rest of the staff and other pupils. Some pupils like to be involved, (or even do it themselves), others prefer not to be. Others (particularly older pupils) may not want a general announcement to be made but prefer to choose themselves who should know and tell them themselves. If appropriate, give the pupil the choice.
- Ensure regular contact is maintained with the pupil and family – this helps inform you about how they are coping, what their concerns are and what would be most helpful for the pupil if there are difficulties. Where possible involve the pupil in deciding how problems can be overcome – this helps them develop their coping strategies and learn about their network of support
- If the pupil is not joining you for online sessions, ensure they do not feel forgotten – cards or messages from staff and peers help to remind them that people care. These activities will also provide opportunities for the class to feel they are doing something positive and is an opportunity to discuss their own concerns and worries and think about ways to support their classmate on their return.
- If appropriate, arrange a meeting with the pupil (and family) before their return to school to address any concerns and to devise strategies with the pupil to help them cope once back in school. (See section on "A bereaved pupil's return to school")
- Nominate a key member of staff (in consultation with the pupil if appropriate) who will offer ongoing support and monitoring of the situation as things change.
- Ensure all staff (including ancillary staff) are aware of the bereavement and the possible effects on the pupil, their behaviour and their learning, so that appropriate support can be offered.

Step 2: Ongoing Action Plan for when schools are fully open

- If the pupil is having difficulty returning to school once they re-open, you may be able to consider an individual reintegration package; short visits, working alone, attending favourite lessons, reduced timetable.
- Quietly check on a regular basis how things are going and if problems arise, ask the pupil what they think could be done to improve the situation.
- Help pupils to understand the mixture of feelings that make up grief are normal, (see section on "Children's reactions to bereavement"), which, with support and strategies, can be managed.
- Consider "time out" card or similar way in which pupil can exit the classroom quickly if feeling emotionally vulnerable – make sure they know where to go and what support is available.
- Because concentration is often diminished following bereavement and pupils are often tired, disorganised and lack initiative, they may well need more of your help than usual. Monitor how things are going academically and socially, give praise for any achievements, and reassure pupil that things will improve in time. If necessary, organize ways to enable the pupil to catch up with work missed.
- Maintain normal rules and expectations of behaviour – but bear in mind the impact of bereavement on pupils and their families when considering sanctions. For example, punishing a pupil for forgetting to complete a task in the aftermath of a death would not be appropriate but handing out a punishment for lashing out at a peer might be. You could explain that whilst you understand that emotions may be running high at this time, it is still not acceptable to hurt others.
- If the pupil thinks it would be helpful and friends agree, establish a peer support network – ensuring that those helping are given appropriate support themselves.

- Make a note of significant dates which might affect the pupil, e.g. date of death, birthdays, Christmas, anniversaries. Make sure other members of staff are aware of these and the possible reactions from the pupil. Don't be afraid to acknowledge these potentially difficult times with the pupil – e.g. "I know Christmas is coming up and it might feel a very different and difficult time for you all this year without your Dad – so don't forget, if it helps to talk you can always come and see me".
- Consider possible reactions to certain class/assembly topics. Discuss how these difficulties might best be managed with the pupil e.g. if making Mothers/Father's Day cards do ask the pupil if they wish to be included in the activity too – very often the answer is yes as they still have a parent, just can no longer see them, but still want to remember them.
- Recognise a pupil's own resources and help them identify and build on their strengths.
- Look out for any indication of isolation, bullying or difficulties in the playground – bereaved children are often seen as vulnerable and may become a target for others.
- Consider using books/activities to help pupils explore feelings and ideas about death as part of the normal school curriculum (see book list and website addresses at end of pack).
- Be alert to changes in behaviour – these may be an indication that the pupil is more affected by their bereavement than they are able or willing to say. Reactions may present themselves months or years after the event, and it may be difficult for staff and other pupils to relate behaviours to the bereavement.
- Follow up absences – absence could indicate bereavement associated problems at home or school.
- At the end of the day, being yourself, listening, caring and keeping familiar routines and behaviour boundaries in place can do much to help a grieving pupil – they promote a sense of security and safety when other areas of their life may be in a state of chaos.

Helping a bereaved pupil return to school

It is not unusual for bereaved pupils to take time off school during the early stages of their bereavement. For some, the need to be with their families will be strong, and indeed they may suffer from separation anxiety when the time comes for a return to school. For others the familiarity, stability and routines of school life may prompt an early return. The time away from school will vary from pupil to pupil but when they do return, they may have a number of concerns – you will only know what these are and how they might be resolved if you ask. Some of the more common concerns might be:



How will staff and peers react– who has been told, what do they know, what will be said, how much will I have to say to people?

