

BEREAVEMENT AND LOSS

A RESOURCE FOR SCHOOLS TO SUPPORT GRIEVING CHILDREN

The Laura Centre



LOSS AND GRIEF ARE PART OF SCHOOL LIFE

ONGOING PROCESS AFFECTING PUPILS AND STAFF

STRATEGY TO MANAGE

SUPPORT IS ESSENTIAL

Please note that this resource can be used in a variety of ways. When you have time you may want to read all or most of the sections: however, if you are pressed for time you may need to focus on particular areas.

If time is short read the 'ABOUT THIS RESOURCE' section (page 12) - at the end of which you are directed as to where to find the information that is most relevant to you right now.

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INTRODUCTION

All of us are affected by loss and change throughout life – our emotional health and wellbeing are greatly influenced by the nature of these changes and our ability to adjust to them.

It is estimated that 1 in 29 school aged children have been bereaved of a parent or sibling. 78% of 11-16 year olds report having being affected by the death of someone 'significant' in their lives. (source Childhood Bereavement Network). Every school will have pupils and members of staff affected by bereavement.

Some deaths demand our attention – the death of a pupil or member of staff will clearly impact the whole school community; our attention and awareness is also likely to be drawn to the impact the death of a parent may have on a child. However it is also important to be aware and prepared for other losses that may not be so immediately obvious. For instance a grandparent (or other relative or family friend) may have a key role in a child's life.

Childhood bereavement has been shown to be a risk factor for life chances – studies have shown links to: higher incidence of adult depression, teenage pregnancy in girls, higher rates of exclusion, and higher rates of adult unemployment in men. Bereavement in childhood has been shown to have co-morbidity with other risk factors for children – for instance with children growing up with a parent with a mental health condition or alcohol/drug addiction.

This resource aims to provide information that compliments existing policies and practice that promotes the emotional health and wellbeing of the school community. It can also be used to support the Healthy Schools Enhancement Model. Whilst the focus is on loss through bereavement, much of the content is applicable to other losses. A brief section outlining other losses is included at the back of this resource (**page 90**) and there is short section on divorce and separation (on **page 92**).

This is not, nor could it be, a step by step manual on how to support a child or community affected by death. This resource aims to provide frameworks for understanding and thinking about specific responses an individual staff member or community may want to make. Much of the material has been developed for, and through, courses delivered to schools staff by The Laura Centre. The Laura Centre offers a stepped professional development programme which provides an opportunity to explore further many of the issues raised in this resource. For details visit the training section of our website www.thelauracentre.org.uk.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT / CONTRIBUTORS

There are many people I would like to thank for making this resource possible. It has been produced through real partnership working, this is true at an organisational level: The Laura Centre (TLC), Leicester Healthy Schools Programme, Leicester City Psychology Service, Leicester City Anti-Bullying Steering Group and The Leicester City Targeted Mental Health in Schools Project (TaMHS) and above all through the generosity of many individual contributors.

I would particularly like to thank John Whitby from Leicester Healthy Schools Programme who has provided invaluable support and direction in producing this resource as well as contributing valuable material. Bhavin Pathak from Leicester City Psychology Service has been instrumental in securing the funding to enable this resource to be printed; in addition he coordinated and supported the partnership work with TaMHS and TLC which has informed and contributed to the development of this resource.

Direct contributors I would like to thank for generously producing and/or sharing material for this resource include: Chris Dilley (TLC), Rose Griffiths (University of Leicester), Steve Harris (Leicestershire Healthy Schools), Patsy Way and Isobel Bremner from the Candle Project at St. Christopher's hospice, Rob Osborn, Janet Smith (TLC) and John Whitby.

I would also like to thank Beck Loveday, Fred Clarke, Byron Greenhow, Tony Whitmore and the many other people who have given feedback or made suggestions about this resource.

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December 2011

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

Ideally you would read all relevant sections, but practically there may be times when you just need to focus on specific areas. There are two checklists below to guide you when time is short, one for around the time of death, the other with regard to support for individual children. The checklists identify which section(s) of this resource may be helpful reference points.

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING A DEATH

Create a strategy taking into account the needs of individual children, staff and the wider community if appropriate (policy frameworks [page 42-43](#), communication [page 14](#), types of death [page 26](#)).

Where a death may attract media attention, have a clear strategy for handling this with one person taking the lead (media [page 22](#), policy frameworks [page 42](#))

Identify who is most likely to need support and information (think about pupils, staff and families) (types of death [page 26](#))

Identify key members of staff who may be able to provide support and/or information

Remember all staff and particularly the leadership of the school provide a model for pupils – what are the key messages you want to be giving out in your words and actions? (Guiding principles [pages 17-19](#))

Where appropriate for a member of a school community, plan memorial events and opportunities ([page 46](#))

Consider the cultural and religious beliefs of those affected ([page 82](#))

SUPPORT FOR BEREAVED PUPILS

Be guided by the needs of bereaved children ([page 49](#)) or young people ([page 67](#)). In a school context the need for 'involvement and inclusion' and 'continued routine activities' may be particularly important..

Each child will benefit from different types of support – some potentially supporting activities are listed on [page 95](#).

Some theory may help you understand individual responses and what helps ([pages 32-34](#))

See also actions/checklist for individual pupils ([page 43](#))

Review their needs regularly – they may change.

Make sure that any support relationship, e.g. between a member of staff and a pupil works for both sides (child is comfortable with member of staff, and member of staff feels able and well supported themselves).

OTHER ISSUES – CHECK LIST

There will be times when every school is affected by a pupil, member of staff or family member having a terminal illness ([page 31](#))

Whatever the circumstances considering the needs and resources of staff is essential (staff support [page 45](#))

It will enrich the education and wellbeing of the school community to embed loss and death in the curriculum of the school (resources [page 89](#))

A bereaved pupil's academic performance and ability to concentrate may be affected ([page 84](#))

A bereaved pupil may be more at risk of being bullied or being aggressive to others ([page 85](#))

A bereaved pupil's attendance may be affected ([page 84](#)).

Consider how the ethos of the school reflects the needs of bereaved children and others experiencing loss.

COMMUNICATION

In supporting bereaved children, families, staff and communities communication will be vital. We could echo a familiar refrain and say that the three priorities in support following bereavement are “communication, communication, communication” .

REMINDERS:-

It is not just **what** you communicate but also **how** you communicate it – if possible, consider: place, timing, tone of voice, body language.

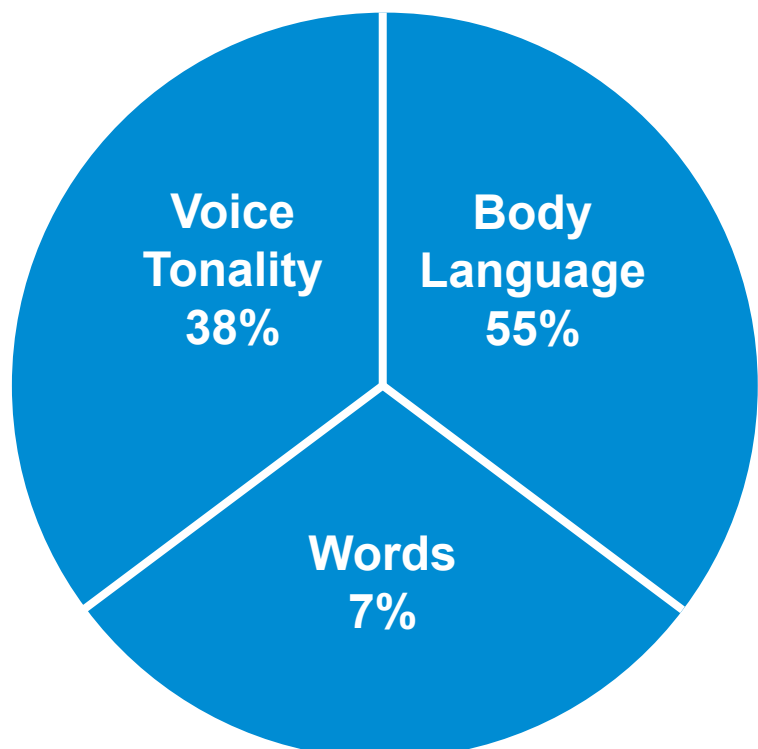
Not saying or doing anything communicates a message and may lead to misinformation spreading.

- It is worth reflecting and consulting with others where possible to decide the best ways to communicate, particularly because there may be conflicting demands to be considered, for instance:-
- balancing honesty and openness with respect for privacy and the need to avoid sensationalism.
- In deciding the best time and place to tell people you may need to choose the ‘least worst’ option– for example, needing to telephone a member of staff rather than tell them face to face because otherwise they might be unprepared in meeting pupils or families.
- If something has happened that might affect multiple people (e.g. accident or contagious illness) provide accurate reassuring information about people who are safe or doing well when this is possible.

It is important to carefully choose who will be the best people to create and maintain communication channels with different groups e.g. bereaved pupil(s), directly affected families, staff and families, media, governors, wider school community and other families.

Regularly re-visit and re-assess what communication needs there may be – managing bereavement is an ongoing process – you need to be aware that the support needs and people involved (for instance a new member of staff or supply teacher) will inevitably change over time.

ALLOW AND ENCOURAGE THINGS TO BE ‘TALKABLE ABOUT’ whilst recognising that not everyone will want or need to take this opportunity at school not everyone will want or need to take this opportunity at school



BODY AND VERBAL LANGUAGE (both negative and positive)

We communicate in many ways.

We communicate our thoughts and feelings through our body language, our voice tonality and the actual words we say.

However what we say has far less impact than how we say it (verbally and non-verbally):

EVERY SITUATION IS UNIQUE

This resource is not intended to be a prescriptive manual – no human being or situation will be exactly like any other. It is always important to start with fresh eyes and ears - whether you are concerned about one individual affected by a loss, or a whole community affected by a traumatic incident. This is true both in terms of the pain and affect of a loss, but also in terms of the resilience and resources that may be available. Ultimately, the most valuable and important resource is the human resource that you, colleagues, pupils and the wider community can offer.

There are however some useful attitudes and principles that have been proven to help in times of loss. Hobfoll et al. (2007) collated and presented the best evidence based practice in supporting communities following large scale sudden death (such as natural disasters or terrorist attacks). The authors identified five 'essential elements' of short and medium term trauma intervention. Though these principles were specifically drawn up in relation to mass trauma they are still applicable to a wide range of bereavement situations – though the exact nature of support will be unique to each individual and situation. These are principles detailed in the next section.

When considering an individual bereaved child, Worden (1996) identified ten needs. These are detailed in age related terms in the sections on primary ([page 49](#)) and secondary school children ([page 67](#)). You will be well equipped to support children and the wider school community if you are familiar with these needs and are guided by the principles below. Though this resource suggests a few possible interventions the ideal would be that you are able to reflect on the particular situation within your school, and think creatively as to how these principles and needs may guide you in devising a tailored action plan.

FIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES TO INTERVENTION

AIM TO PROMOTE:

- A sense of safety.
- Calming.
- A sense of self- and community-efficacy.
- Connectedness.
- Hope.

PROMOTION OF A SENSE OF SAFETY

It is natural to have a heightened sense of anxiety when confronted with a significant loss. The level of anxiety is related to individual perception of threat in a situation – which may not correspond with the threat an observer would expect. For instance, research has shown that some children experiencing bereavement following the long term illness of a parent have prolonged heightened levels of anxiety.

Whether a death has been through illness or a sudden event it is important to emphasize the rarity of this event and provide reassurance of normality. Appropriate information (see needs of bereaved children [page 55 or 69](#)) is key, but so is the sensitive restoration of normal routine where possible.

It is important to do all that is possible to make sure that clear and consistent messages are given about an event and that rumours or ‘horror stories’ are minimised. Where no information is given, the imagination often gets active in creating frightening possibilities about what has happened and may happen.

The restoration of confidence in life for adults and children is often a slow process involving many factors – as professionals we can help by noticing where anxiety may be an issue and provide honest and real reassurance where possible.

PROMOTING CALMING

It is natural for anyone who has experienced a significant loss or shocking event to feel a wide range of conflicting emotional responses. Initially these may include heightened anxiety, numbing, overwhelming sadness, anger and confusion – sometimes our feelings are so removed from our normal experience that we can think we are going mad or that there is something wrong with us. Sometimes these thoughts about our own feelings can become frightening, even overwhelming in themselves. This is where help understanding common reactions can be helpful – the message may be that “it is normal not to feel normal”.

In supporting others it is important to pay attention to ourselves. Checking our own physical state, breathing patterns, voice, and facial tension may help us to have a more reassuring presence.

