

Grief and Bereavement

The purpose of this leaflet is to provide you with an overview

- **Key points about loss**
- **Stages of Grief**
- **Some tips when considering how to support your child**
- **Getting further help**
- **Some frequent questions/answers that you may have**

Key points about loss:

Loss happens all the time.

Loss happens to us all.

Some losses matter more to us than others.

If someone close to us dies we have strong feelings which can take us by surprise.

Acceptance and understanding of our own feelings can help us to support others.

Adults need to be sensitive to the children's distress signals and communicate openly with them about their traumatic experiences.

Stages of Grief

Research indicates that most people who experiences loss show various reactions to it, moving from one stage to another as illustrated below. The ultimate stage ideally consists of adaptation and adjustment to the change caused by loss.

STAGES	HOW YOUNG CHILDREN MIGHT REACT	HOW TEENAGERS OR ADULTS MIGHT REACT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbness • Shock • Disbelief • Dizziness • Oblivious to the world • Drained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May feel left out • May be confused • Death / loss may not have 'sunk-in' • Adults may not be available to them... • Feelings of rejection – 'who cares for me?' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Busy with practical matters – funeral etc • Distressed • Coping with the immediate task • Lonely
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yearning for the lost person • Protest (rage, anger, resentment) • Anxiety • Restlessness • Loss of confidence • Silences • Guilt • Denial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Want lost / dead person back • Possible behaviour change – temper tantrums, withdrawal, bed-wetting etc • May stop talking • May regress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longing for lost / dead person • May ignore those who are still alive • Possible behaviour changes • Passivity • Reject help and support • Find it difficult to share feelings • Suppressed anger • Being over-active or withdrawn, always tired • Lack of interest – everything is 'boring' • Lack of appetite <p>Aggression</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resolution • Coming to terms with the loss • Adaptation to the new life situation <p><i>• If issues appear to be unresolved, consider seeking support from professionals</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carries on with life • Able to share feelings • Can play constructively • Able to make friends • Able to relate to adults <p><i>• Remember, the vulnerable times: anniversaries, important festivals, seasons and traditions</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge and live with the void • Carry on with everyday life • Open to new ideas • Engage in new relationships <p><i>• Remember, the vulnerable times: anniversaries, important festivals, seasons and traditions</i></p>

Some tips when considering how to support your child

Talking with children about their fears and anxieties

When talking to a child and whether giving tragic news or discussing an incident, do so in a safe and familiar environment.

Use factual language which is easily understood and establish that the children have understood the news. Give the children opportunities and time to ask questions and express their feelings. Respect their confidentiality.

Do:

- Provide reassurance and extra emotional support.
- Show that you understand.
- Use understandable language.
- Be honest and give factual information. Repeat this if necessary.
- Return to or maintain normal routines.
- Explain that everybody (including you) struggles with anxieties and fears. Cope with anxieties at a pace comfortable for the children.

Do not:

- Expect the anxieties or fears to disappear quickly.
- Embarrass the children because of their thoughts.

Make overcoming children's anxieties and fears a condition of your support and acceptance.

Remember... fears and anxieties are an integral part of the normal developmental process.

Further Support

If you need further help or you may have more questions here are some charities who are specialised in supporting children who have experienced bereavement.

Daisy Dreams <https://www.daisysdream.org.uk/>

Winston's Wish <https://www.winstonswish.org/>

Child Bereavement UK <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>

Samaritans <https://www.samaritans.org/>

Speak to school if you feel your child may need counselling or other help.

Frequently Asked questions

How can I help if I have not suffered bereavement myself?

Although you may not have suffered bereavement, you will almost certainly have been through changes in your life, some of which will have been painful (for example, changing jobs, moving to a new area, relationship breakdown, and so on). So remember that you know about loss and are able to share an understanding of loss.

What do I say? What if I am lost for words?

You do not have to say anything, but be prepared to listen sympathetically. Your presence may be enough. Often non-verbal communication is as important as words.

What if I say the wrong thing?

It is good that you are sensitive to the needs of others. There are no right or wrong things to say, but acknowledging pain is always appropriate.

What do I do if the child cries?

Whatever feels right for you and the situation – a handkerchief, an arm around the shoulder, a quiet word.

What if I break down in front of the bereaved person?

This can happen. It may be quite helpful. If you cannot stop crying, that can be okay too, but you may need to withdraw gently. Perhaps later you will be able to talk to the child about your reaction.

What are the normal reactions to death?

That may depend on many things, such as the circumstances of the death (e.g. expected / unexpected, disaster/ accidental), cultural or religious beliefs, age, etc. There are recognised stages in the grieving process, and people's reactions develop as time goes on (see page 2).

What skills do I need to deal with death as a parent/carer?

You may already have many of the skills – e.g. being a good listener, being non-judgmental, knowing people might react differently, accepting people as they are, doing what you feel comfortable with.

What if I really can't cope?

If you feel you cannot cope, don't panic and do not feel that you have failed. Consider who would be able to provide help and ask them for their support. A death may raise other issues for you as an individual and for others. Do not be afraid to ask for help.