- You can help by: meeting with the pupil to welcome them back, acknowledge the death and talk through their concerns. Saying something simple like "I am sorry to hear that your dad died – sometimes it helps to talk about it and if so, Mrs Y will be there for you – will that be OK?" is usually much appreciated by the pupil. If possible, offer the pupil choices about how things should be handled in school and what support would be helpful. Let staff/classmates know how pupil wants to be received and supported.



Fear of sudden emotional outbursts – anger, distress, panic.

- You can help by: normalising grief reactions (See section on Children's reactions to bereavement) and giving the pupil choices about what strategies will help them to cope in the classroom e.g. able to leave lessons without fuss – "exit card" system, where they can go, who they can talk to.



Fear of being behind with work and unable to catch up

- You can help by: clarifying with other staff what is essential to accomplish and what can be left and offering appropriate help to achieve what needs to be done.

**Inability to concentrate and feel motivated or sit still**

- You can help by: Reassuring the pupil that this lack of motivation and concentration is normal and will pass. Offering shorter, more manageable tasks, giving encouragement for achievements and minimising difficulties often helps.

**Family grief impacting on normal family functioning – e.g. meals sporadic, routines disrupted, bedtimes chaotic, etc. which may mean that the pupil is inadequately prepared for school, does not have the necessary equipment, and may be tired or hungry.**

- You can help by: Checking out with the pupil where areas of difficulty lie and try and work out strategies with them and their family to help keep things on an even keel in school. Identify their strengths and help them build on them.

**Unable to meet homework/project deadlines because of altered responsibilities within the family and home.**

- You can help by: helping pupil work out and meet priorities. Be flexible where possible and offer additional support where needed.

**Forthcoming examinations.**

- You can help by: Explaining the process of notifying examination boards and the possible outcomes.

Supporting a pupil when a peer or member of staff dies

When the death of a pupil or member of staff occurs within a school community there is often a profound sense of shock - even if the death is expected. For this reason, it is important to have already thought through a plan of action as it is sometimes difficult to think clearly at a time of crisis. It is advisable that, with the consent of the family, accurate, factual information is shared with staff and pupils as soon as possible to avoid rumour or gossip circulating.

You may find the following guidance helpful when considering how to respond to the death of a pupil or member of staff in your school community. Please see Appendix four for tips on planning a memorial at home.

Step 1: Immediate Actions

- Identify the member of staff (usually the Headteacher) who will be the initial contact for the bereaved family.
- Initiate contact to offer the collective sympathy of the school and to ascertain details of what happened and what can be told to the rest of the school. Some families may not want all facts known, but it is important to point out that information gets around by other sources and can be more distressing in the long run if not accurate.
- Contact those staff and governors who need to be told immediately and then arrange a virtual meeting to inform all other members of staff. Don't forget to let ancillary/administrative staff know what has happened and any plans.
- Consider who else might be available for staff/pupil support e.g. school nurse, counsellor, E.P.
- Be aware of the impact on some staff for whom the news may have special significance e.g. activating memories of own losses, close relationship with the pupil or member of staff.
- Ensure staff are aware of what support is available to them and where possible arrange for class cover if staff unable to undertake their normal duties.
- Agree what information will be given to the rest of the school, by whom and in what manner. In larger schools, it can sometimes help to write a short statement for staff to read out to their classes to ensure consistency.
- Where possible, with the family's consent, a letter should be sent home explaining what has happened, what the pupils have been told and what support is available in school for those who need it.
- Send a virtual card or a phone call where IT is unavailable, on behalf of the school – this can be not only an expression of support for family but an acknowledgement of how much the person was valued.

Breaking news of the death to pupils and making an action plan

- This is often best done as soon as possible in class or tutor groups where the teacher knows the pupils and can explain and follow up what happened in the most sensitive way. If appropriate, students who remain on site could be gathered together (following social distancing measures) to demonstrate the sense of shared loss within the school community. During school closures, it is suggested that news is shared with parents initially and a follow up with students as considered appropriate.
- What happened should be told simply and factually – don't stray into conjecture. You should use clear, correct language and terminology, avoiding euphemisms such as "lost" and "passed away" which might confuse younger children. Example wording to share with parents or for school staff:

"I have got something very sad to tell you. You all know that (pupil) has been ill and has not been well enough to come to our community school much lately. As you know sometimes people do not get better, and sadly yesterday (pupil) died. He was at home with his parents. We have no more details at the moment but if we learn anymore that we think it would be helpful for you to know then I will tell you."