In some circumstances children may stay in a prolonged state of ‘hyperarousal’ – this may impact their ability to sleep, socially interact with others and concentrate. Where these symptoms persist then it is advisable to seek specialist help.

There may be some specific calming activities that members of staff feel comfortable leading depending on the children and members of staff. Potentially some aspects of Art, Music and Physical Education could be used to have a calming effect. Some simple breathing and relaxation exercises are listed on page 102.

DON'T PANIC..... instead take a few shallow, slow breaths...

SENSE OF SELF- AND COMMUNITY – EFFICACY

It is a common human response to feel helpless in the face of bereavement, especially if the circumstances surrounding the death have felt overwhelming. Our inability to bring someone back to life can easily be generalised into feelings of helplessness in other areas of life. This may be accompanied by a loss of self-esteem. Similarly we may lose faith in others ability to be able to help us.

Providing consistent messages that each individual has their own resources and capabilities and that they can be helped and help others is invaluable in promoting a sense of self- and community efficacy to combat these debilitating thoughts and feelings.



CONNECTEDNESS

The death of someone close can often be isolating – especially for a child or young person. Several aspects may come into play here:

- They may not have the words or confidence to share their own experience with others.
- Their peers may not be able to understand or empathise with their experience.
- They may perceive and/or be given the message that they are 'different' as a result of their loss.

It can be really helpful to encourage ways for individuals and groups to feel connected. Ideally these would sensitively give the following messages:

Each person's experience is unique, but as human beings we share common feelings and it

can be helpful to share these and be understood.

There are ways we can help each other – where practicable this would include education about what these might be.

Collective acknowledgement of loss where appropriate is a powerful symbol of connectedness.

SENSE OF HOPE

It is common to feel helpless and hopeless following a death. There is an element of truth in these feelings – no-one can bring a dead person back to life – in this respect we are all powerless; and there is no hope of future plans that involve them being alive coming to pass. It is important to allow these thoughts and feelings to be expressed, accepted and understood. Research into traumatic loss has shown that trying to give people ‘false’ hope and comfort is unhelpful and hinders recovery. For instance – it is not helpful to suggest a positive consequence (“you will be stronger”) – or to suggest that things could be worse (“at least you still have ...”). In time some children may recognise their resilient qualities and come to appreciate the people in their life, but this cannot be imposed or forced.

However there are many things that we can do which implicitly convey messages of hope for the future. These include:

- sharing our own or others experiences that show that people can survive and thrive through loss (even though it may be painful and difficult at times)
- demonstrating that there are many ways that children may be able to help themselves (and others)
- showing that there are things that we can do
- supporting a child to build up their self-esteem – it is easier to feel positive about the future if you have positive beliefs about yourself.

The dual process model (see [page 32](#)) – illustrates how it is natural to move between feelings of loss and a focus on ‘restorative’ activities – it may be helpful to find way to share this in age appropriate ways to children, for instance, moving between happy and sad feelings.

ACTIONS / CHECKLIST

FOR BEREAVED CHILDREN

- Identify the key children affected, take into account that the impact may spread wide through a community (see the ripple effect diagram, [page 36](#)).
- Acknowledge what has happened.
- Involve and include them in planning the best ways for them to be supported, for instance is there someone they would like to be able to talk to about this.
- Establish communication links with parents / carers.
- Find out about any cultural or religious factors – do not be afraid to ask (see [page 82](#)).
- Remember every child or young person is unique in their response to a death and how they will want to be supported.
- Provide information and support for peers to be able to support them
- Plan the best way to enable the child to remember the person who has died (depending on death may involve being able to talk about them with friends, a member of staff or a memorial event).
- Be sensitive to areas of school life that may be more difficult for them and involve them in deciding how to deal with them. Examples: letters home to 'parents', a school trip overnight (may be more anxious), subjects that relate to death, mother's day cards.
- Read tips from pupils ([page 42](#)).
- Refer to communication policy framework ([page 40](#)).

KEY QUESTIONS

- Are there significant changes in mood and/or behaviour?
- How are their friends and peers reacting to the loss? Is it in a supportive way?
- How is their concentration? Is it harder for them to do academic work (see [page 84](#))?
- Are there any issues around attendance (see [page 84](#))?
- How are staff responding to them? Has there been good communication about their needs? Are they being pushed too hard?



FOR MEMBERS OF STAFF AND GOVERNORS

- Decide on the key messages that you want to give to the school and the wider community (refer to guiding principles [page 17](#)).
- Consider how best to communicate about a death and/or the needs of bereaved children.
- Identify whether there are any training (see [page 45](#)) or support needs for staff.
- Refer to communication policy framework ([page 40](#)).
- Acknowledge that members of staff may be affected in particular, either because of their own grief in relation to this loss and/or because it triggers feelings of other losses
- Empathise with bereaved pupils / members of staff
- Be connected to previous losses in their own life.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Has everyone who may be affected by a death or who will come into contact with a bereaved pupil been informed?
- What messages about bereavement and emotions are the leadership team and staff modelling for pupils?

FOR FAMILIES

The following points are likely to apply both to the families of pupils or members of staff.

- Identify a key person to liaise with the bereaved family.
- Each situation is different, but in most cases the offer of a home visit will show that the school cares and may help to establish better communication with the family.
- Where the person who has died is a member of the school community involve the family in plans for remembering them (see [page 47](#)).
- Refer to communication policy framework ([page 40](#)).
- Provide information for the families of other pupils as appropriate (see [page 35](#)).

KEY QUESTION

- What message are directly affected families getting from the school?

FOR MEDIA

Where a death may be news-worthy it is important to plan your response to the media.

- Identify one person to liaise with media.
- Consult with families and relevant authorities if appropriate and reflect with others on the message you want to give.
- It may be valuable to prepare a script, either for the key person and/or for others who may need to handle initial enquiries.
- Provide a press statement.
- Remember it is OK to say there are things we do not know, or questions that cannot be answered at this stage.
- Give a clear message to pupils and staff as to how to handle media enquiries.
- Whilst it is important to make sure rumours or unhelpful comments are not reported in the press try to ensure that your response to the media does not get in the way of good internal communication.

KEY QUESTION

- Is the message we are giving to the wider community consistent with the ethos of the school and the internal messages about this death?

MESSAGES FROM PUPILS

BEREAVED PUPILS SAY



- *Inform other teachers, especially supply teachers about my loss although I may not wish to talk to them about it. Keep this on record.*
- *Talk to me about what has happened. I may need more information, advice and education about loss.*
- *Arrange for me to get extra help with my work so I don't get behind, especially before exams.*
- *Realise that I have a lot on my plate. Try not to put the spotlight on me too much. I will participate when I can.*
- *Help me to cope by treating me the same as everyone else.*
- *Let me know about groups for children and young people who are also coping with loss and change.*
- *Ask me how I am feeling. It may not be obvious.*
- *Give me a note that allows me permission to leave class briefly, without having to explain myself if I feel overwhelmed.*
- *Understand that I will not 'get over it' or 'put it behind me' but with time I will learn to cope with all the changes.*
- *Give me extra encouragement for all the things I am managing to do and keep me in mind.*
- *Find a way of getting my attention back in class, without others noticing and making me embarrassed.*
- *Wait until I am ready to talk.*
- *Remember that I am still me, just feeling a bit lost at the moment.*
- *Help me to find new dreams of the future and make plans.*

(Reproduced from Childhood Bereavement Network website, developed in partnership with young people in Scotland working with Seasons for Growth peer support programme)

YOUNG PEOPLE ALSO SAY

One young person's group (aged 14-16) that met at The Laura Centre said they would like to tell schools:

We would like understanding that:

- *We might not feel like participating*
- *We might be feeling generally angry and find it hard to concentrate*

We would like:

- *Time out when we need it, without having to behave badly*
- *A place to go to be on our own, ideally with a punchbag or something else that allows us to safely release our feelings*
- *Respect that we know what we need*
- *To choose our subjects*
- *If something has happened – listen to both sides*
- *Listen to us*

Please don't:

- *Act like you know what's happened when you do not (in class)*
- *Act on reputations or what the files say*
- *Pretend you understand when you don't act like you do.*



TYPES OF DEATH

There are many variables which make every situation unique, but two of the key factors which determine the impact on individuals and a community are: who has died and the cause of death.

WHO HAS DIED?

A MEMBER OF A SCHOOL COMMUNITY.

Where a pupil or member of staff or another widely known member of the school community (e.g. lollipop person, parent active in the school) has died, then a response needs to take account of the needs of the whole community. There will be obvious people who are directly affected, family and close friends or colleagues, but the impact will spread out in different ways throughout the school.

Where a death involves someone from the school ways need to be found to inform all members of school community as well as families or parents/carers. Good information helps to avoid rumours but also may help to create and support a compassionate and caring culture.

A RELATIVE OF A PUPIL

Where a death is significant for a pupil but is not of someone widely known throughout the school, information may need to be shared in a targeted and sensitive manner. Key people to communicate with include:

- Bereaved pupils and their families.
- All staff who will come into contact with bereaved pupils.
- Pastoral and/or special needs teams within school.
- Friends and peers who come into regular contact with bereaved pupils (for instance classmates, fellow team members).
- The parents/carers of friends and peers (so they may be prepared for questions/ comments).

A RELATIVE OF A MEMBER OF STAFF

Though many aspects of this death may be outside of the realms of school policy it is still appropriate to consider the support and communication needs of the school. Information will help colleagues know how to best support the bereaved. Consideration will need to be given as to how pupils are informed about a bereavement – for instance to explain a member of staff's absence. Some thoughts:

- It is important that each member of staff is able to share information in a way that is natural and comfortable for them.
- Some pupils who have experienced a loss may particularly identify with a bereaved member of staff.
- Some pupils will want to be able to offer support.
- Staff members may act as role models for some pupils.

CAUSES OF DEATH

As always remember every situation is unique. The following notes point out some of the potential considerations according to a cause of death, but remember research has shown that main determinants to how well bereaved children cope are:

- How their parents/carers are coping
- The messages they receive about the death and grief
- How safe they feel

Children can be resilient and adaptable when they are given support and shown that, though it may be difficult and painful, we can cope with loss and change.

ANTICIPATED DEATH

Children and young people may not be as prepared for a death after serious illness as might be expected. A number of factors effect this including –

- How involved they have been (for instance have they recently visited someone in hospital)
- The information they have been given
- How the person with terminal illness has coped
- The way the rest of the family has responded to the illness and death
- Their ability to make sense of and accept the information they have been given.

Some research has shown higher levels of anxiety in children that have lived with a parent with a long term serious illness. 'Normal' family life may have been disrupted for years, all members of the family may have lived with varying degrees of concern and anxiety. In some cases this anxiety may become engrained in their emotional and physical experience.

SUDDEN DEATH

Whatever the cause a sudden death means there has been little opportunity to say good-bye. There is potential for confusion about what has happened, and a child may have witnessed potentially traumatic images. No matter what has been seen or experienced, people of all ages respond differently to these – for instance there is great variability in the number and persistence of seeing 'flashbacks'.

Any sudden death may potentially leave a child or young person with a difficult last memory of the person. Maybe their last contact was an argument, or they recently got very angry with each other.

GENETIC ILLNESS

There are some conditions which a child might have inherited from a parent or other relative. They might need to be tested for these conditions, and sadly in some cases they may end up knowing that their life expectancy may be limited. Or they may need to have regular check ups and/or medication, or they may live with uncertainty.

In such circumstances good communication with parents/carers may help in understanding

the situation and being better able to support a pupil. However, no matter what you know or don't know, the key here will be to listen and notice what their needs are. They may want school to be a place where everything continues as it always has and they do not want to talk about their loss and/or condition, on the other hand some young people in this situation may really want to be able to talk to someone outside the family.

DEATH THROUGH ALCOHOL OR DRUG ABUSE

These deaths may often, but not always be sudden. It is likely that a family has been greatly affected by this addiction for years. Sometimes where a parent has been addicted it will have been instrumental in the parents separating, in which cases there may be issues of lack of contact with the deceased (see also FAQ's [page 59](#), [page 73](#)).

It may be helpful for a child to come to an understanding of addiction as a form of illness. Part of what happens when someone is addicted is that the true, whole person becomes lost to the addiction – either because their life revolves around getting their next fix and/or because their behaviour is so affected by the substance.

Occasionally when someone has been addicted for years, or in other circumstances where there have been ongoing difficulties in relationships a child may mourn not just the loss of the person who died, but their hopes that things would become resolved in the future and they would finally have the relationship they wanted.

