

Supporting a Bereaved Child



What Is Grief?

After a bereavement (the loss of a loved one), the range of emotions a person goes through is called 'grief'. Just like an adult, a child also goes through the stages of grief, which can be unpredictable, challenging and upsetting. This leaflet aims to explore ways in which you can support a bereaved child.



How Can You Help?

Firstly, ensure you reassure the child that their feelings and emotions can, and should, be felt and expressed. Remind them that you are there to support them with these feelings and emotions.

Remind them that the loss is not their fault. Children can often blame themselves for a loss and will attribute blame to themselves through something they did (or did not) do, or something they did (or did not) say, and will believe their impact caused the person to die. Make sure you remind them that the loss was not their fault and they are in no way to blame for it.

Recognise that they are grieving, even if they are behaving as if life is totally normal for them. This is often a child's way of coping with intense emotions or when the emotion feels too challenging to handle.

Ensure they understand that being upset is normal and OK. A child who is constantly surrounded by adults who are 'strong' and do not show emotions, begins to learn and believe that this is what they should be doing as well. The more open you can be with your own emotions, the more a child will realise that their emotions can be safely explored and they will be supported.

Winston's Wish

www.winstonswish.org

0808 802 0021

Cruse Bereavement Care

www.cruse.org.uk

0808 808 1677

Child Bereavement UK

www.childbereavementuk.org

0800 028 8840

Childline

www.childline.org.uk

0800 1111

Hope Again

www.hopeagain.org.uk

0808 808 1677

Samaritans

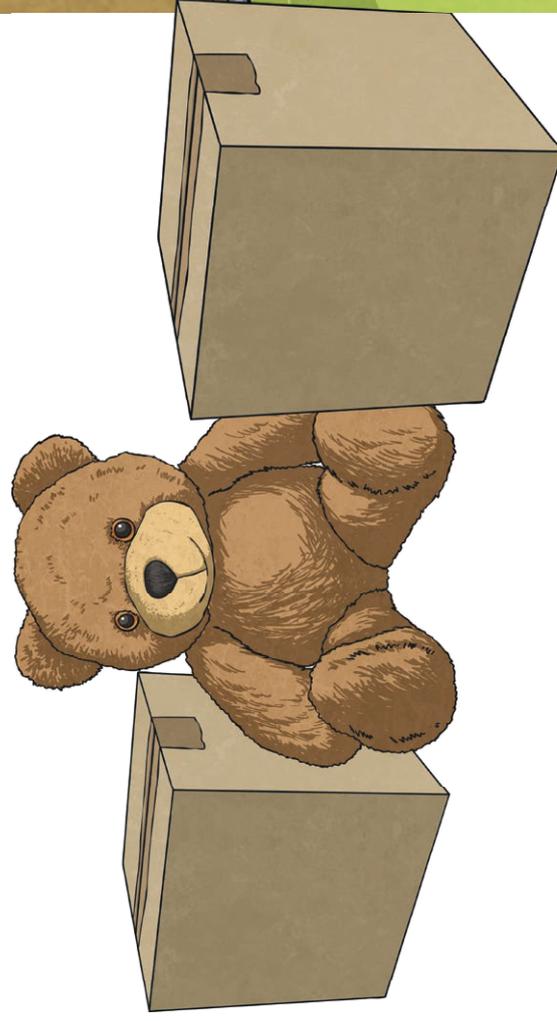
www.samaritans.org

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Mind

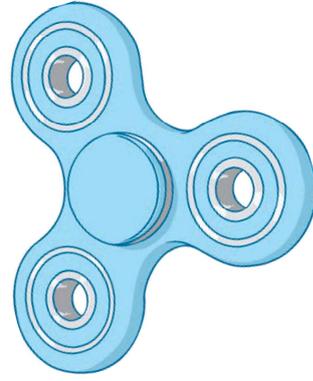
www.mind.org.uk

0300 123 3393



In school, children crave the normality provided by the people and routines associated with school. They seek comfort in the standardised expectations that are held for them and will be reassured by this and the stability it brings to their life (which will feel far from stable while they are grieving). If they have a challenging moment or day during their grieving process, you, as their teacher, can provide the calm boundaries that they so desperately want and need. You can remain detached from their emotions, yet be a rock of support and consistency by being there for them. You may well feel like you cannot or do not help, yet by just being you and by just being there, you are doing what they need you to do. Remind the child that you are there for them, no matter what they say or do. Your caring and nurturing environment will make them feel valued and safe.