"I have something very sad to tell you. You may have heard about that Mrs/Mr Y was unwell and was taken to hospital. I am sorry to have to tell you that, although the doctors did all they could to help her/him, she/he was very ill and she died last night."

- Time should be allowed for pupils to ask questions and express feelings. Reactions will vary – all should be acknowledged, and pupils helped to understand grief is a normal response to loss.
- If you are back in school or for students who remain onsite, it is helpful if you can have someone else in the room with you to support you and those pupils particularly affected by the news. Acknowledge how the news has affected you if you wish to seek support. If school closures are still in effect, you may wish to consider how students can ask questions.

- Initially it may be necessary to waive timetable expectations for those pupils badly affected by the news – time to be together as a group with support, talking, remembering, making cards, creating memory books or boxes which could be added to over the coming days, may be most helpful for some – others will want the routine of school to continue. If possible, offer choice.
- Be aware of the impact on key friendship groups – these may span different classes.
- Let pupils know what support (people/places) will be available and how to access them.
- Begin to explore what can be done to support each other/the family of the person who died.
- Some schools find it helps to create a "memory board" on which staff and pupils can post messages and memories of the person who died – set up in a quiet area where people can reflect and remember- can be quite healing. The memories can be collected later and put in a book for the family if appropriate – perhaps at an assembly or memorial event.
- Arrange for staff/pupils who wish to, to visit or send cards, flowers, drawings etc. to the bereaved family - this will send a message of support to the family and also help pupils to express their emotions and feel they are doing something positive.
- Consider who should go to the funeral and how this should be organised. Consult with the family. For those who cannot attend and would like to, is it possible to mark the occasion in school or virtually in some way – e.g. light a candle, listen to music, share memories, silent reflection etc.
- This is a difficult time for pupils and staff alike, so having given support to the pupils it is important that the staff should feel supported too. It is often helpful for staff to be offered the opportunity to meet up at the end of the day, debrief and give and receive support from each other – tea and cake always helps. If people feel nurtured themselves, they are more able to nurture others. (See section on "Looking After Yourself").

Step 2: Ongoing actions

- Be prepared to go over the same information several times with pupils as bad news is sometimes hard to take in first time around. Ensure consistency of explanation among staff. Questions from pupils may continue long after the death occurred.
- Be aware of any changes in behaviour or attitude over time which may indicate that someone is more affected by the death than they may be able to say. Ask them what would help.
- Discuss with family/staff/pupils the development of a memorial if appropriate – this can be in the form of something practical like a bench or tree or can take the form of an annual fundraising event, cup or trophy reflecting the pupil or staff member's particular interest.
- Use books/activities to help pupils explore feelings and ideas about death (see list of books/website addresses at end of pack).
- Consider the need for a whole school assembly/memorial service (See section on "Holding an Assembly/Memorial Service").
- Remember to mark the anniversary of the death in some way, if appropriate.

Holding an assembly or memorial service (post pandemic)

Please see Appendix four for advice on planning a memorial at home.

Bringing a whole school or part of a school community together to remember someone who has died can often be a very helpful, healing activity. It can be an act of remembrance and/or celebration which affirms the life and contribution to the school of the person who died and is often most successful when it is a joint activity between staff and pupils. Sometimes it helps to hold an initial service to acknowledge what has happened and share feelings about the loss, and then later to organise a commemorative event to celebrate the life of the person who has died. It can also be an acknowledged time for any pupil to remember anyone they wish to who has died.

Who should attend?

- Basically, anyone in the school community who wishes to, and, although they may not feel able to attend, many families appreciate being invited – or at least being informed that an event is taking place.

Who should be involved?

- Very often the pupils themselves can come up with great ideas for celebrating or remembering the person who died – participating also gives them the feeling of doing something positive.

What to do?