Sometimes in families with addiction issues children become the carer – and apart from everything else they may feel they have lost their sense of purpose (“It was my job to keep mum alive”).

SUDDEN DEATH THROUGH ILLNESS

As with other causes of death there may be issues of understanding the exact cause of death. There may be a need for reassurance that they are not to blame and also that the same illness is unlikely to affect anyone else in the family.

SUDDEN DEATH ACCIDENT

Potential issues include:

- Uncertainty about what happened
- Blame and anger towards others and/or the deceased
- Being involved or witnessing what happened
- Protracted legal/inquest proceedings

SUDDEN DEATH MURDER/MANSLAUGHTER

Additional factors:

- Protracted legal proceedings
- Media interest and coverage
- Fear and anxiety – will someone attack me or other family members?

- Desire for, or belief that there is a duty to avenge the death.
- Potential for the issue to continually surface because of external factors: e.g. trial, sentencing, release of conviction, failure to find/convict perpetrator, re-activation of media interest.

SUDDEN DEATH – SUICIDE

There is a strong potential for a child to feel rejection if a close family member, especially a parent, takes their own life. Often families find it harder to be open about the circumstances of a death and this can lead to ongoing confusion in a young person.

You may be reliant on information from parents/carers but it is important to recognise that a pupil may know more than a parent realizes, also that suicide sometimes becomes public knowledge. Sometimes children have found out about suicide in the playground, or from another source – this may have the effect of undermining trust in family members who have not told them the truth.

It is helpful for children and young people to be dealt with in an open and honest way about all deaths that affect them. There is an excellent resource available from Winston's Wish (contact details [page 103](#)), called 'Beyond a Rough Rock', which helps parents/carers think about how best to talk about suicide with children. This includes sections on how to talk about different ways that people have killed themselves.

Ideally information will be given in a timely and age appropriate way, maybe not all at once (though this depends on the circumstances). It is often appropriate to talk about depression, other forms of mental illness or drug addiction, and any other contributory factors which meant that the person was not able to think clearly or how they would if they were functioning normally.

SERIOUS / TERMINAL ILLNESS

IMPACT ON A FAMILY

One of the difficulties for everyone concerned when there is a serious illness is uncertainty about the course it will take. Children and young people often have less information and/or understanding than adults, and professionals in schools may similarly struggle to get a clear view of the situation. It may not be clear for example that an illness has entered a 'terminal' phase. Illnesses do not always run their predicted course: sometimes people die unexpectedly early from a long term condition, at others they live for much longer than has been predicted.

All of this means that the picture for a family may be confused.

No matter what information is available to an individual there is often a need to cling to hope of recovery right until the end. This is true for people of all ages, though, it is more likely that an adult may engage in some anticipatory mourning. Where children and young people are aware of an impending death they may need reassurance about practical considerations, in some cases they will be aware that it could impact where they live and who takes care of them.

Hopefully there may be opportunities for family members to say good-bye and actively provide memories and connections for the future. Sometimes the ill person will be able to record their thoughts and feelings in writing, or on video or audio recording. They may be able to have important conversations or do memorable things whilst they are well enough. There is some excellent information for parents who are in this situation on Winston's Wish's website (see resources [page 103](#)).



There are some common themes for families in this situation, they include:

- Uncertainty about how much time is left
- Communication difficulties
- Loss of a future together
- Disruption of family routine
- Rapid changes/redistribution of roles
- Intrusion by professionals
- Social isolation
- Lack of fun/enjoyment
- Vulnerable family members may be at risk

Things that may help:

- Acknowledge worries, fears and the stress of living with many uncertainties
- Openly communicate
- Reinforce Strengths
- Encourage and empower
- Affirm anticipatory mourning
- Give information
- Grasp opportunities to help

SERIOUS / TERMINAL ILLNESS OF A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON

Impact on Parents of an ill child:

- Physically and mentally exhausting
- All-consuming of time and energy
- Confusion
- Knowing the death would happen but denying it
- Controlling overwhelming feelings of sadness, fear and anger
- Impact on Parents/carers
- Seeing no future but wanting an end to the present - inner conflict
- Wanting to avoid the child feeling a burden
- Feeling guilty about neglecting well children
- Changing roles and relationships
- e.g. taking turns to care, changing work
- Experiencing your child's pain

Impact on Sibling of an ill child:

- May increase insecurities
- Fear own mortality
- Feel abandoned by parents
- Jealous of parents' attention
- Guilt feelings on enjoying life
- Can feel like a sudden death, not always aware of seriousness

SERIOUS / TERMINAL ILLNESS OF A PARENT OR CARER

Many similar feelings and thoughts may occur as with an ill child (above).

In addition:

Parents and children may:

- Be concerned about how to cope with practical issues (money, work, housing, school etc.) before and after death
- Be affected by how the ill parent is able to accept and talk about what is happening
- Be impacted by how other family members, e.g. the parents of ill person, are coping.

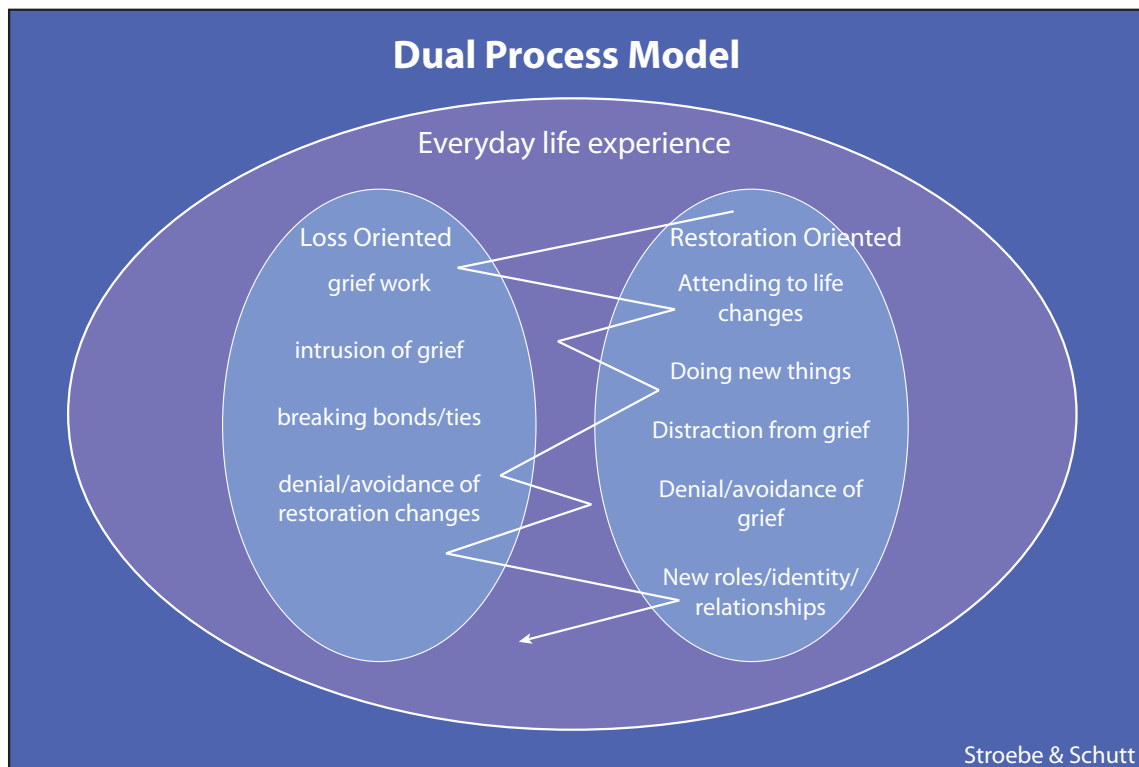
Children may also:

- Feel like they have lost both parents because of the impact on the well parent
- Be worried that a surviving parent/carer may die
- Fear that their own future is uncertain

THEORIES OF GRIEF

THE DUAL PROCESS MODEL OF GRIEF

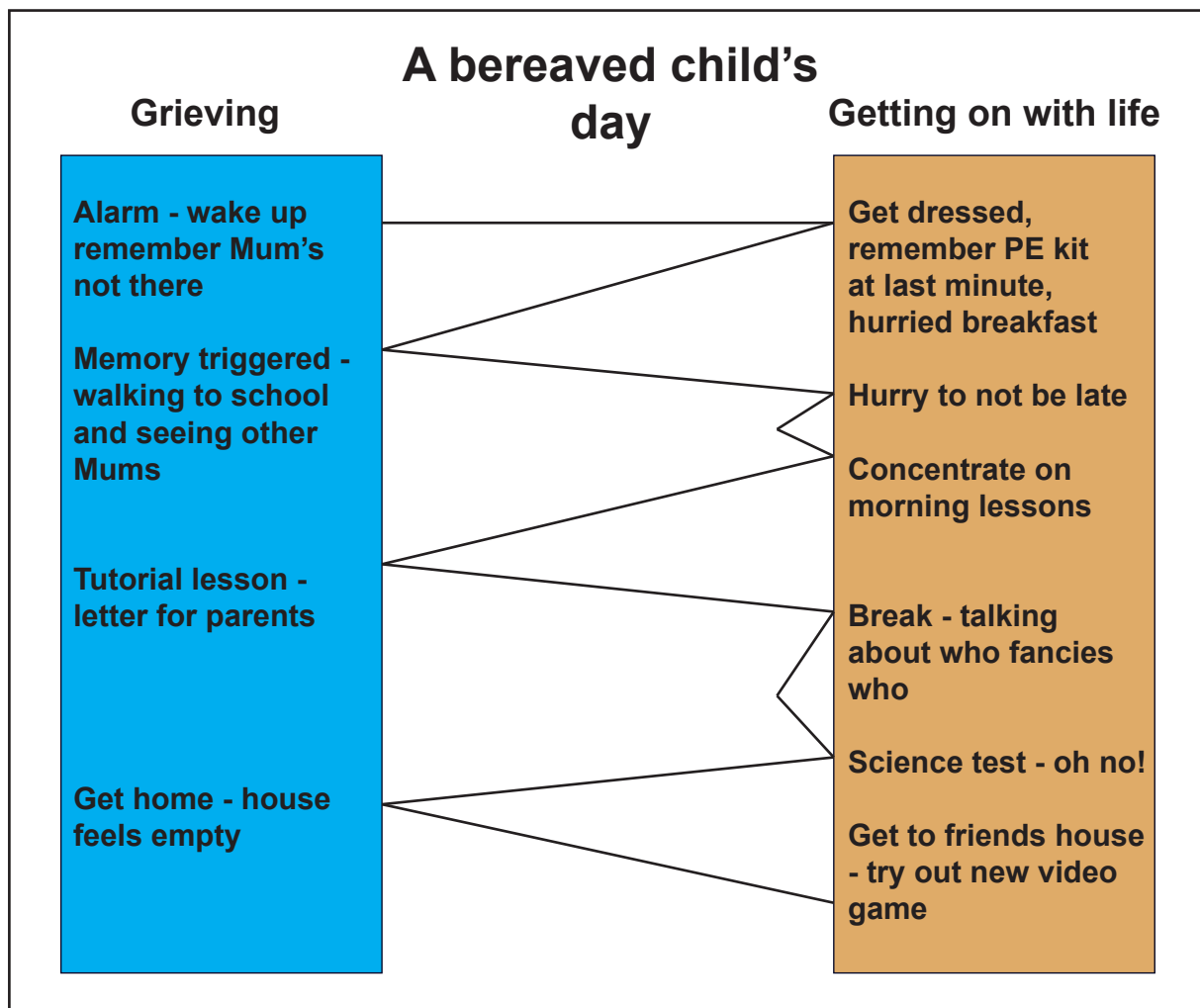
This straightforward model of grief provides a useful framework to understand a wide range of responses to a death.



Every person will have their own unique path between the 'loss' and 'restoration' orientation – most but not all, children and young people may move more quickly between these two sides than adults.

Important considerations:

- Each person will grieve differently
- If someone is always only on one side for a prolonged period of time then it may be a cause for concern (note that some children will rarely, if ever, share their grief at school)
- Within couples and families, individuals are likely to have a tendency towards one side or the other, though this may change over time.
- It is helpful to see that individual differences can be complementary, for instance where a couple takes it in turns to 'hold things together'.



The diagram gives an example of how one child's experience of a day might be charted using the dual process model. The time frames above can vary enormously so that someone may experience more 'loss' or 'restoration' orientation: from one moment to the next, for a few hours, for a day, a week, a month or a much longer period of time. These may be triggered by external events or reminders. A significant event in a child or family's life may remind them of the loss and they may experience/have intense feelings of grief for a more extended period – for instance waiting for exam results, going to the school dance or prom. With the death of a parent a range of complex feelings and thoughts may be triggered by a parent potentially finding a new partner.