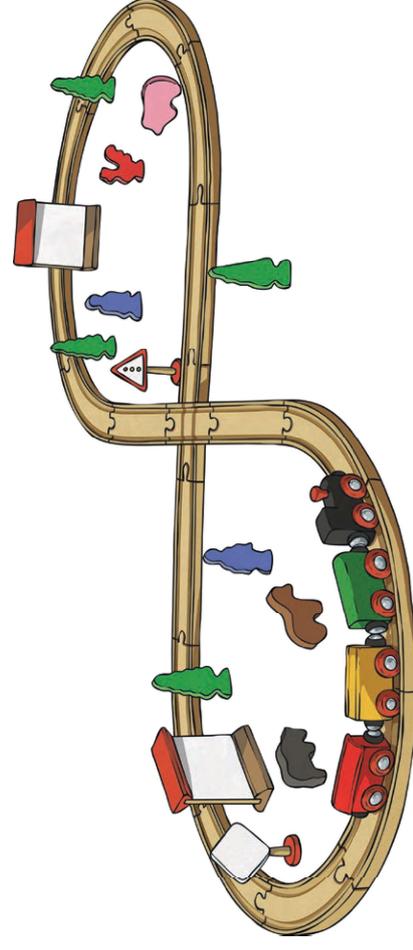
A child who is grieving may wish to talk a lot about the person they have lost and they may ask questions around the person's death or dying in general. If you ever feel uncertain as to how to reply, do not feel the need to rush an answer. Explain to the child that you want to give them the best answer you can and to do that you want to ask for further advice or ask someone who is more specialised in the area. Make sure you do get back to them but never feel rushed to give an answer which you may doubt afterwards.



Encourage opportunities of fun. Children often process their emotions through play and the play process eases feelings of anxiety and stress. The more active and playful a child is enabled to be, the greater the opportunity for them to express their grief through this form.

Provide stability and routine. The more 'normal' a day a grieving child can experience, the more they will feel a sense of safety and stability within the routine. Children can often worry that an adult dying could mean another adult in their life will die. Routine and transparent plans can ease a child's anxiety over this and provide them with a sense of stability.

A grieving child may well regress to younger behaviours or emotional stages while working through their grief. This is entirely normal and reassuring them of this is important.



Give them opportunities to talk through their feelings and worries. Particular or significant dates or situations may trigger sudden emotions, feelings or worries. Encouraging them to talk and open up (this may be through playing, music or art, for example) can support them to work through these fears and feelings.

Remember that grief goes through many phases and is never 'finished'. Life will constantly serve reminders to the child of their loss and significant events in childhood will only exaggerate these feelings and emotions. Be ready to be there and perhaps create a memory book or box to support the child with these feelings at these times. Children gain a sense of stability from routine and predictability.

While depression is a normal, and important, stage of grief, it is also important to keep a close eye on low moods and ensure that if depression has lasted a long time, it is discussed with a qualified professional, e.g. a GP.

Make sure you have your own support network. Supporting a child through loss and grief can take its toll on your own emotional resilience. It is important to ensure you have your own strong support network who are aware that you are supporting a child who is grieving. Ensure that there are other adults who will also be able to support you and/or the child, as it is important you do not feel alone in being the child's support.

Schools can help to support a child's bereavement by encouraging open conversations around dying. The safe discussions within schools can support future grieving scenarios as the children know they can open up about the experience as the school will provide support and stability. Specific situations surrounding either violent deaths or suicide will need professional support and additional school support for the grieving child.