- It might be best to hold the event before a break so that people have time to compose themselves before continuing the school day. This also means the day might end on a more "normal" note. If held at the end of the day, make sure people have time to compose themselves before going home. Whenever it is held make sure people know what support arrangements are available if needed
- Make sure you have a clear beginning, middle and end to the service and try and end on a positive note. You might wish to:

Light a candle

- Incorporate the person's favourite music/poetry/prose
- Ask the pupils to compose a piece of poetry or prose or music
- Make and display a collage of the person's work/life in the school
- Make a memory book/box of all the things people want to remember
- Suggest the class create a "jar of memories"
- Create a tribute or friendship tree – draw the outline of a tree and then offer people "leaves" on which to write their memories to be attached to the branches.
- Plant a tree/bulbs/shrub at the end of the event
- Ask for suggestions about a lasting memorial (if appropriate)
- Suggest staff/ pupils organise a fundraising event in memory of the person who died
 - Let people know how long the memory book will remain open - not everyone will be able to express their feelings immediately following a death but should be given time to make their responses
 - People's contributions can be displayed in school for a time and then offered to the family.

Supporting a bereaved child in nursery school

Very young children in a nursery setting who have experienced the death of a parent or someone constant in their lives will grieve for the loss of that person – but the grief may not be expressed in ways we might expect. The pre-school years are a time of huge developmental changes and as young children mature at different rates, their understanding and responses to death are likely to be based as much on their experiences of life as on their chronological age. You know the children in your care so will know how the following guidelines best relate to them (See also section on “Children’s understanding of death”). Please see Appendix five for advice on explaining death to young children. This can be shared with parents.

Children under 2 years

- Babies and very young children do not understand the concept of death
- However, they do respond to the loss of someone significant in their lives with whom they have formed an attachment
- This response may take the form of eating or sleeping disorders, crying, or emotional withdrawal. They may also search for the person who has died.
- Their responses will also be determined by the emotional state of other adults around them – if others are upset or detached then this will impact on the behaviour of the baby or young child.

Children aged 2 – 5 years

- Much of the above may also apply to this age group
- Children in this age group often think that death is reversible and that people who have died can come back
- They are concrete in their thinking so are easily confused by such terms as “losing Daddy” or “Grandma fell into a long sleep” – this may make them worry about being lost (and not found) or fear going to sleep – it is important to use the correct terminology “Daddy has died”
- They often repeat questions about the death in an attempt to make sense of the “story”
- They may temporarily lose skills previously mastered – e.g. toilet training

- They may be upset, withdrawn, angry, tired, grumpy, confused – but for short periods only. Young children are often said to “jump in and out of the puddles of grief” – before going back to playing and having fun.

How you can help (Post pandemic)

- Staff can do much simply by being their usual, caring selves and keeping nursery life as normal as possible. Consistency and normality provide a sense of safety and security for bereaved children when much of their lives outside the nursery may be in turmoil.
- Liaise with the family to ensure consistency of language about the death.
- Be tolerant of any regressive behaviours – giving encouragement to regain skills.
- Keep in contact with parents – if you know what is going on at home you will be better placed to offer appropriate support at the nursery. Be supportive of the bereaved adults in the child’s life.
- Answer children’s questions simply and honestly – let parents know if you have any concerns about what they are saying or believing. Be patient in repeating your responses.
- Let children talk about what has happened if they wish to – it is likely to be a short conversation before they go off to resume playing. You can help them by encouraging them if they want to talk about little things, they remember about the person who died.
- Playing, drawing and talking about what happened and exploring any worries or feelings will help children begin to integrate their loss into their lives – but this should happen as and when the children feel ready to do it. Stories about death can sometimes help children’s understanding.
- Look after yourself – caring for a bereaved child can be very stressful and often the close relationship which exists between parents and nursery staff can mean that the death of a parent can have a significant impact on you too.

Appendices

Looking after your well-being

The strain on staff of leading a school through a critical incident can be profoundly disturbing and may not be identified until after the crisis. Staff, both teaching and non-teaching, can often underestimate the impact on them and may not recognise that they are experiencing difficulty. The following tips are adapted from the Anna Freud Centre's booklet: Staff Well-Being:

- Supervision is a core element of health service practice but has been less widely developed in schools. Pastoral care teams and specialist staff working with bereaved pupils may have established methods of providing staff with supervision, but the idea of supervision may be unfamiliar for some teachers and school staff. There are many approaches to supervision. The word supervisor may give an impression of directing a staff member's work, however, most models of supervision also emphasise the supportive function of supervision as much as the directive function. One of the key benefits/aims of supervision is that it reduces the feeling of being alone in managing a problem. Isolation can cause a great deal of work stress if someone feels that they are carrying something on their own. For school staff who are dealing with stressful circumstances around the needs of children and young people, isolation can compound this feeling. In this way, regular, planned supervision can play a role in ensuring that staff have appropriate support.
- Knowing personal limits and having the ability to say 'no' when necessary. This helps you to have more balance in life and will enable you to take better care of others.
- Identifying supportive people that you have in your life. If you would like to increase your support networks, then you might consider taking up new hobbies or activities. You can also speak to a professional for more support.
- Talking. There are times when challenging situations affect us emotionally. If you have had a difficult day at school, try to speak to someone before you leave school as this can then help you to process how you are feeling, ask for support and separate your work and home life.
- Self-compassion. If you take some time to stop and reflect on the thoughts in your head, are they more positive or critical? Once you have identified any negative thought, you can begin to introduce more positive thoughts and 'turn the volume down' on the critical voices.
- A familiar resource to some of you: Psychology Tools created a workbook (Living with worry and anxiety amidst global uncertainty) for adults to help them manage anxiety during COVID19. It can be accessed here:
- www.psychologytools.com/assets/covid-19/guide_to_living_with_worry_and_anxiety_amidst_global_uncertainty_en-gb.pdf
- Seeking further support and signposting: some adults may need support from external professionals. Please see the section at the end for organisations.

Tips for planning a memorial at home

Adapted from Good Grief: Funerals in a pandemic

1. **ASK** others how they would like to contribute
 - Invite those who will be with you to write some remarks
 - Invite those who cannot be with you to email or send their thoughts which you can read aloud.
2. **CONSIDER** inviting someone to join you via Skype or Facetime.
3. **PREPARE** any children in the household. Honestly tell them:
 - a. What you will do
 - b. Why will you do it
 - c. What it means to be dead.
4. **PLAN** the ritual by identifying each part and who is responsible for what first.
5. **ASSEMBLE** videos or songs you want to play.
6. **SET-UP** the space where you will do the ritual and remove distractions.
7. **REMEMBER**, creating a funeral is not about it being perfect, but it is about the ritual being an authentic.

Checklist for planning a memorial at home

1. Identify anyone who will participate in the ritual. Will you use video to include others?
2. Create a playlist.
3. Identify 1-2 readings (poetry, excerpt from a book, sacred text).
4. Identify an activity. You can do this as a small group or by yourself.
5. Ask participants to reflect on words they want to share memories, words of gratitude, assign tasks to participants, gather objects and materials for your ritual e.g. candle, picture, supplies for any group or individual activities.
6. Create an order (program) for your ritual what comes first, second, and third etc.
7. Be kind to yourself. this is not about perfection.

Explaining Death to a Young Child by Margaret Harvey (Parent resource)

Children often receive mixed messages about death. Their friend says, "My granny's gone to heaven", they see dead leaves fall from the trees yet reappear afresh next spring, they watch the TV news and see bodies lying about the streets in war-torn areas of the world, a cartoon character jumps up again after being shot in the head. But what does any of this have to do with the cot death of a baby sister or the road accident that made a brother disappear?

It is confusing to be a small child at the best of times. In a family trying to cope with the death of a child, it must seem almost impossible – but we do need to think about the child's understanding of what death is. This implies that we ourselves do understand something which none of us has yet directly experienced for ourselves, so how do we start?

- We must be honest. We must not say anything, which the child will later find to be a lie, which would destroy trust. This does not mean, however, that we should overwhelm children with too much information. (the Goldilocks principle we should only answer the question they ask, not give them the information that we think they should have).
- We need to talk, as far as possible, at the child's level of understanding, to use words they already know and concepts we think they understand.

- We must accept that they will need lots of repetition; this can be almost unbearably painful, but it is necessary. You may have said that death is for always, but that will not stop the child saying at bedtime, "Will Sally come home tomorrow?" You need to reply, "No, Sally's dead, she can't come home." Young children are not always logical in our terms.
- We shouldn't feel that we have to protect them from the emotions, or the grief – weeping together, letting them see that it's OK to cry, will help them acknowledge their feelings. Children do know when adults are keeping secrets, shutting them out, and it makes them feel uneasy, afraid, uncertain – at a time when they desperately need to feel secure.
- We need to feel comfortable with what we say and also be able to say, "We don't know." It is difficult to make general statements because faith and religion are personal. Perhaps the key is to avoid pretence, not to use concepts of God and heaven as 'facts' if they have no meaning for you.
- Children will hear varied and contradictory stories about death. It is most helpful if you can accept whatever a child says, so that it can be talked about. It is reassuring for the child to hear "Yes, some people think that ...but we/I believe..."
- If we follow their lead and answer their questions it can help us avoid telling them too much at once.
- Using books can be a good way of saying things we find hard, and it is good for repetition of the key ideas. Books such as "Lifetimes" can give a broader focus: everything that lives have a beginning/birth and an end/death – that is their lifetime. The 'gentle' books (for example about the death of a pet) can be of great value because they make it possible for us to say "and that's what happened to Sally, isn't it? She has died too."