CONTINUING BONDS

'Continuing bonds' is the name given to a theory which supports the need for people to continue the relationship with the deceased after death. This is not about denying the death, but about recognizing that there are always continuing thoughts, feelings and ways of relating to the person who died. For instance it is very natural to have conversations with someone who has died, either silently in our own head and/or aloud.

This theory asserts that not only is it natural to continue the relationship with the deceased it is a helpful and ongoing part of grieving and adapting to loss.

Our father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, partner will always be a part of our inner life, even after death and in many cases will play a role in ongoing parts of our outer life. Relating to other family members, family gatherings, genetic and property inheritance, and anniversaries and special occasions may all be influenced by previous relationships, memories and feelings connected to the deceased.

Some key points:

- "Letting go" is not always what bereaved people want to do - they often want to "hold onto".
- We need to find ways to "relocate" the deceased (in our heart, in heaven, in our memories, in our bodies, in our family...)
- Mourning is often about identification - finding a place for the deceased in one's sense of self
- Sharing stories, memories, photographs ... keeps the connection and the reality of the relationship alive
- This theory re-affirms the need of bereaved children to have "opportunities to remember".
- "I had to learn how to have a relationship with someone who was not there anymore" (Natasha Wagner following death of her mother actress Natalie Wood).
- Grief is never finished it evolves through our personal development, growth and life cycle

With children in particular it is important to remember that they will naturally re-visit the meaning of the death and their relationship with the deceased as they grow older. Two factors make this likely: one, their continuing personal development and understanding of the world and relationships; two, life events, such as new family relationships or personal changes and transitions.

(Continuing Bonds: New understandings of Grief, editors: Silverman, Nickman and Klass, Taylor and Francis, Bristol PA, 1996).

SCHOOL STRATEGY AND POLICY

As with any area of school life it will make a real difference to pro-actively think through and engage with potential issues in relation to bereavement and loss; in particular it will be helpful to prepare strategies and systems that support individuals, families and the school community. Formulating a policy is a helpful way of focussing attention as well as recording and passing information to others. It is important that the focus is on providing the appropriate information and support for all concerned, not simply on producing a document.

It is also important that any policy relates directly to the individual circumstances of your school. This will also need to relate to other school policies and approaches within the school. These may include: safeguarding, bullying, emotional health and well-being, attendance and the school vision and ethos.

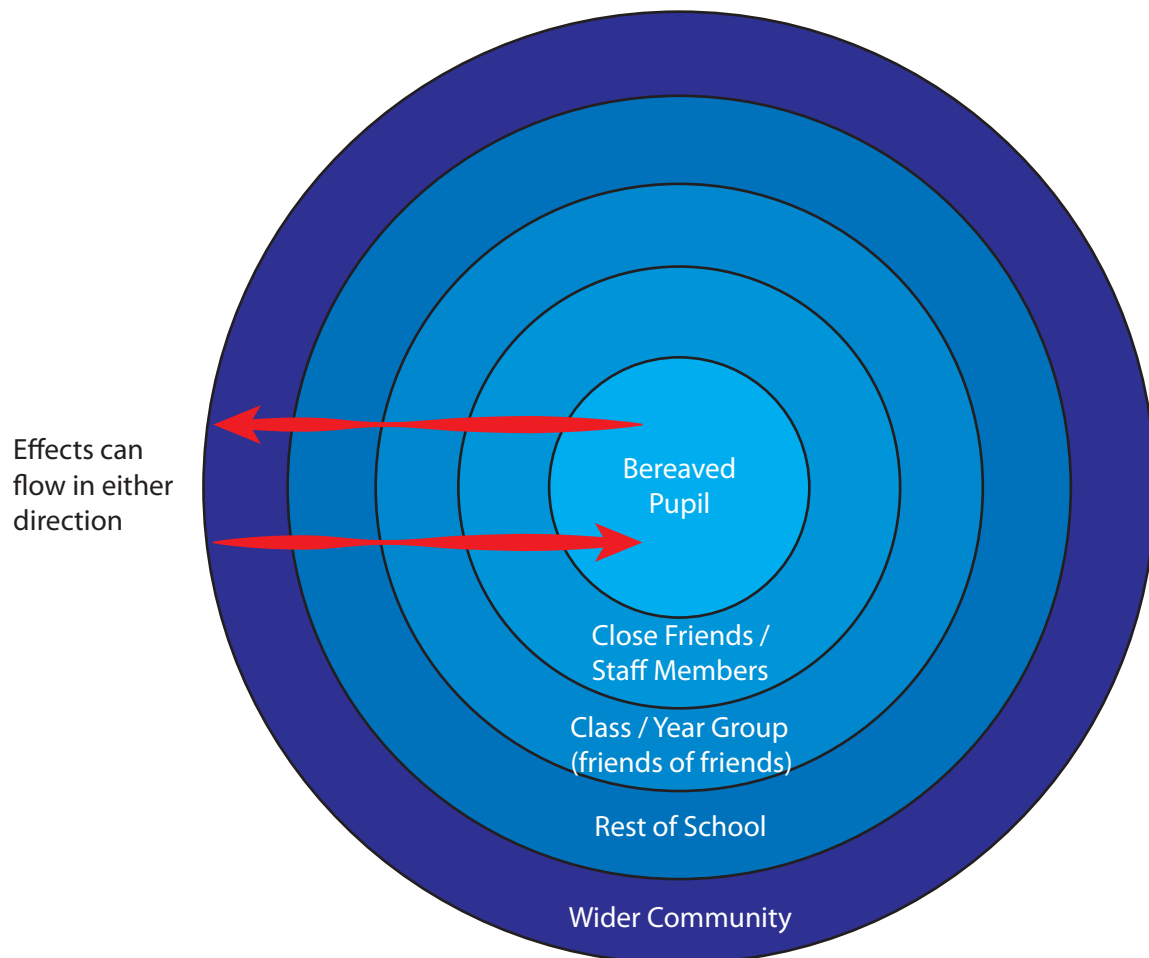
Factors to consider in bringing together a strategy for your school include:

- Communication systems for pupils, staff, families and the media (see following pages)
- Training and support needs of staff
- Methods of identifying the needs of individual pupils
- Support resources available within school including staff time and space
- Does your approach help to promote the five guiding principles ([page 17](#))
- Which agencies to contact for additional support.



THE RIPPLE EFFECT

A death may impact a whole community.



Often members of a community need the appropriate information and opportunity to provide support.

Ripples can flow both ways – may include: emotional and behavioural impact, support, information, understanding and realization about mortality.

The nature of the circles and movement of the ripples in the above diagram will be unique in every situation.

INFORMATION / COMMUNICATION WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

WHO TO	HOW TO	WHAT	WHERE	WHY
All affected children (eg. children in same class as the bereavement)	Through appropriate staff member (eg. class teacher/ head teacher/ school nurse/ school welfare officer/ school counsellor)	The factual account of the death	Classroom	Appropriately informed with accurate information
Other pupils	Through appropriate staff member (eg. class teacher/ head teacher)	The factual account of the death	Classroom or Assembly	Appropriately informed with accurate information
Personally affected children (including siblings)	Through nominated staff member	Provide details of staff member who children can talk to on individual basis	Internal (private setting)	Share feelings in safe setting supporting child through grieving process
Personally affected children (including siblings)	Class teacher	Individually tailored support – workable and agreed with child	Classroom	Acknowledge and understand child's behaviour. Acknowledge child may be less capable
Affected children (including siblings)	Class teacher	Continued involvement in routine activities. Treated the same as any child	Classroom	Provides stability in unstable time. Made to feel normal

INFORMATION / COMMUNICATION WITH STAFF AND GOVERNORS

WHO TO	HOW TO	WHAT	WHERE	WHY
All staff members and governors if appropriate	Through appropriate staff member (eg. Head Teacher)	The events leading up to the death and factual account on how death occurred	Staff or Governors meeting	Appropriately informed with accurate information
Absent staff members	Personal visit or telephone by nominated staff member	The events leading up to the death and factual account on how death occurred	Staff members home	Appropriately informed and acknowledging absent staff members relationship with the bereaved
All affected staff members	Through nominated staff member provided a resource menu of support options	Provide resource menu to include handouts on Needs of Bereaved Children and coping with Death. To also include material on local bereavement and educational psychologist services available	Internal	Better able to support pupils
Personally affected staff members	Through nominated staff member provides a resource menu of support options	One to one support Group support	Internal (private setting) External	Providing support for staff members own personal grief

INFORMATION / COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES AND THE MEDIA

WHO TO	HOW TO	WHAT	WHERE	WHY
Bereaved family	Through nominated staff member (eg Head Teacher)	Liaise with bereaved family	Family members home	Offer continued help to family
Bereaved family	Through nominated staff member	Establish direct telephone line number for family to contact school	Home to school	One point of contact – less intrusive for family
Bereaved family	Through nominated staff member	Letter or card to family	School to home	Help provide support for bereaved siblings and family members
Bereaved family	Through nominated staff member	Provide handouts on needs of bereaved children and details of local bereavement support services	School to home	Help provide support for bereaved siblings and family members
Parents and carers of other pupils	Through nominated staff member	Letter	School to home	Helping parents to support their children and provide consistent information
The Media	Through nominated staff member (eg. Chair of governors/Head teacher)	Providing news statement at agreed time	School TV Studios	Helps deal with media intrusion for death which may attract media attention/ coverage

BEREAVEMENT POLICY FRAMEWORK

As with any school policy it is not the piece of paper but the preparation, thought and involvement of staff and the community that makes the difference. Below are some suggestions on aspects that you may want to include in your bereavement policy.

1. Statement on support for emotional health and wellbeing in school- (mission, values, inclusion statement). Recognition of differing circumstances / situations
 - a. How we prepare children for possible loss / bereavement (if imminent individually and /or group / whole school)
 - b. How we prepare adults in the school community for bereavement (staff)
 - c. How we communicate with parents/ carers, families/ children/ staff
 - d. When we communicate with parents / carers / families
2. How we support children/ parents/ carers/ families, staff (before and after the event)
 - a. The procedures we have when a bereavement takes place – (immediately: after a day: week: month: anniversary: for the funeral)
 - b. Ongoing support, recognising long term nature of bereavement
 - c. How we work with parents / carers/ families to deal with behaviour issues stemming from loss / bereavement (attendance, aggression, bullying, etc.) e.g. circle of friends, buddies, etc.
3. How we work with the media (if appropriate)
4. How we consult with our parents / pupils / staff
5. How we remember those who have died
6. What we offer in the curriculum about aspects of loss and bereavement as part of our PSHE programme (SEAL)
7. The resources we have in school to support loss and bereavement
8. How we respond to children's questions about death / loss
9. The name of the person responsible for dealing with / giving advice on loss and bereavement issues
10. The training we offer our staff on loss and bereavement issues
11. When we review our policy and procedures (every 2/3 years?)
12. Related policies
 - a. Major incidents and crises
 - b. Emotional health and wellbeing
 - c. Behaviour
 - d. Anti-bullying
 - e. Inclusion
13. The support organizations we work with on bereavement issues: The Laura Centre, EPS, EWS, BST

A SAMPLE BEREAVEMENT RESPONSE CHECKLIST FOR SCHOOLS

Statement	✓ X	Response / action
Up to date policy in place		
Named person responsible		
Training / CPD		
Named support organisations and contact details		
Age appropriate programme in place dealing with loss and bereavement		
Age appropriate resources available		
Preparation procedures in place for staff		
Preparation procedures in place for children		
Communication materials in place for parents / carers families		
Media strategy in place		
Procedures in place when bereavement takes place		
Behaviour / emotional support in place for bereaved, children, staff / adults		
Support for staff available		
Staff communication issues addressed for behaviour, attendance, etc.		
Consistent staff response to death in place		
Procedures in place for remembering the deceased / family		
Practical ways of supporting staff in place		

NOTES FOR PARENTS/CARERS

FOR PARENTS/CARERS OF BEREAVED CHILDREN

When a death affects a family it is difficult for everyone. As a parent/carer of a bereaved child you may be struggling to deal with your own feelings and thoughts as well as the practical consequences of the death. You will know your own family and child better than anyone else and will need to find the best way to support them through the death. These notes aim to provide a few key points to help you think through the best way to support your children in the early stages following a death.

