



Bereavement Pack

Conwy County Borough Council



Developed by Conwy Educational Psychology Service and School Based Counselling Service

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What Is Bereavement and Grief

Bereavement is what we experience when someone important to us dies. When this happens, we go through a process known as 'grief' experiencing a range of emotions over time. The experience of bereavement and grief is different for everyone and there is no right or wrong way to feel. We might experience grief over the death of a family member, a friend, a teacher or a pet.

We can sometimes have feelings of grief about other things like;

- Moving schools
- Changes to family life
- When someone we know becomes ill
- Changes to our usual way of life

We will experience feelings of grief about all of these things.”

Adapted from Mind (2020) <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/bereavement/about-bereavement/>

This is a pack of resources to support children and their families who may be experiencing bereavement and grief.

Supporting Children through Loss

Children and Young People will find experiencing bereavement and grief extremely difficult. Their lives have changed and they will be experiencing a lot of different feelings and thinking about their future. They may display changes in their behaviour and mood. Here are some things you can do to support them.

Listen – Listen to what your child has to say and validate how they might be feeling. It's okay for them to feel worried, angry or scared. Sometimes children may need a silent supportive space that gives them the opportunity to sit with their feelings. As long as they know you are there to listen it is ok to sit with your child in silence until they feel ready to talk.

Talk to children honestly – Talk to them about facts and emotions. Consider their age and level of understanding. Discussing the situation will be an ongoing conversation.

Be reassuring – Give children clear and accurate information about what has happened and what may happen next e.g. funeral arrangements. Acknowledge how they are feeling and encourage them to talk about their thoughts and feelings.

Don't make promises – Reassure them that they are loved and supported. Try not to make promises (e.g. Granny will be fine). Be open and honest. It's okay to tell them you don't know the answers to some of the questions they might have.

Keep to a Routine – This can help bring some structure when normal life feels disrupted. Try to have regular mealtimes, school work, breaks, playtime and bedtime.

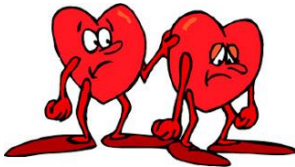
Don't be hard on yourself! – give yourself a break and try not to set unrealistic goals. Give children choices so that they can decide what they are doing as this will help them feel a sense of control over their lives.

Adapted from Young Minds

Factors Affecting Grief



Cause of death



Your child's age



The nature of the death



Religion or Culture

Adapted from Robert Kempson (2019) ELSA

Developed by Conwy Educational Psychology Serv

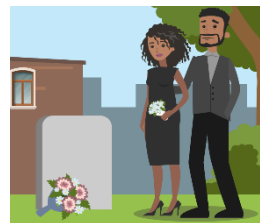
Relationship with the person who has died