So, with these general principles in mind, what should we tell children about death?

Whatever the circumstances, the key fact is that the body has ceased to be of use, it is not alive, breathing or moving, it cannot be re-awakened. We can use images to help us explain this to a young child – it is like clothes no longer worn, the person has ceased to need them. It is important to establish this if the child is not to be frightened by the thought of the coffin, burial or cremation. If he thinks granny is in the coffin, he may be terrified that she is squashed, suffocating, that she will be hurt when she is cremated – children see things very literally, in terms of themselves.

If we say clearly that the body isn't the person any more, then we enter a more abstract and tenuous area – if granny still 'is', where is she? A very young child will probably ask this question, and this is perhaps one area where we need to be guided by their needs, and their understanding. If you are a practising member of a religion and all the family worship together, then the beliefs about life after death are already part of the child's active vocabulary, even if their understanding is limited by age. But perhaps we should not underestimate children's awareness, even if it is not put into words.

There are some hard questions, which children often think about and which may become areas of great anxiety, even if they do not verbalise them. It may be helpful to think about some of them – to be prepared:

What is it like to be dead?

It is true to say that no one knows exactly, because no one now alive has been dead! We do know that it does not hurt, that we don't feel cold or hungry (common child fears for the dead person) because 'we' are not there. You may believe, and share with your child, beliefs about heaven, God, reincarnation, an afterlife – these are matters of personal faith.

Are they asleep?

Children may wonder about this and it is important to be clear that death is not sleep. Sleep is rest, our bodies breathe, our hearts beat, we have dreams – death is not like that, the body has completely stopped working and cannot start up again. This is important, or the child may be afraid of going to sleep himself. Other phrases best avoided include "we've lost granny" (where? how? when? – giving confusing messages about getting lost in the supermarket!) and someone "being taken" (by whom? why?) – creating fears of "me next", where death is akin to the abductor on the news.

Why didn't the hospital/doctor make them better?

This is another area for reassurance. Usually people get a little bit ill and then they get better, just like a grazed knee when the skin 'mends'. Sometimes, usually when we are very old, our body gets so ill that it can't be made better, however hard the doctors try. Children whose brother or sister died in hospital need to be reassured that they were cared for, that no one 'let' them die.

Was it my fault?

Did I say something to make them die?

This too needs a clear response - it was not the child's fault, words don't kill people and death is never a punishment. Young children are not logical and often believe that they can 'wish' something to happen. This is an area hard for adults to understand, but one where unspoken fears can be real.

It's not fair – why was it him/her?

On one level, there is no answer to this, and we all feel this about a young life cut short, but as adults perhaps we can more readily accept that life is not fair. We should guard against implanting fears of God 'choosing' or 'taking' people, of saying that God 'wanted him/her for an angel' – this may give a grieving sibling a picture of a powerful being 'snatching' people in death, even wondering if it will be their turn next. It may be more helpful to say that we don't always understand why one person gets ill and dies and another doesn't.

Where have they gone?

Where are they now?

It is hard to explain abstractions to very young children. There are no 'answers' and you must be true to your own thoughts and beliefs. Slightly older children may be helped by analogies – we cannot 'see' lots of things (dreams, love, being happy or angry) but they are real. Memories keep the dead person alive in a new way – in our hearts and thoughts and conversation. And nothing takes away the pain of missing someone we love – that is real.

These are only some of the questions that may be in the mind of a child struggling to understand death within a bereaved loving family. Perhaps the most important thing in the end is not the words we use but the hugs, the cuddles, the tears we shed together, the silences while we both remember and mourn and then our acceptance that a young child will need to run off and play with friends, to kick a football or go out to tea – for that is part of being a child.