Children benefit from being included as much as possible. This means children need to be given clear age appropriate information about the death and the rituals and ceremonies that may follow. Sometimes, for instance at a funeral, it may feel hard to look after a child as well as cope with your own feelings. In this case it may help to have someone else the child knows and likes be there for them.

Bereaved children often feel anxious when someone has died, keeping to familiar routines and carers can help provide reassurance and reduce anxiety.

It also helps children to be given clear undivided attention. Though this may be difficult it is really helpful if it is possible. With a quiet undisturbed space it may be much easier to listen to a child and provide them with the information and comfort that they need.

Every one is different, but most children, especially younger children, benefit from hugs or cuddles, which can be very important at this time. You will know your own child best. Evidence shows that children benefit from being able to talk about the person who has died, the illness or events which have caused the death as well as other thoughts and feelings they may have. Finding ways to be open and honest about what has happened really helps. This does not mean having to share every detail of what has happened or all your thoughts and feelings. There is some information about 'Causes of Death' on pages 27-29 and some detailed guidance on Winston's Wish website - www.winstonnswish.org.uk It is important to remember that if children are told something that turns out to be untrue it will undermine trust.

Sometimes children may try to comfort you or distract you if you are upset. It is useful to reassure them and help them learn about grief. For example by saying things like "I am very upset and sad because Dad (or whoever) died... though it is hard and hurts, it helps to let our pain out....I can't talk more right now because I am so upset but will be able to talk later". Over time it helps a child to know that we can cope with even the most difficult and painful feelings."

FOR PARENTS OF OTHER PUPILS IN A SCHOOL OR CLASS

A death in a school, or in the family of a pupil, may raise questions and issues for children. Every child is different and you know your own children and their experience better than anyone. These brief notes may help you think through the best way to support your child and answer any questions they may have.

Providing clear age appropriate information helps to avoid confusion and often reduces anxiety. Firstly, especially with younger children, it is important to be very clear about what has happened – use the word “dead” and “died” (other terms can be confusing). It is also helpful to give some guidance about how those affected may be feeling – for instance talking about them being very upset, angry, sad or frightened.

When children are friends with others who have been bereaved it may help to give them some simple ideas about how to talk with them. Sometimes the simplest things like “I am so sorry to hear about , I don’t know what else to say.”

It is helpful for children to develop an understanding of all life changes and events as they grow up. Questions about death and dying are natural and help them to make sense of the world and their experience. In the fairly recent past, children in this country would see the realities of death from an early age – for instance visiting homes with an open coffin.

Sometimes children may feel anxious about the thought of death, for instance if someone else’s mum or dad died they might ask “Will you die?”. It is important to be as reassuring as possible, but still be honest. There may be important information to understand about a particular death – for instance that a “Heart Attack” is not an attack on your heart and that they usually happen because someone already has an illness or damage there (even if they did not know it). Saying something like “I am healthy and the Doctor says my heart is fine and I plan to live until you’re really old, at least as long as Grandma and she is 80” – may help to reassure. However we cannot pretend that we control life and death or guarantee that we will not die.

If you are concerned about your child as a result of a death you may want to access further information and/or help. A list of useful resources, help lines and websites is available through the school.



HELPFUL HINTS FOR A BEREAVED PUPIL RETURNING TO SCHOOL

- Make active efforts to contact the family and show that you care about their loss.
- As much as possible find out what has happened and what the pupil has been told.
- Support parents/ carers to involve their children and talk openly with them.
- Make contact with a pupil and let them know what has been happening in class – even trivial, silly events.
- Acknowledge what has happened directly with the pupil.
- If possible talk to the pupil about what would help their return
- Help them think through what information and how they would like it shared with the class. Sometimes you may need to let them know what has already been said and why.
- Help their friends and classmates to be sensitive to their needs. Consider doing an activity or reading something that helps them to consider and explore what might be helpful whilst acknowledging that everyone's needs are different.
- Mutually agree a link person for them to talk to about what has happened. Encourage them to help identify someone they find it easy to go to.
- Be mindful of special days – anniversaries, birthdays, mother's day etc.
- Be sensitive to areas of school life that may strongly remind them of loss e.g. parents' evenings, a topic or assignment that focuses on death or family.
- Remember that for many children school provides familiar, comforting routine where they want to be 'normal' and fit in.
- Consider helping classmates to write to the bereaved (see writing frame below)

WRITING FRAMES FOR PUPILS TO WRITE TO A BEREAVED CLASS-MATE

Pupils may find it useful to be given some prompts, a sample writing frame is given below but the exact wording will depend on the individual circumstances including the age of the class and the nature of the bereavement.

Address etc.

Dear -----

I am sorry

When I heard the sad news it made me feel

At school.....

I remember

The thing I will miss (most) about

I hope

With best wishes

SUPPORT FOR STAFF

It is important to recognise that bereavement within school may impact staff. This may be because of their own grief, past losses or because they are touched by someone else's pain (or a mixture of these).

It has been said that grief is painful both to experience and to witness.

In the normal business of school life it is all too easy to overlook the needs of staff. It is really important that staff are allowed to be human as part of being professional. The same issues and models may apply as much to members of staff as to anyone else.

As well as being important to value and take care of staff in their own right, good practice in this area is likely to transmit to the whole school community. Well-supported people are better able to support others.

Remember that senior staff have support needs too – sometimes these may be over-looked or it may feel more difficult to find sources of support.

Some suggestions from previous Laura Centre training days with school staff include (these may apply to general work situations as well as bereavement):



- Providing a formal or informal buddying system
- Ensuring there are good communication systems within the staff team
- Providing opportunities to mentor or exchange skills (e.g. someone may share their experience of supporting bereaved children with someone who is more up to speed with computers).
- Provide cover if someone feels unable to teach
- Good training

- Ensuring people are given adequate support and feel capable to carry out the roles they have been given.
- Opportunities to de-brief and off-load stressful feelings and experiences
- Access to counselling or other support services
- Acknowledgement and reward systems
- Opportunities to attend funerals
- Have awareness that staff may feel de-skilled or suffer from low self-esteem
- Time and space to support individual children away from other duties

Feeling really listened-to and understood can make all the difference. This is easier in a non-judgemental, accepting and confidential space.

ASSEMBLIES AND MEMORIAL EVENTS

INFORMING PUPILS ABOUT A DEATH

Where a member of a school community has died (a member of staff or a pupil or a volunteer) it is important to acknowledge this publicly and as soon as possible. The assemblies may be whole school, by year or by class as appropriate – ideally all pupils will be informed at the same time. Consider the guiding principles ([page 17](#)) and how they apply to your situation. Things to consider/cover:

- In most cases there will be some information already circulating (“some of you may have heard....”)
- Supply what clear information you can whilst acknowledging if there are unknown/uncertain aspects.
- Some pupils may have been very close to the person who died, others may not have known them. In a whole school assembly, for instance, it may be appropriate to indicate the need for thoughtfulness and consideration for those people (family and friends) who are close to the deceased.
- Let them know how they can express support or feelings, for instance if there is an opportunity to write in a memory book.
- Where they can go for support or help.
- If there will be more information or opportunities to be involved in the future.

MEMORIAL EVENTS

Where a member of the community has died it is important to find ways to collectively honour and remember their life.

Timing:-

Usually you will want to allow some time to pass so that the immediate shock and disorientation have passed. You may want to consult with family members to see if they want to be involved and when would suit them. It is also important to consider the needs of pupils – that it is soon enough for them generally to feel connected to the event, and also where possible to avoid pupils close to the deceased having left school (for instance in Year 6). Where this cannot be avoided (for instance for a death at the end of summer term or in the school holidays) see if there is a way to invite back former pupils.

Memorial activities

It is important that you plan an event which feels right for your school /setting and the life of that particular person. It is important to liaise with the family and to see if they would like to be involved or present at the event(s).

Here are some ideas of things that can be used as part of remembering a person. These may be done separately or combined:

- Lighting a candle
- Holding a minute’s silence.

- Writing messages /memories on cards that can be posted into a box, or stuck in a memory book or wall.
- Giving an award or honour in the name of the person who died connected to their interest.
- Raising money for a charity in their memory.
- Sharing something that person wrote or produced.
- Playing a piece of music or song.
- Reading a poem.
- Planting a tree.
- Decorating or placing something around the school in their memory.
- Invite pupils to contribute their own suggestions as to the best way to remember the person.
- Something from a previous activity for pupils close to the deceased could be used if appropriate (for instance if pupils had been invited to produce poems or songs).
- The canteen could have the person's favourite meal on the menu for the day of the memorial event.

PRIMARY AND PRE-SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN

AGE SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

page 50

THE NEEDS OF BEREAVED CHILDREN

page 55

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

page 59



AGE SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

Every child develops an understanding of death in their own unique way at their own pace. The stages below are given as a very loose guide to some of the age specific issues that may arise. Other more general guidance in this resource may add to or reinforce understanding and ideas of how to support a child including: the needs of bereaved children ([page 55](#)) FAQ's ([page 59](#)), and activities ([page 95](#)).

These notes were developed by Steve Harris as part of a resource developed by Healthy Schools Leicestershire.

BETWEEN BIRTH AND TWO YEARS:

Understanding:

- Babies and toddlers of this age generally have no understanding of the concept of death.
- Babies and toddlers can experience loss, and distress may be heightened by the lack of language to express themselves.
- They will absorb the emotions of those around them, and sense the disruption to their lives.

Possible Reactions:

- Distress could manifest itself through: increased crying, changes to feeding patterns, disturbed sleep, changes in bladder and bowel movements, irritability and disturbed sleeping patterns. Babies and toddlers may lose interest in toys, or those around them.
- At the older end of this age range toddlers may seek to find the absent person by returning to familiar places where they used to be found.

Providing Support:

Keep normal routines and structure where possible.

Be verbally and physically affectionate and reassuring.

As far as possible maintain other familiar aspects of the child's life such as comforters, toys etc.

BETWEEN TWO AND FIVE YEARS:

Understanding:

Children tend to perceive death as reversible. Despite being able to tell you that someone is dead, they may still expect them to return, or express concern regarding their whereabouts or wellbeing

- Children may not have logical thinking, and may engage in 'magical thinking' believing that if they behave in a particular way they could bring the deceased back. This may also lead to children blaming themselves for the death by associating it with things they think they did wrong. In this case it must be made clear to the child that their actions are in no way connected to the death.
- Children's developing language may lead to distress and confusion as they are unable to express themselves.
- Children may also feel unexpressed guilt.
- Understanding still highly influenced by emotional state of those around them.

Possible Reactions:

- The child may or may not appear anxious. An outward lack of anxiety does not mean that the child is not grieving.
- Children might 'regress' to behaviours from a younger age-such as 'baby-talk', bed-wetting, thumb sucking, temper tantrums etc.
- The child may demonstrate confusion or frustration through irritability, anger or protests.
- Children may repeatedly ask the same questions in order to try to make sense of things.
- The child may anxiously hunger for affection and be 'clingy', or suffer increased separation anxiety from carers.
- Some children may escape into play.
- A child may still be expecting the deceased to return.

Providing Support:

- Keep normal routines and structure, as well as familiar objects, people and surroundings as much as possible.
- Listen carefully and help the child in understanding and verbalising the situation and their own feelings.
- Provide opportunities for expression through play, drawing etc.
- Avoid euphemisms such as "Mummy went to sleep." These can be especially confusing for young children.
- Ensure the child does not feel responsible in any way. It may be appropriate to gently correct any 'magical thinking.'
- Be tolerant of regressive behaviours.

BETWEEN FIVE AND EIGHT YEARS:

Understanding:

- At the younger end of this stage most children will recognise that being dead is different to being alive, whilst at the older end most children will recognise the permanence of death. At the older end children will usually recognise that death can happen to anyone.
- Children may begin to fear that others they love will also die.
- A child may engage in 'magical thinking', and also may feel guilt for their feelings, or blame themselves in some way.
- Children may wish to gain a greater understanding by asking concrete questions, possibly of an intricate nature regarding what happens to the body etc.
- A child may have misconceptions received from wider peer group.
- A child may begin to show greater understanding of the feelings of others.

Possible Reactions:

- Many of the reactions seen in younger children may still be evident.
- A child may disguise their own grief or copy coping mechanisms seen in adults who are grieving.
- A child may exhibit separation anxiety and clinginess, possibly leading to school phobia and loss of confidence.
- A child may experience mood swings, and the grief may appear to come and go.
- A child may find forming relationships harder.
- Some children show increased aggression or angry outbursts.
- There may be illnesses such as headaches, stomach aches, nausea etc. caused by anxiety (psychosomatic.)

