

Bereavement Guidance for Children aged 0-19 years

Guidance for Bereavement with families 0-5

Our role: It is important for the service to be aware of up to date national and local resources to support families. The following information is for awareness and to ensure service users are promptly referred to professional support as detailed in the signposting options below. Our service can offer advice around health problems linked to bereavement, including behaviour management, sleep problems, eating difficulties, and mental health concerns.

The following information provides guidance using resources from Child Bereavement UK <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/information-supporting-bereaved-children-under-5> and Simon Says <https://www.simonsays.org.uk>

Parents and Younger Children aged 0-5	
How they might feel	How you can help
<p>Long before they can talk, babies are likely to react to the grief of the main caregiver and the changes in their environment as a result of a death. At this age, a child will have no understanding of what death and dying means, but they will sense that someone important is missing. The resultant feeling of abandonment may create more than usual clingy behaviour. With little or no language to express themselves, their anxiety and insecurity may show themselves with inconsolable crying. Feeding and sleeping routines may also be disrupted.</p>	<p>Respond to their needs by providing cuddles, close contact, and reassurance.</p> <p>Consider the senses such as smell for very young children. Providing a soft toy with the smell of the person who has died may be comforting and will create a memory that they can cherish throughout their childhood. This might include pieces of fabric from clothing, perfumes or by using a voice recording of the person who has died.</p>
<p>Before they are a year old, children are beginning to understand the permanence of objects and people. If a main caregiver dies, the child will search for that person, expecting them to return. When that person does not appear, the child is likely to protest with behaviour such as crying. Searching behaviour is a common response in very young children</p> <p>Even very young children need information, using words suitable for their age so that they can start to make some sense of what has happened. Without this, they may go through life minus an explicit memory of the</p>	<p>When someone dies, adults often, with the best of intentions, do not tell children the truth, assuming that under 5s are too young to understand. Sometimes people feel that they don't want to talk about death in case they are "robbing" them of their innocence and their childhood.</p> <p>Do not be afraid to use the word 'dead.' It may feel harsh but using words such as 'lost' or 'gone away' only create confusion and misunderstanding in young children who take what they hear very much at face value.</p> <p>As with older children, the explanation may need to be repeated many times, but for this age group even more</p>

<p>death, but with a strong sense of a significant loss from which they have been excluded</p>	<p>so. We have included a list of books suitable to use with a toddler. These can be used as a starting point to talk about what we do and how we might feel when someone dies.</p> <p>Give children the space and time to express their feelings. This might be by using messy play, drawing, colouring and writing.</p>
<p>Becoming aware that someone is missing creates fear in a young child.</p>	<p>Try to give lots of physical reassurance with hugs and touch. Babies may need to be in almost constant physical contact with a trusted carer and will cry as soon as put down. Some children will need to remain physically close to an adult they know and maybe extra clingy</p> <p>Toddlers can sometimes be comforted by an object such as a blanket or jumper which has a familiar smell. Leaving a photograph or something of yours to 'look after' can also help. When you do have to leave them, it will help if you explain where you are going. Always say when you are returning with a time the child can relate to.</p> <p>Something to look forward to might help: like reading a story. A timeline of what to expect can be helpful.</p>
<p>Tantrums and Anger</p> <p>All children tend to express themselves through behaviours rather than words and this is the case with the under 5s. Frustration at a lack of words to express thoughts and feelings may come out as destructive behaviour. There will be times when they are completely overwhelmed by powerful feelings and may need to express them in a very physical way.</p>	<p>Try to accept that this behaviour is what the child needs to do rather than what they want to do They are allowed to be angry, but not to hurt themselves or others, so help them to find safe ways to do this by expressing themselves through activities and encouraging them to focus on how they are feeling and trying to express that in a healthy manner.</p> <p>Maintaining your usual boundaries around acceptable behaviour will give security to a grieving toddler whose world has been turned upside down.</p> <p>It is ok to say no if behaviour is becoming overwhelming for the child or difficult for other members of the family.</p>
<p>Sleep disturbance</p> <p>When grieving, it is common for very young children and babies to cry more than usual at bedtime and to need reassurance on waking through the night. At bedtime, they may not want to be left alone or may become anxious about the dark. Climbing into a parent's bed at night may be a sign that they are having frightening dreams or are just generally fearful.</p>	<p>Try to keep to the usual bedtime routines, but recognise they may need someone to stay with them until asleep. The need for this extra reassurance at bedtime should reduce once they become less anxious and their confidence returns. Sometimes using a dream-catcher or something similar might help a child to control night fears. It is important to be clear that sleep doesn't mean dying as sometimes people use the words that someone has "gone to sleep" or "didn't wake up" and this can create fear in children.</p> <p>This brings us back to remembering that using the words, death, dying and dead is ok.</p>
<p>Withdrawal and being subdued</p> <p>After a death, there is often a lot of coming and going at home and some young children can find it all overwhelming. Sometimes they react by retreating into themselves. They may lose interest in toys and people previously enjoyed.</p>	<p>Allow them to 'just be' rather than cajoling them to cheer up. They probably will engage when ready to do so.</p>