Reaction of other family members



How curious your child is about the situation



Family circumstances



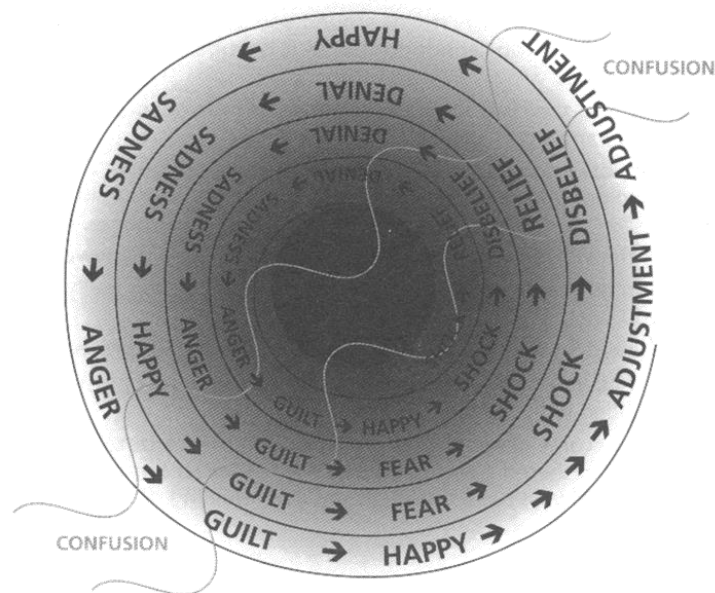
Previous experiences of grief

The Grieving Process

We often think of grief as having 5 stages all experienced one after another

Denial – Anger – Bargaining – Despair – Acceptance

However, there are many different ways people can experience grief. Below are just two ways we can think about how someone might experience grief.



Grief can be like a 'spiral of emotions' (Shelley Gilbert, 2004).

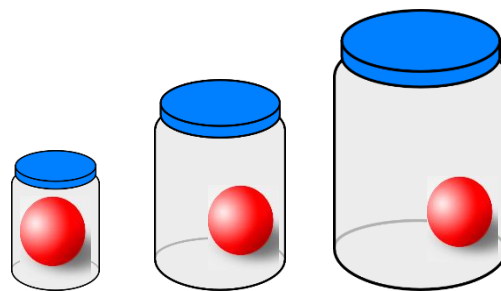
Grief can be journey from an 'emotional black hole' through to a range of feelings that re-occur and become less intense over time. Also recognising that people may experience moments of happiness along this journey.

This spiral of emotions can be very confusing, particularly for children. It is important to be open and honest with children about the feelings they are experiencing and normalising their experiences as much as possible.

‘Growing Around Grief’ (Tonkin, 1996 and Monroe, 2009)

Another way we can look at the grieving process is that the feelings we associate with grief do not become smaller over time. In fact, people adjust and learn to live with their grief.

The image below illustrates this idea;



Grief (the red ball) remains constant in size but the individual (the glass jar) grows learning to accommodate the grief in their lives.

Grief doesn't get any bigger or any smaller. It stays the same. However, our world 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”

This is important to consider when supporting children and families through bereavement and helps us to look at how we talk about dealing with grief. They may not want their grief to go away or become small – we need to support people to grow with, and around, their grief.

Models adapted from Robert Kempson (2019) ELSA Training Materials

Reactions to Death

Each child and young person will react differently to a death. Every person's experience of a bereavement is unique. Many children and young people will display outward behaviour changes when grieving, some may hardly have any reaction, some may not understand the situation and so struggle to know how to react.

Children and young people's reactions will vary depending on their age and developmental stage. For children with additional learning needs, we must consider their understanding of the situation to best support them through the experience of bereavement.

A bereaved young person may display some of the following behaviours:

Increased emotionality
and irritability

Social withdrawal

Sleep difficulties

Friendship difficulties

Headaches & stomach
aches

Fear of separation &
being alone

Reduced concentration

Anxiety about safety of
self & others

Developmental regression



It is important to remember that these behaviour changes may not happen straight after the death but could happen at a later time.

Adapted from Robert Kempson (2019) ELSA Training Materials

Here are some broad generalisations about how children may respond to death at different ages and stages

0-2 years:

Very young children do not understand about death but will experience the loss as separation. They may become withdrawn with excessive crying. Their emotional state will be affected by the people around them. Therefore, normality and routine are important.



2-5 years:

Children of this age will perceive death as being reversible and may also feel a sense of guilt that they were somehow the reason that a person has died. Children are significantly affected by the emotions of family members. They can experience nightmares, trouble sleeping, eating problems and aggressive behaviour.



6-12 years:

Children want to view death as reversible but are starting to understand that death is final. They may not fully understand their emotional reaction to the death which may include feelings of fear and guilt. Behaviour may include immature reactions, challenging behaviour as well as physical manifestations of emotional pain like headaches and stomach aches.



13-18 years:

Young people at this age range will possess an adult-like concept of death. Their reaction and emotions in response to the death may be heightened. Reactions may include anger, depression and defiant behaviour. The death of someone close to them may cause them to reflect on the meaning of life or alternatively they may withdraw and hide their feelings.