An Adolescent's grief and mourning (taken from SeeSaw Guidance)

"That's when he should have come home – we always expected him to come in the door, and of course, he never did. We were afraid to talk about him together for quite a while, as though we'd upset one another and that would make everything even worse. For a while I would pretend to myself that everything would be alright – that we didn't really see much of Dad when he was alive – he was always so busy with work, so we wouldn't really miss him that much. I used to pretend to myself that he was away on business. I kept going with that one for quite a while.

Then I got scared stiff because of course I really knew he was gone, and that he wouldn't be coming back, and that our lives were different now. I was scared with all the responsibility that seemed to be on my shoulders now. I didn't know how we'd be financially – if I'd be able to finish school, or I'd have to go out and get a job – but that turned out alright as he'd had a good insurance policy and we could manage. I was afraid of being different in any way – I'd always been a bit that way. I could remember the times I'd had a go at other kids – like Peter when his mum and dad split up – and I didn't want them having a go at me. Being without Dad, fatherless, like an orphan or something, seemed really bad.

When I realised that that was alright, and maybe our lives would still go on in some sort of way as a family, I started to let myself think about him. I used to miss him a lot at nights – that was the time we spent together. I used to long for him to come back, make things alright again, just as they were before – but as time went on, I was getting used to the way things were and accepting that he was gone. I used to be in bed at nights thinking about him, about fathers, about what he'd meant to me – I remembered the times we used to spend together, the great times we had. He was a pretty good father I thought.

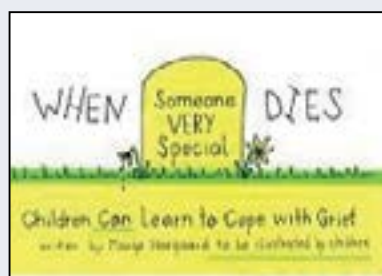
A lot of things went through my mind about the past as well as about the future. I could talk to mum about some of them, but not many really as she seemed to need to lean on me. That was what the family expected – they kept saying it was good I was the man now – how lucky it was that I'd grown up enough to help her. Sometimes it all seemed stuck inside. I felt really bad about the arguments I'd had with him – especially the bad blow up I'd had with him the week before he died.

I used to wonder if that sort of strain had made his blood pressure worse or affected his heart. I tried asking my biology teacher about it. He was a great guy and seemed to sense that there was something more in what I was asking, and he asked me about my Dad. Well, I felt a fool at first – there I was crying and telling him all – but he didn't seem to think there was anything wrong in that. He made me feel good about it – in fact I felt a lot better – like a burden had been lifted. I talked to him on and off after that and it was a great help. He made me feel that what I thought and felt about Dad was normal, and after a while I started to feel better. I still felt sad about Dad and we talked about him quite a lot at home. It was good to have a man like my teacher to lean on sometimes, but on the whole I felt I was getting over it all right and that there weren't too many problems. Life was going on.

Reading and resource list

If books are unavailable for delivery, YouTube offers readings of children's book on bereavement.

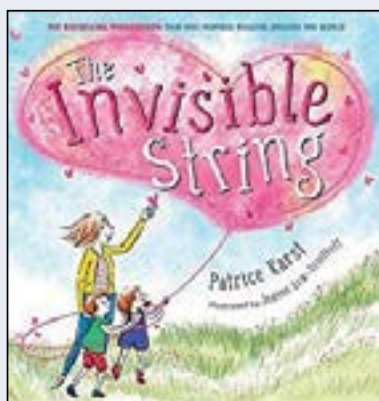
Primary school children



When Someone Very Special Dies: Children Can Learn to Cope with Grief (Drawing Out Feelings)

Marge Heegaard

A practical format for allowing children to understand the concept of death and develop coping skills for life, this book is designed for young readers to illustrate.

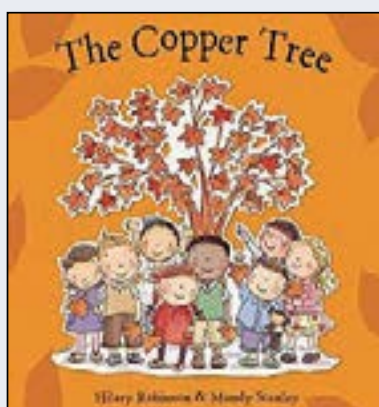


The Invisible String

Patrice Karst

Parents, educators, therapists, and social workers alike have declared *The Invisible String* the perfect tool for coping with all kinds of separation anxiety, loss, and grief. In this relatable and reassuring contemporary classic, a mother tells her two children that they're all connected by an invisible string.