Providing Support:

- Much of the support from younger stages still applies.
- Be tolerant of erratic behaviour whilst still providing secure boundaries.
- Provide factual and age appropriate information.
- Ensure the child is able to ask questions and grieve openly. Avoid encouragement to 'be strong', as suppressing the natural responses may cause problems later.
- Share age appropriate books that tackle the subject of death and bereavement.

In School:

- With parental consent, consider group discussion/circle time etc.
- Appoint a member of staff close to the pupil to listen to them, provide help and keep a watchful eye for incidents such as bullying.
- Offer opportunities for acts of remembrance in both the short and long term.
- Provide a safe-place to which the child can retreat for time alone or one to one care.

BETWEEN EIGHT AND TWELVE YEARS:

Understanding:

- Builds on the understanding from the 5-8 stage.
- Children increasing understanding of the inevitability of death, potentially increasing anxiety for others.
- Empathy with others who are bereaved begins to increase.
- Children may take on 'adult' roles in supporting others, which may prevent them from allowing themselves to mourn fully.
- Increasing desire to know details about death and funeral arrangements etc.
- Becoming aware of own mortality.
- Increasingly aware of how their world will be changed as a result of the bereavement.
- May experience anger and feelings of guilt.

Possible Reactions:

- Many of the reactions seen in younger children may still be evident.
- Some children may be reticent to express the emotions they are feeling.
- A child may become fearful regarding their own health or that of others.
- A child may exhibit challenging behaviour. This will need to be handled sympathetically, though stability and consistency of boundaries should be maintained to aid a feeling of security.
- A child may develop psychosomatic illnesses such as sickness or headaches, resulting in more erratic school attendance.
- Bereavement may affect progress at school, and lead to under performance in work and exams.

Providing Support:

- Much of the support from the previous stage still applies.
- Encourage the child to feel they can talk about their experiences.
- Provide a range of alternative ways for the child to express themselves, such as writing, drawing, dance, role-play, etc.
- Be open and honest, and don't be afraid to tell the child if you don't have an answer.
- Avoid statements such as 'Be strong.' or 'Dry your eyes.' that imply the grief reaction should be held back.
- Provide fun opportunities for the child to take a break from grieving, and ensure they know it is OK to relax.
- Maintain consistent and fair expectations, whilst also allowing for more erratic behaviour.

THE NEEDS OF BEREAVED CHILDREN

The following notes draw heavily on the work of William Worden as well as our own experience of working with bereaved children. In “Children and Grief”, (Guilford Press, New York, 1996) Worden summarises the findings of the two year long Harvard bereavement study, which charted the impact of the death of a parent on children. Worden states that children have ten needs.

1. ADEQUATE INFORMATION.

Children need clear information, given in age-appropriate language, for instance, “He’s died” – rather than phrases such as “We’ve lost him”. It is important to give enough information without overwhelming a child. Sometimes the honest answer to a child’s question may be “I don’t know”, or “I can’t tell you just now”.

Sometimes with traumatic death (suicide or murder) it may help to provide information in stages over weeks, months or even years. Giving simple facts at first (e.g. “Daddy died last night”), can be followed with more information later, perhaps prompted by the child’s questions.

Some key aspects of death may need to be repeatedly explained to younger children, in particular the finality of death, the fact that it is irreversible, and that people who are dead feel no cold, hunger or pain.

Some families have spiritual or religious beliefs about death. If talking about these matters, it is helpful to separate out what happens to someone’s body and their soul or spirit. It is important to respect the child and family’s views.

If at all possible, it is helpful for children to be given some preparation if someone close to them has a terminal illness

2. FEARS AND ANXIETIES ADDRESSED.

It is a natural reaction to feel frightened following a death. Children may particularly fear that a surviving parent (or carer) will die or that they may die themselves. Sometimes lack of understanding about a particular death, or death in general, may exacerbate fears. Fears are often worst at night, especially at bedtime or at other times of separation (e.g. going to school, staying at someone else’s house). Giving the child something to look after, or something to look forward to, helps them to understand that the separation will be short

It is important to reassure wherever possible, but equally it is important to be truthful. For example, a bereaved child who asks a surviving parent, “Will you die?”, will not easily accept a statement which offers false certainty, such as, “No, of course not.” This child already knows that parents can die, maybe in sudden and shocking ways. However, a suggestion that the surviving parent will probably live a long time (“Look at Grandma, she is 87!”) and sharing plans about who would care for them in the unlikely event of early death can be reassuring. Clear accurate information helps to reduce fears - for example, talking about dad dying from a brain tumour and explaining how this is different to feeling poorly and having a headache.

3. REASSURANCE THEY ARE NOT TO BLAME

Young children are still learning the difference between things that they caused to happen and

things that had nothing to do with them. For example they naturally experience extremes of emotion and may connect an earlier angry tantrum with someone's death. It may be necessary to give them clear, repeated messages that they are not to blame.

4. CAREFUL LISTENING AND WATCHING

We all show our thoughts and feelings in many ways, not just by what we say. Children may express their feelings through their play, behaviour and the way they relate to others. Maybe they do not do things they always used to enjoy, or it seems very important to do something that 'daddy' did. Or they go very quiet at a particular time. Or they make a big fuss about something that might appear insignificant.

Sometimes it can be helpful to find out what is behind a question. For instance, if a child asked: "What happened to John when he died?". It might be worth saying: "I wonder what you think?" The child's answer to this question may reveal more precisely what he wanted to know as well as helping him to find his own answers. This question might be about what caused his death, the physical changes in the body following his death, a spiritual question about his soul or something else entirely.

5. VALIDATION OF INDIVIDUALS' FEELINGS

The Harvard bereavement study found that 2 years after death one quarter of the children had been admonished for not showing enough feeling, whereas another quarter were told they should have finished grieving. This latter group included children who reported high levels of crying into the second year (Worden).

Allow for individual differences both in feelings and in the expression of feelings. There is no one way to grieve, in fact there are as many ways to grieve, as there are people.

It is important to let a bereaved adult or child know that the death, however painful, is something they can talk about. However, it is not helpful to make comments like: "I know how you feel", "You've got to be brave", or "You should try and forget it", or "At least you've got another sister". These all have the effect of stopping any real conversation about what has happened, and denying the reality of the loss.

Sometimes validating a feeling, especially feelings of despair or deep pain, help us to move through those feelings, at least temporarily. When we believe it is not OK to feel something our feelings can get locked away inside us. This can make them harder to deal with and may lead to difficulties in later life.

6. HELP WITH OVERWHELMING FEELINGS

We all sometimes need to protect ourselves from difficult or painful feelings. Sometimes young children want to pretend that something awful has not happened, or at least forget about it for a while. It is important to respect this need at the same time as providing an environment that encourages confidence in our natural capacity to deal with difficult emotions.

Sometimes children will feel very angry, destructive, anxious, or withdrawn.

Carers need to balance children's need for consistent boundaries and expectations about their behaviour, with an acceptance that they may be less capable than you would ordinarily expect from a child of their age. For instance they may temporarily go backwards with potty training dressing themselves.

Being alongside a child in play or other activity may provide opportunities to help them express their feelings. For example, “Teddy’s feeling really cross because his mummy’s died and he can’t see her again.”

7. INVOLVEMENT AND INCLUSION.

It is important to involve children in acknowledging and commemorating a death. This may include visiting a sick person before death, seeing the body after death, their involvement in the funeral and their opinions about memorials. Seeing how the death affects their family and friends will help them to feel less alone.

Even where families have clearly defined choices or traditions around death, a child may still be able to contribute something to a funeral or memorial.

8. CONTINUED ROUTINE ACTIVITIES

Children benefit from being able to continue routine, previously enjoyed activities and interests. It is sometimes hard for adults to see children wanting to carry on with things so soon after a death (e.g. going to football training). It is natural for children to dip in and out of grief, and just as adults need to carry on with the normal routines of daily life (making meals, cleaning the house etc.), so children need to play.

Play may naturally include re-enactment of events surrounding the death or illness.

It is especially important following traumatic loss to provide as much stability and continuity as possible. The death of someone close is often very frightening. The child needs familiar activities and people to help them realise that, though life will never be the same, there are still many things that remain constant.

9. MODELLED GRIEF BEHAVIOURS

“Children learn how to mourn by observing mourning behaviour in adults.” (Worden p. 145).

Through sharing our own experience we can provide repeated opportunities for a child to make sense of and share their own feelings. It is important to be true to ourselves and open about our own feelings. At the same time it is important to be sensitive to a child’s needs when talking to them. There may be information that it is not appropriate for a child to know at this time.

Adults can promote an environment where it is easy to talk about the deceased and to acknowledge good and bad memories.

When talking about such things it is natural to feel sad. It is also important to acknowledge anger, guilt and fear, but to do this in a way that does not overwhelm the child.

10. OPPORTUNITIES TO REMEMBER.

When someone who played a significant part in a child’s life dies there will be countless moments when the child is reminded of their absence. When a family is able to speak about the deceased naturally, it helps a child to make sense of their own reality. At the same time it is important to respect that any individual may need to protect themselves from pain at times, and a child may not want to talk about the deceased.

Sometimes when significant events are coming up, like anniversaries, Christmas, or other festivals, it is useful to plan in advance how the day will be spent. Families have found it helpful to do something in memory of the deceased at the beginning of special days, for example, looking at photos and talking about the person who has died. Such times can also be a good opportunity to remind children that it is OK to have fun, perhaps by saying something like: "I'm sure Mummy would want you to enjoy today as much as possible, though we are bound to feel sad when we are missing her."

Very young children who never met their deceased parent or sibling may not feel the need to ask questions about them – but older ones will. And as teenagers develop their own identity, it is helpful for them to have a sense of where they come from. It is much less painful for children to grow up with this knowledge than for them suddenly to find out later on.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – YOUNGER CHILDREN

These questions were posed by children's professionals who took part in focus groups. This research was part of the process of producing the training courses designed to complement the 'Not Too Young to Grieve' and 'Teenage Grief' DVDs. The courses and their content were produced in partnership with Rose Griffiths from the University of Leicester, School of Education. The courses are available to download free from the Childhood Bereavement Network website (see [page 40](#)).

There are no 'right' answers to these questions, the bullet points below each question provide some initial ideas which we hope will stimulate your own thoughts.

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HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN WHAT “DEAD” MEANS TO A YOUNG CHILD?

- Young children need repeated age appropriate information.
- It may take years for full comprehension to develop.
- Use the words “dead” and “died” rather than words like “gone to sleep”, or “lost”.
- Give a simple explanation of the cause of death and how that prevents the body from working.
- Explain that someone who has died does not eat or drink, nor feel pain. They have not gone away so they can’t come back to life.
- Seeing a creature that is dead helps understanding more than words. Even seeing a dead insect and noticing the differences from a live insect can help.
- In many cultures it is expected that children will be able to see the dead body, to help them understand what has happened.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IN THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF A DEATH, TO HELP A CHILD OR THEIR CARER? SHOULD I SAY ANYTHING, OR SEND A CARD?

- This is a significant event in a child’s life and we need to acknowledge it. Just saying something like “I am very sorry to hear your mummy has died” is important. It helps the child to know that you are aware of the death.
- A card or note to a carer acknowledges this loss and may give you the opportunity to offer help.
- When deciding what information needs to be shared and how, consider the needs of: the bereaved child and their family, other children, and staff in your setting.

HOW CAN WE INCLUDE CHILDREN IN THE CEREMONIES SURROUNDING DEATH?

- Some families will follow fixed or traditional practices or customs following a death. Children benefit from a clear explanation of what is going to happen.
- Even quite young children can contribute to a funeral or memorial, for example, by choosing flowers, a piece of music, drawing a picture or choosing a favourite toy to bring with them.
- Sometimes if a child has not been directly involved in the funeral (or was not able to understand it), the family could hold a child-friendly ceremony to remember and say good-bye.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO STOP CHILDREN BLAMING THEMSELVES OR OTHERS UNREALISTICALLY?

- Make sure you use simple and unambiguous words to explain the cause of death. In many cases words such as “there is nothing anyone (or we) could have done to stop Daddy dying” are helpful.
- Pay attention to what a child says or does, including in any role play, so that you can reassure them if they show signs of guilt or regret about things they have done.
- Remind them of positive things they did for the person who died. For example, “Your sister loved playing hide and seek with you”.
- If a close family member or carer has a terminal illness it is helpful to give some advance warning that they are seriously ill

WHEN A CHILD WHO HAS BEEN BEREAVED IS BEHAVING BADLY, HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?