Adapted from Bracknell Forest Council (2020) Coronavirus and Bereavement Pack

How You Can Help

- B** **Bereavement support**
Bereaved children need to receive support from their family, from their school and from important people around them.
- E** **Express feelings and thoughts**
Bereaved children should be helped to find appropriate ways to express all their feelings and thoughts associated with grief, such as sadness, anxiety, confusion, anger and guilt.
- R** **Remember the person who has died**
Bereaved children have the right to remember the person who has died for the rest of their lives; sharing special as well as difficult memories.
- E** **Education and information**
Bereaved children need and are entitled to receive answers to their questions and information that clearly explains what has happened, why it has happened and what will be happening.
- A** **Appropriate response from schools and colleges**
Bereaved children need understanding and support from their teachers and fellow students without having to ask for it.
- V** **Voice in important decisions**
Bereaved children should be given the choice about their involvement in important decisions that have an impact on their lives such as planning the funeral and remembering anniversaries.
- E** **Enjoyment**
Bereaved children have the right to enjoy their lives even though someone important has died.
- M** **Meet others**
Bereaved children benefit from the opportunity to meet other children who have had similar experiences.
- E** **Established routines**
Bereaved children should, whenever possible, be able to continue activities and interests so that parts of their lives can still feel 'normal'.
- N** **Not to blame**
Bereaved children should be helped to understand that they are not responsible, and not to blame, for the death.
- T** **Tell the story**
Bereaved children are helped by being encouraged to tell an accurate and coherent story of what has happened. These stories need to be heard by those important people in their lives.

Adapted from Winston's Wish

Children's Self-Help Guide

Has someone important to you died?

Ideas to help you in your grief

People cope in all sorts of ways when someone dies. It can be hard to know what to do to get through this time, especially while we have to be apart from family and friends. Here are some suggestions from other bereaved young people about things you could do. Tick the ones you think would help at the moment, and keep it as a reminder.

Tell people what helps me feel better and keeps me feeling safe

Remind myself that, like the seasons, things will change

Ask if I can keep something that belonged to them

Look after myself and allow time for sleeping, eating resting, thinking and relaxing

Start a memory box or book to help remember them

Ask questions about what happened even if people get upset. I need the facts to understand, and talking about it will help me

Share with others if I start to think I am to blame

Remind myself I'm not going crazy. My sleeping, eating, thinking, memory, concentrating & motivation will be up and down

Laugh and have fun without feeling bad about it

Talk to the person who died in my imagination or write them a letter. This may help me say things I never got the chance to say, and to stay feeling connected to them

Ask for help and support whenever I need it

Stay connected with friends and family even though we have to be apart

Find ways of expressing my feelings by writing, drawing, music or exercise

Ask for any extra help I might need with school work, especially while schools are closed

I'm going to try

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.....
.....

I PLACE
THIS SEED IN
THE EARTH FOR THE
MEMORY
OF A LOVED ONE.

THIS IS WHAT I WISH WILL BLOSSOM...



Useful Resources and Links

Books:

DEATH and LOSS –

Badger's Parting Gifts by Susan Varley

The Day the Sea Went Out and Never Came Back by Margot Sunderland (suitable for ages 4-12)

Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine: Your Activity Book to Help When Someone Has Died by Diana Crossley

Sad Book by Michael Rosen

The Little Book of Bereavement for Schools by Ian Gilbert

Websites:

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/> - bereavement support and information

<https://www.winstonswish.org/> - support for bereaved children and their families

<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/> - online support for children experiencing bereavement

<https://apartofme.app/> - an app that gives children and young people the safe space to grieve

Bereavement Support Lines:

Childline 0800 1111 <https://childline.org.uk/>

Cruse 0808 808 1677 <https://www.cruse.org.uk/>

Child Bereavement UK 0800 028 8840 <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>