

Supporting Children and Young People with Loss, Change and Bereavement

These are very unusual and uncertain times for everyone. Not only are we all having to adjust and cope with changes in our lives, but many of us are also having to deal with health anxieties in relation to ourselves or those we are close to. Additionally, some of us are experiencing the loss of close family members and friends. This document provides an overview of key information and recommended resources to help you support your children with loss, change and bereavement. Grief is unique to each person and every family, so adapt these suggestions as needed.

Key information to help you to support your child

1. **How to talk about loss and bereavement**
2. **Responses to loss and bereavement**
3. **What you can do to help**
4. **Taking care of yourself**
5. **Where to find additional information or support**

1. How to talk about loss and bereavement



- Do not avoid the subject with your child, it is important to talk about loss and death
- Keep your language simple. Do not use words like 'passed away' or 'went to sleep' as children can take this literally and may think these things could happen to them. It is best to use the words 'dead' or 'death'. Young children may need to have this explained further
- Be honest and open with your child. Take into account their age and understanding, telling them basic facts and responding to the questions they will have
- Many young children are likely to repeat questions and all children will need time, support and patience to help them to process and understand the situation
- Children often need reassurance that the death was not their fault and that it will not happen to them or someone who is caring for them

Books can be a very helpful way of supporting children to understand death and loss. Here is a selection of books which have been reviewed positively.

When Someone Has a Very Serious Illness by Marge Eaton Haagaard	The Invisible String by Patrice Karst & Joanne Lew-Vriethoff	Badger's Parting Gifts by Susan Varley	As Big as it Gets – Supporting a Child When Someone is Seriously Ill – Winston's Wish	Out of The Blue by Julie Stokes & Paul Oxley (A book for teenagers)

Winston's Wish has a list of specialist books and resources - <https://www.winstonswish.org/supporting-you/publications-resources/>

For further information on telling children that someone has died go to <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/telling-a-child-that-someone-has-died>

2. Responses to Loss and bereavement



Everyone responds to loss and bereavement in different ways, however, children and young people's reactions are also likely to be affected by their age and relationship with the person whom they have lost. It is important to realise that children experience the same range of emotions as adults but may express these in different ways. Younger children may get upset for short bursts and then appear to completely forget about the situation. Adolescents can experience very strong emotions which can be frightening and upsetting for them. The table below shows some of the different types of emotional and physical responses to loss which may be seen at different ages.

Age or Stage	Babies 	Toddlers and Pre-School 	Primary 	Secondary 
Emotional and Physical Responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinginess • Crying more • Jumpy • Anxious • Poor feeding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinginess • Crying more • More tantrums • Withdrawn • Loss of bladder control • Change in sleeping and eating patterns • Regressed behaviour e.g. wanting a bottle <p>For toddlers and young children death is usually seen as temporary and reversible</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinginess • Upset, crying • Irritability, defiance or disobedience • Anxious • Bad dreams • Blaming themselves • Unsettled, difficulty concentrating • Forgetfulness • Changes in eating and sleeping • Toileting or bedwetting issues • Sore tummies or headaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxious and fearful for family, friends and themselves • Strong emotional reactions such as shock, anger, guilt or sense of rejection • Sense of shame or embarrassment • Trying to please adults • Hiding feelings • Spending a lot of time thinking about and talking about the death • Feeling isolated and withdrawing • Saying or acting like they don't care • Risk taking behaviour to escape or cope • Headaches or physical pains

For further information on supporting children with additional support needs, go to: -

<https://www.winstonswish.org/supporting-children-with-send/>

For further information on children's responses to grief, and how to offer support go to: - <https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help-for-parents/children-and-young-peoples-emotional-responses>

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**Changes in behaviour and mood are normal responses to loss and bereavement.
Grief is exhausting for children as well as adults**

3. What you can do to help



Children need ongoing comfort, attention and reassurance. They can experience grief at different times and in different ways as they process their loss, experience new situations and grow and develop.

- Accept their feelings; it is OK to be sad, angry, fearful, upset or simply feeling OK and getting on with things



- Help children to recognise and name the feelings they have - it is normal to have a variety of responses
- Talk to children about their feelings and help them to identify helpful ways they can manage the feelings
- It is OK and helpful for children to see that adults have feelings, and coping strategies, too
- Prepare your child for the changes they will face
- Where appropriate involve your child in decisions that may affect them
- Let your child know that whilst they may be struggling with feelings just now, and will always miss a loved one, that they will not always feel so bad

Ideas to help children process loss and bereavement

- Create a memory box with a child or together as a household. Gathering photographs, mementos or special items can help everyone to share memories
- Make a record of special memories or photographs, this could be done online
- Keep written memories in a special box or jar, which can be added to or looked at, at any time

For further ideas on how to support children to say goodbye when a funeral or gathering of family or friends is not possible - <https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus-funerals-alternative-goodbyes/>

It may be helpful to let your child's school know of the situation so that they can offer support for your child during lockdown and in the transition back to school. Many schools offer the 'Seasons for Growth' programme which supports children with change, loss and bereavement.

Spend quality time with your child and reassure them of your love and support

4. Taking Care of Yourself



It is important to take care of yourself in order to best support your children. Your children will pick up on how you are feeling and how you are coping with the situation. It is OK to show children how you are feeling and also the things you are doing to manage the situation for yourself and others.

- Take time to talk with family or friends about the situation and how you are feeling
- Try to get plenty of sleep, eat healthily and stay active
- Make extra time to relax and do things which you enjoy, and which may take your mind off upsetting thoughts or worries
- Manage your own expectations in terms of things you can do; remember that loss and bereavement is emotionally and physically exhausting for adults as well as children
- If you are struggling to cope or are having negative thoughts, find a trusted relative or friend to talk to or seek additional support

5. Additional Information and Support



Childhood Bereavement UK

Guidance and short films offer support, including talking to children about Coronavirus

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>

Helpline 0800 02 888 40 (Monday-Friday 9am-5pm)

Email for bereavement support: support@childbereavementuk.org

Richmond's Hope

Provide a range of services for children, young people and families in Edinburgh

<https://www.richmondshope.org.uk/>

Phone: 0131 661 6818

Email: info@richmondshope.org.uk

Winston's Wish

<https://www.winstonswish.org/>

Freephone National Helpline 08088 020 021 (Monday-Friday 9am-5pm)

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/>

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>

On how to support yourself and others during Covid-19 - <https://www.bps.org.uk/coronavirus-resources/public/coping-death-and-grief>

If you are a City of Edinburgh parent or a member of staff, and require further support, please contact: Educational Psychology Services - Monday to Friday (9am to 5pm). Call 0131 469 2800 and leave a message including your name, number and child's school. Alternatively email Educational Psychology at psychologicalservices@ea.edin.sch.uk