- What do we mean by bad behaviour? We want to help children not to associate themselves with the label bad.
- It is generally helpful to keep consistent boundaries. These help to provide safety and containment.
- Whilst still keeping boundaries it is helpful to acknowledge feelings that may be being expressed. “I can see that you are very angry, it is OK to be angry, but not OK to punch me”.
- Whilst not condoning challenging behaviour it is important to try to understand what may be behind it.
- It is quite common for children to be less capable and appear to go backwards for a time following a bereavement. Concentration and other abilities may not be at the level they were before, especially if a child feels anxious or afraid.
- Addressing the needs of the child for instance for information, reassurance and security may help to address the underlying cause of difficult behaviour.

FOR HOW LONG WILL CHILDREN GRIEVE?

- A significant bereavement will be part of a child’s experience for the rest of their life.
- Certain events, reminders or anniversaries are likely to trigger feelings and thoughts about the dead person.
- Children go in and out of grief. This is true both over the short and longer term. So directly following a bereavement they may move in and out of grief feelings from moment to moment.

- As they grow and develop they may re-visit a death with their new awareness and understanding, this may trigger new feelings of grief.
- Studies have shown that children are affected by bereavement for a long time. One two-year study showed that a significant proportion of the children were showing more emotional distress two years after a death than immediately following their bereavement.

SHOULD STAFF SHARE THEIR OWN FEELINGS WITH CHILDREN? HOW CAN STAFF SUPPORT EACH OTHER?

- Children learn from others. Often it is through adults talking about thoughts and feelings that children make sense of their own experience.
- In supporting a child we need to focus on their experience rather than our own. However it is important to acknowledge your own feelings, especially where they also recognise a child's loss e.g. "I feel sad when I think about your mummy dying".
- Talking about your own experience of loss in age appropriate language can be very helpful to a young child.
- All staff that work with a bereaved child need to be informed as quickly and clearly as possible about a death. If a death affects a whole staff team, try to ensure that everyone is informed.
- In supporting staff it is important to respect individual differences. Some may need the opportunity to talk; others may prefer to cope by getting involved in other activities or focussing on the needs of the children. It is valuable to acknowledge the impact a bereavement may have on the staff.
- Some time at staff meetings can be given to address issues and acknowledge the impact of a loss.
- How can we help children to remember and make sense of the life of the person who has died?
- Talk naturally about the person who died.
- Photographs are invaluable in helping to recreate some aspects of the life of the person who died.
- A child is likely to be interested in two different aspects of their life: one, the relationship to the child and two, what they were like as a person. So, if a parent has died, a grandparent will be in a unique position to share about this person's life as a child.
- Creating memory boxes for each bereaved child helps honour their unique relationship to a dead person. If objects or photos have a story or a memory attached it makes them more meaningful to a child.
- Sensitively acknowledging anniversaries and other significant events (e.g. Mother's day) may provide opportunities for the child to remember and make sense of their loss.

HOW ARE OTHER YOUNG CHILDREN LIKELY TO REACT WHEN ONE OF THEIR PEERS IS BEREAVED? WHY DO YOUNG CHILDREN SOMETIMES REACT BY BULLYING A CHILD WHOSE MOTHER OR FATHER HAS DIED?

- They may react in a whole host of ways; some common reactions are fear, disbelief, not understanding, anger and sympathy.
- The information they are given including guidance about how to be with the bereaved child can make a significant difference to behaviour.
- It seems likely that bullying sometimes comes about from fear and lack of understanding or knowledge. Often children find it frightening to think that someone so significant can die. They may blame the bereaved child for their own feelings and want to make them “wrong” for what has happened.
- Children sometimes use ‘difference’ as a cue to bully. Bereaved children’s own behaviour may add to the perceived difference. On occasion they may also exhibit angry and aggressive behaviour which may trigger reprisals.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO ABOUT MOTHER’S DAY AND FATHER’S DAY? ARE THERE ANY OTHER SIGNIFICANT CELEBRATIONS WHERE WE NEED TO BE ESPECIALLY THOUGHTFUL ABOUT A BEREAVED CHILD’S EXPERIENCE?

- Openly acknowledge the anniversary recognising that if a father or mother has died these days may highlight the loss.
- If an activity has been planned give the child a choice about taking part, and in what way. In many cases a child will be pleased to make a card for a deceased parent, perhaps placing this on a grave or other special place.
- Other days are child, family and culture specific. Birthdays, religious festivals, visits or meetings with people that have a particular connection to the deceased may all trigger stronger feelings of loss. All these occasions also provide opportunities to remember the person who has died and honour the importance of their relationship.
- Having acknowledged someone’s absence it can be helpful to give a clear message that it is OK for children to have fun. For instance, “Mum would really want you to enjoy your birthday”.

SHOULD WE TALK ABOUT HEAVEN?

- We need to be aware that young children may not be able to clearly understand any explanation of death whether spiritual or physical in nature. Their understanding will increase as they develop.
- It is important to make sure that religious or spiritual explanations do not create fears through misunderstandings. For instance, being frightened that someone (“Jesus”) can come and take you away.

- For many children and families it is natural and important to talk about heaven or another form of after-life. It is important to acknowledge and respect this part of a child's reality.
- Professionals sometimes feel uncomfortable talking about faith. Remember choices can always be given: for instance, "some people believe..., what do you think?"
- Children will often naturally say they want to go and see the person who has died in heaven. This is usually a natural expression of the desire to be with this person. Often acknowledging this feeling is helpful, without worrying about the idea of the child wanting to die.
- People with religious faith would say that the concept of heaven provides comfort and reassurance and is helpful for people.

WHAT DO YOU SAY IF A PARENT HAS DIED NOT FROM ILLNESS BUT FROM SUICIDE, MURDER, DRUG ABUSE OR A PREVENTABLE ACCIDENT?

- Children benefit from being in an open and honest environment
- Each case is unique and it is important to be discerning about how to support each individual child
- Sometimes it may be appropriate for a child to learn the whole story about a death over a long period of time, as they develop and grow. When a death occurs it is important that children see some of the pieces of the jigsaw. Over time they may get more pieces so that eventually they can see the whole picture.
- On occasion more and more detail about the death may be given as a child asks for it.
- There are occasions when certain details about a death are public knowledge and the child may be surrounded by people talking about a death. In these cases it is important to give the child the best information possible.
- If there is a great deal of anger in the family about a death, then some understanding of who or what the anger is directed at helps a child to know that they are not being blamed.

HOW CAN WE HELP BEREAVED BABIES AND VERY YOUNG CHILDREN TO FEEL MORE SECURE?

- Responding to the basic need for physical holding.
- Providing as much that is familiar as possible.
- Sharing openly in age appropriate fashion, for instance allowing them the chance to see the body of the deceased.
- Providing as much continuity of care and carer as possible.
- Storybooks, a familiar piece of clothing from the person who died, or perfume may all provide comfort.

HOW DO YOU HELP A CHILD WHILE THEY ARE ADJUSTING TO A NEW HOME OR CARER?

- Be sensitive to the impact of the change; pay close attention to how the child is responding.
- Acknowledge the reality of the change by talking about differences e.g. “going to bed is different now because you share a room with Chris”.
- Where possible allow the child some choice. Even being given small choices (“Do you want your bed here in this corner or in that one over there?”) helps to give a sense of some personal control.
- Keep as much of familiar helpful routine as possible.
- Allow child to take their time to adjust, allow them to express negative feelings about the change, including towards new carers in their lives.

WHAT PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS OF ILLNESS MIGHT A CHILD HAVE, AS A RESULT OF A BEREAVEMENT?

- First, if a child displays any physical symptoms it is important to treat them as medically appropriate. Make sure that any illness or underlying physical cause has been treated or ruled out.
- Grief and other strong emotional pain hurts, sometimes it hurts physically – places that many people feel this pain are in the throat, chest, stomach and head.
- A child may worry that they could have the same illness as the person who died, and they may echo symptoms of the illness. This may be to seek reassurance that they will be OK.
- Sometimes being physically hurt may provide the opportunity to cry or release other feelings. Children may on occasion deliberately fall over for this release and/or because they need attention.

IF A PARENT WHO DIED WAS ESTRANGED FROM THE ONE WHO IS NOW LOOKING AFTER A CHILD, WHAT ISSUES MIGHT ARISE?

- Family conflict, including issues about custody of the child.
- The child is likely to have to cope with a lot of further changes, these might include: moving house, friends, nursery/school, losing and/or gaining contact with relatives and having a new main carer.
- Where there was little contact with the parent who died it may take longer for the death to fully register. This may be a death and relationship that the child will need to re-visit as they develop.
- If the parent who has died was the main carer then basic issues of care and routine will

arise.

- This is a potentially difficult situation for everyone; however it will make a great difference if people can see the child's needs as a priority when considering practical arrangements.
- A child in this situation has all the needs referred to earlier in the training but some of the needs may be harder to meet or require extra effort on the part of carer(s).
- This situation may be one where a professional setting – playschool, nursery or a child minder – may provide valuable continuity and familiarity.

SECONDARY SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

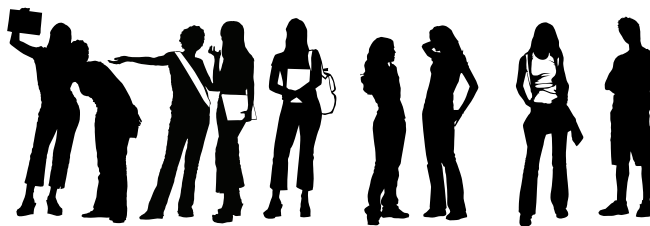
There are a number of challenges in working with young people in this setting. Often there are many members of staff involved with young people – it can be harder to know the needs of any one pupil and to know how others may have responded to them. It is especially important to make sure there is good communication with and about bereaved pupils and their families (see policy framework [page 40](#)).

Most of this section reproduces materials from a course developed to be used with the Teenage Grief DVD (see resources [page 104](#)).

There is some evidence that young people affected by a significant bereavement are more likely to be excluded from school. It is important to make sure that any underlying reasons for difficult behaviour are explored. Sometimes others use bereavement or the heightened sensitivity of the bereaved to bully or draw a reaction. Sometimes underlying anger and anxiety in the bereaved can develop into reactive negative patterns of behaviour; this can be compounded by bullying or isolation from peers.

It is very useful to provide young people with guidance and an opportunity to reflect on how to support someone who is bereaved. In some situations it may be possible to do this in advance of a pupil returning to school following bereavement. A combination of small group work and classroom discussion is likely to be very helpful. There may be other occasions of where similar preparation may be useful, both for the pupil affected by loss and their peers. For example, if someone had been in an accident and was returning to school with a disability.

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DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES (11 YEARS +)

A key task of adolescence is developing a sense of your own identity. For most young people this involves some separation from family – and a strong focus on peer relationships. It is also a time for starting to think more long term about the future, initially this may be about education and training, but also career and future relationships.

A death in the immediate family may complicate some of the natural developmental tasks and the grieving process.

- It may be harder to separate from the family because of high levels of anxiety in the young person and/or parent/carer.
- If there had been conflict with a parent who died – this may lead to excessive feelings of guilt.
- A young person can fall into a depressive state about the future, “What is the point? I will probably die young like my brother.”

Some typical characteristics of teenage years:

- More impulsive, self-conscious and self-centred
- Idealistic
- Developing sexuality and starting to relate to potential partners
- Growing independence
- Changeable in mood and opinion
- Need more sleep but tend not to be tired at night

Understanding (11 years +)

Young people generally share a similar cognitive understanding about death to adults. They are also likely to be aware of and think about the practical consequences of a death – especially if this affects who may care for them or where they may live.

Young people ‘do not know what they don’t know’ or they may feel embarrassed or awkward about asking questions, either way it may be important for others to take the lead in providing information and guidance (for instance as to what happens at a funeral).

Just as with adults, there can be a need to deny the reality of a difficult situation. A range of factors may lead to a potentially ‘anticipated’ death being experienced as ‘sudden’ by a young person.

Some studies have shown that there is a developmental point in early teenage years where a young person’s ability to empathize with others falls. This may be as a result of temporary changes in the brain due to different hormone levels. Whatever the reason – it may help to explain why a characteristic of teenage years, is to be self-focused. This does not mean that they cannot understand others, but it may mean that they need more information or help to be able to see another’s point of view.

THE NEEDS OF BEREAVED TEENAGERS

The following notes draw heavily on the work of William Worden as well as our own experience of working with bereaved young people. In “Children and Grief”, (Guilford Press, New York, 1996) Worden summarises the findings of the two year long Harvard bereavement study, which charted the impact of the death of a parent.