Books that may be helpful for young children under 5

Honey Bear Died by Jennifer E Melvin

Always and Forever by Debi Gliori and Alan Burant

Goodbye Mousie by Robie H Harris

The Elephant in the room by Amanda Edwards and Leslie Ponciano

How do people with Autism grieve and how to help by Deborah Lipsky

Missing Mummy by Rebecca Cobb

We Were Gonna Have a Baby But We Had An Angel Instead by Pat Schwiebert

Remembering Lucy by Sarah Helton

Is Daddy Coming Back in A Minute by Elke & Alex Barber

Fred by Posy Simmonds

The Sunshine Cat by Miriam Moss

Are you sad Little Bear by Rachel Rivett

Guidance for Bereavement in Children aged 5-19

Our role: It is important for the service to be aware of up to date national and local resources to support a service user. For a school-aged child, it may be necessary to liaise with the child's school to signpost to agencies who can provide this specialist support. The following information is for awareness only, should emotional health support reveal this additional need. As a service, we should ensure service users are promptly referred to professional support as detailed in the signposting options below. Our service can offer advice around health problems linked to bereavement, including behaviour management, sleep problems, eating difficulties, and mental health concerns.

Younger Children aged 5 - 11	
How they might feel	How you can help
Young children may go from being happy one moment to distressed the next and may talk randomly about the death in otherwise normal conversations	This is known as "Puddle-jumping". Give the child the opportunity to talk and make sure they know that they can talk about their loved one. You do not need to say anything, just listening and reassurance can be enough.
Young children may be reluctant to talk about their bereavement and lack the emotional literacy to communicate their emotions	Young children may find it easier to draw how they feel. Ask them to tell you what their picture means and try not to interpret it yourself.
Bereavement and death is a very hard subject to talk about, for you and your child	Honesty is always the best policy in bereavement. Children are very imaginative and may use their imagination if they do not have the whole truth, leading to much scarier thoughts than what has happened/is happening
By age 7 years, children understand that we will all die eventually, and it is	You can explain death and dying by looking at nature, such as the life cycle of a plant through the seasons
Children may feel isolated around bereavement	There is a wide range of child-friendly storybooks about death that you can read to your child so that they do not feel alone

Young People aged 12 – 19	
How they might feel	How you can help
It is common for young people to lack the emotional literacy they need to express their emotions, as well as being reluctant to talk about their bereavement	Give the young person the opportunity to write their feelings. They may like to keep a diary and give them the choice when it comes to sharing as they may want to keep this private.
Young people may ask questions about death and the death process	Honesty is the best policy. Giving them the facts allows them to process this and move forward at a much quicker pace than if the truth is sugar-coated

Behavioural changes during bereavement are normal, and young people may express their emotions by rebelling and having emotional outbursts	It may be a good time to get the young person involved in a hobby. Give them time and a safe place to express themselves, and be patient while they figure out how they're feeling
Young people are likely to have a strong sense of self and question their cultural and religious beliefs during bereavement	Are there any events coming up that can be used to remember the loved one? Including mother's day, birthdays, religious calendar days?
It is not uncommon for young people to feel prolonged periods of feeling one emotion, such as anger or guilt. They also worry about practicalities such as finances	This is another opportunity for them to write their feelings down or any questions they have. Ask them if they are worried about anything and offer them reassurance

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Other Useful Tips	
Children and young people are likely to have questions around death, such as "What happens after they die?"	It's important to turn the question back to them and ask what they think. This provides an opportunity to discuss their beliefs and ideas, and to offer reassurance where there are misconceptions that are troubling them
Naturally, we want to protect our children from harm, including emotional pain. When talking about death, we tend to "sugar coat". An example of this is describing death as "going to sleep", which may make them afraid of sleeping	It's not that you can't approach the subject sensitively, but think about what the words you're using mean to them - It's okay to use words like "dying", "death" and "died"
After a loved one has died, all we have left is our memories of them. Memories can be photographs, possessions, smells, music, or even small items like receipts from a day out	A popular activity for bereaved children is to create a memory box. Adults can help by decorating, giving the child things to add, or even writing down stories of the loved one for the child to read in the future.
Grief is a long process, and you may wish to seek continuing support or access it in the future. Early intervention is key to preventing future health problems	Useful bereavement charities: Simon Says, Child Bereavement UK or Hope Again. Alternatively, you can contact the school nursing team for more information around support and recommended reading

Signposting resources include

Hampshire Healthy Families: <https://www.hampshirehealthyfamilies.org.uk/bereavement-resources>

CAMHS: <https://hampshirecamhs.uk/issue/bereavement-loss>

Simon Says: <https://www.simonsays.org.uk/>

Hope again: <https://hopeagain.org.uk>

Child bereavement: <https://childbereavementuk.org>

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

Cruse: <https://cruse.org.uk>

Young Minds: <https://youngminds.org.uk>

The Good Grief Trust <https://www.thegoodgrieftrust.org/>

Havant –

<https://www.rowanshospice.co.uk/care/meerkats/>

Southampton -

<https://thefirgrovecentre.org.uk/> for people over the age of 18 seeking help with the impact of miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death, unintended pregnancy, loss to adoption or issues surrounding a termination