If a staff member passes away



The Copper Tree

Hilary Robinson and Mandy Stanley

When Olivia's teacher dies, the children at her school are encouraged to think of everything that reminds them of her. Written with sensitivity and sprinkled with light hearted moments, *The Copper Tree* approaches grief with sensitivity and sound judgement. A delightful and touching short story.

Books to support staff supporting children

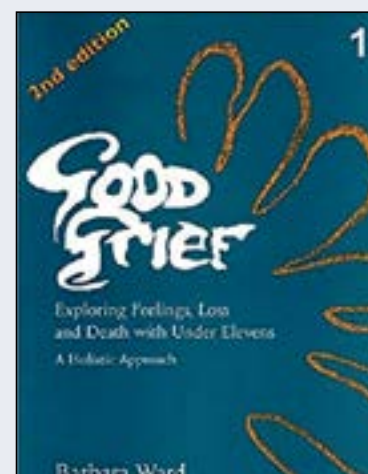


As big as it gets

Julie A. Stokes

- www.winstonswish.org.uk

Supporting a child when a parent is seriously ill. This booklet provides a range of ideas for parents and carers so that they feel able to involve their children in what is happening. The book also includes some suggestions about what parents might say to children and how to offer support.

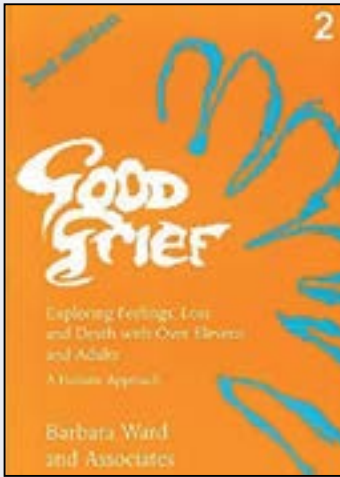


Good Grief 1: Exploring Feelings, Loss and Death with Under 11s: 2nd Edition

Ward & Associates

With twenty educators contributing ideas piloted with children of different abilities and backgrounds in their care. To explore and demystify the experience of loss within the framework of the National Curriculum.

Secondary school young people



Good Grief 2: Exploring Feelings, Loss and Death with Over Elevens and Adults: 2nd Edition

Ward & Associates

With twenty educators contributing ideas piloted with children of different abilities and backgrounds in their care, Good Grief has been designed to explore and demystify the experience of loss in different contexts within the framework of the National Curriculum. This second edition has been updated and revised, to include a new chapter on the effects of disasters on children. Suitable for all professionals, carers and parents, both books are activity based. Good Grief 1 facilitates the use of children's own experiences and encouraging improvisation and extension. Primarily designed for mixed ability secondary and adult education, Good Grief 2 will also be invaluable for many other statutory, professional and community organisations.

Child Bereavement UK

Young People sharing their experiences.

- www.childbereavementuk.org/young-peoples-experiences

Parenting



Helping Your Child with Loss, Change and Trauma: A self- help guide for parents

David Trickey (2020)
Available on Kindle.

Parenting a bereaved child, Child Bereavement, UK

- www.youtube.com/watch?v=uw1MZIKLKI4

Parent advice, Young Minds

- <https://youngminds.org>
- Choose links:
Home / Find Help / For Parents / Parents guide to support A-Z / Parents Guide To Support - Grief and Loss.

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

National Autistic Society

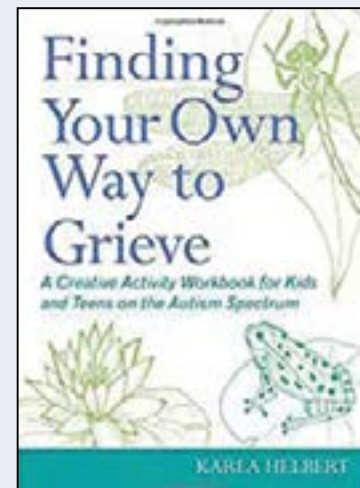
Provide guidance and suggested readings/resources

- www.autism.org.uk/about/family-life/bereavement.aspx

Child Bereavement, UK

Provide guidance and suggested readings/resources

- www.childbereavementuk.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=e99e1f53-01c0-4112-bfa4-e2a58dfb4e24



Finding your own way to Grieve

Karla Helbery

A Creative Activity Workbook for Kids and Teens on the Autism Spectrum