Worden states that children and young people have ten needs:

1. ADEQUATE INFORMATION.

Everybody needs clear information given in a sensitive manner after a death. Sometimes assumptions and expectations get in the way. Some adults assume teenagers have heard or understood things that they have not. Young people sometimes believe they shouldn't need to ask questions, or perhaps, may fear the reaction they will get if they talk about what has happened.

It is important to give enough information without overwhelming a young person. Sometimes with traumatic death (suicide or murder) it may help to provide information in stages. If teenagers are not given enough information by the adults around them, they may fill in the gaps themselves, sometimes inaccurately. Young people sometimes think they know or understand more than they actually do. This may cause misunderstandings or rumours.

Some families have spiritual or religious beliefs about death. If talking about these matters, it is important to respect both the teenager's and their family's views, recognising that these could be different.

If at all possible, it is helpful for young people to be prepared if someone close to them has a terminal illness.

2. FEARS AND ANXIETIES ADDRESSED.

It is a natural reaction to feel frightened following a death. Young people may particularly fear that a surviving parent (or carer) will die or that they may die themselves. Sometimes lack of understanding about a particular death, or death in general, may exacerbate fears. Clear accurate information helps - for example, talking about dad dying from a brain tumour and how this is different to having a headache. It is important to reassure wherever possible, but equally it is important to be truthful. Fears are often worse at night, especially at bedtime or at other times of separation (e.g. going to school, going on a trip or staying at someone else's house).

When we feel frightened or anxious it may limit what we feel able to do. For example a young person may not want to go out of the family home or go somewhere where they would have to meet new people. It is helpful to have a balance between acknowledging these feelings and encouraging young people to carry on with important aspects of life.

It can be especially difficult for teenagers to talk about their fears and anxieties because they may feel too vulnerable and may worry about being judged. Sometimes this results in angry, resentful or withdrawn behaviour. It is often helpful to find a quiet time to ask if there are any questions, thoughts or things that are worrying them. Sharing how you feel or how you might feel in their shoes may help.

3. REASSURANCE THEY ARE NOT TO BLAME

Adults and children often feel that they could have done something differently that may have prevented a death. A natural part of teenagers' development is to over-emphasize their role in things. This may intensify their feelings of guilt and they need reassurance and explanations about why they are not to blame.

Sometimes in families, especially following suicide, there is a desire to blame someone for a death and people will feel very angry. It is important that young people are not targeted for this blame and understand that the anger is not directed at them.

Teenagers often have ambivalent feelings towards parents and siblings. It is not unusual for them to have been involved in angry scenes pre-death. This can lead to a teenager believing that the person who died did not know that they loved them. It can help them to remind them of the times they showed they cared and other positive aspects of their relationship.

4. CAREFUL LISTENING AND WATCHING

We all show our thoughts and feelings in many ways, not just by what we say. Young people may express their feelings through their behaviour and the way they relate to others. Maybe they do not do things they always used to enjoy, or it seems very important to do something that the deceased person did. They may go very quiet at a particular time, or make a big fuss about something that might appear insignificant.

Teenagers will sometimes find it easier to talk while you are doing something else, like washing up or preparing a meal. Perhaps this is because they feel less self-conscious. It is important to respond to their approaches positively. Sometimes it may be worth creating these opportunities, for instance by travelling somewhere together. Often it really helps to share something of our own experience first.

Sometimes it is easier for teenagers (and some younger children) to talk to someone outside of the family. It may be helpful to encourage them to find an opportunity to meet with someone they like in a setting that helps them to communicate.

5. VALIDATION OF INDIVIDUALS' FEELINGS

The Harvard bereavement study found that 2 years after death one quarter of the children had been admonished for not showing enough feeling, whereas another quarter were told they should have finished grieving. This latter group included children and young people who reported high levels of crying into the second year (Worden).

Allow for individual differences both in feelings and in the expression of feelings. There is not one way to grieve; in fact there are as many ways to grieve as there are people.

It is important to let a bereaved person know that the death, however painful, is something they can talk about. However, it is not helpful to make comments like: "I know how you feel", "You've got to be brave", "You should try and forget it", or "At least you've got another sister". These all have the effect of stopping any real conversation about what has happened, and denying the reality of the loss.

Sometimes validating a feeling, especially feelings of despair or deep pain, help us to move through those feelings, at least temporarily. When we believe it is not OK to feel something our feelings can get locked away inside us. This can make them harder to deal with and may

lead to difficulties in later life.

6. HELP WITH OVERWHELMING FEELINGS

We all sometimes need to protect ourselves from difficult or painful feelings. Sometimes young people want to pretend that something awful has not happened, or at least to forget about it for a while. It is important to respect this need, at the same time as providing an environment that encourages confidence in our natural capacity to deal with difficult emotions.

Sometimes young people will feel very angry, destructive, anxious or withdrawn. They need to know that this is normal and they are not alone.

Adults need to balance teenagers' need for consistent boundaries and expectations about their behaviour, with an acceptance that they may be less capable than you would usually expect from someone of their age.

Some teenagers will find it helpful to engage in sport or another activity where they can let off steam or tire themselves out. Time with friends may provide valuable relaxation and the opportunity to "switch off" for a while.

7. INVOLVEMENT AND INCLUSION.

Young people should be given an informed choice about their roles in rituals and activities which surround a death. This may include visiting a sick person before death, seeing the body after death, their involvement in the funeral and their opinions about memorials.

Many young people will never have been involved in any of the customs or ceremonies around death before a significant loss, so they need clear explanations of what they may expect to see, how long things will take and why things are arranged in a particular way. Most young people believe they should have a choice about whether to view a body and most who choose to do so will find it helpful.

These are just some of the ways teenagers have been involved: helping choose what the deceased wears, providing a photo or letter to be placed in the coffin, writing something to be said at the funeral, choosing music or a poem for the ceremony, helping organise a memorial event, creating a memorial website or suggesting a charity for donations in memory of the deceased.

Young people need to feel needed and valued. They can contribute to all aspects of every day life including providing practical help and emotional support to the adults around them, to balance the help they receive themselves.

8. CONTINUED ROUTINE ACTIVITIES

Young people benefit from being able to continue routine, previously enjoyed activities and interests. It is sometimes hard for adults to see them wanting to carry on with things so soon after a death (e.g. going to a club with their friends). It is natural to dip in and out of grief, and just as adults need to carry on with the normal routines of daily life (making meals, cleaning the house etc.), so teenagers need their normal activities. Often these will focus on spending time with their peers.

It is especially important following traumatic loss to provide as much stability and continuity as possible. The death of someone close is often very frightening. Continuity helps to re-

establish stability and helps teenagers to realise that though life will never be the same there are still many things that remain constant.

9. MODELLED GRIEF BEHAVIOURS

“Children (and young people) learn how to mourn by observing mourning behaviour in adults.” (Worden p. 145). Adults can promote an environment where it is easy to talk about the deceased and to acknowledge good and bad memories.

When talking about such things it is natural to feel sad. Other feelings which might be important to acknowledge are anger, guilt, relief, confusion and fear. If an adult can model handling these difficult feelings it will help a teenager too. It is important to do this in a way that does not overwhelm them or give them more information than they want, but young people are usually very good at letting us know when they have had enough.

We should acknowledge that none of us have all the answers and there is no “right” way to grieve

10. OPPORTUNITIES TO REMEMBER.

When someone who played a significant part in our life dies there will be countless moments when we are reminded of their absence. When a family is able to speak about the deceased naturally, it helps a teenager to make sense of their own reality. At the same time it is important to respect that any individual may need to protect themselves from pain at times, and at times they may not want to talk about the deceased.

Sometimes when significant events are coming up, like anniversaries or Christmas, it is useful to plan in advance how the day will be spent. Families have found it helpful to do something in memory of the deceased at the beginning of big family occasions, for example, a visit to the grave or other memorial or looking at some photos together. Such times can also be a good opportunity to remind everyone that it is OK to have fun, perhaps by saying something like: “I’m sure Mum would want us all to enjoy Christmas as much as possible, though we are bound to feel sad that she is not here.”

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS - OLDER CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS

INTRODUCTION

These questions were posed by children's professionals who took part in focus groups. This research was part of the process of producing the training courses designed to complement the 'Not Too Young to Grieve' and 'Teenage Grief' DVD's. The courses and their content were produced in partnership with Rose Griffiths from the University of Leicester, School of Education. The courses are available to download free from the Childhood Bereavement Network website (see [page 103](#)).

There are no 'right' answers to these questions, the bullet points below each question provide some initial ideas which we hope will stimulate your own thoughts.

Though many of these questions are the same or similar to the questions in the primary school section, the bullet points are geared particularly to secondary school aged children.

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WHAT IS “NORMAL” FOR A BEREAVED TEENAGER? HOW DO I KNOW WHEN EXPERT HELP IS NEEDED?

- Adolescence is a time of rapid growth and change. Mood swings, angry outbursts, sullenness, risk-taking and other challenging behaviour are all a normal part of being a teenager.
- Most grieving young people can be helped by friends and family listening, paying attention to them and respecting their feelings.
- Many bereaved young people benefit from meeting others who have been bereaved, to share their experience.
- However, if grief continues to overwhelm them, or the young person remains unable to cope with day-to-day life, or you are aware that they may be suicidal, or their behaviour is causing danger to themselves or others, contact with a professional is advisable.
- Bereavement following suicide, murder or other traumatic death may be particularly difficult.
- If a young person's home situation is particularly chaotic or dysfunctional, this can be another indicator that more in-depth help is required.
- If not sure, seek advice rather than just leave it.
- Sources of help include The Laura Centre, the family doctor, a social worker or a school counsellor.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IN THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF A DEATH, TO HELP A TEENAGER OR THEIR CARER? SHOULD I SAY ANYTHING, OR SEND A CARD?

- This is a significant event in a young person's life and we need to acknowledge it. Just saying something like “I am very sorry to hear your father has died” is important. It helps the teenager to know that you are aware of the death.
- A card or note to a carer acknowledges this loss and may give you the opportunity to offer help.
- Talk to colleagues about who needs to know about the death and how you will share this information.

WHAT HELPS BEREAVED TEENAGERS TO TALK?

- Everyone finds it easier to talk to someone they feel comfortable with, in a reasonably private setting and when there is plenty of time.
- Often doing something together (a car journey, a shopping trip, a game of cards, or any practical activity), may provide ideal informal opportunities to talk.

- You cannot make a teenager talk about their grief if they do not want to and they may resent being made to feel under pressure.
- There are many ways to express grief apart from talking (for example: playing music, writing, sharing on the internet, or doing something that reminds you of the person who has died).

WHAT CAN WE DO TO STOP YOUNG PEOPLE BLAMING THEMSELVES OR OTHERS UNREALISTICALLY?

- Straightforward reassurance is important. In many cases words such as “there is nothing anyone (or we) could have done to stop Dad dying” are helpful.
- Pay attention to what a teenager says or does, so that you can reassure them if they show signs of guilt or regret about things they have done.
- Sometimes there may have been angry disagreements between a young person and the deceased. It can help to put these into context with their whole relationship. “Mum knew you loved her. Having rows is part of growing up.”
- Remind them of positive things they did for the person who died. For example, “Your sister loved going shopping with you”.
- If a close family member or carer has a terminal illness it is important that teenagers are informed.

IF A TEENAGER IS BEHAVING BADLY, HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?

- Make sure that you do not label a young person “bad” because of particular behaviours. Noticing when, where and with whom a teenager behaves in a certain way will help you to find ways of responding appropriately.
- It is generally helpful to keep consistent boundaries. Knowing there are limits helps young people feel more secure.
- Whilst still keeping boundaries it is helpful to acknowledge feelings that may be being expressed. “I can see that you are very angry, it is OK to be angry, but not OK to swear at me”.
- It is quite common for anyone to be less capable and appear to go backwards for a time following a bereavement. Concentration and other abilities may not be at the level they were before, especially if a young person feels anxious or afraid.
- Addressing the needs of the teenager (for instance, for information, reassurance and security), may help to address the underlying cause of difficult behaviour.

FOR HOW LONG WILL A YOUNG PERSON GRIEVE?

- A significant bereavement will be part of their experience for the rest of their life.

- Certain events, reminders or anniversaries are likely to trigger feelings and thoughts about the dead person.
- Getting on with life is really important to teenagers. This often involves spending time with their friends and doing things that mean they can temporarily forget what has happened. This does not mean they don't care or are not grieving.
- As time goes on they may re-visit a death with new awareness and understanding. This may trigger new feelings of grief.
- Studies have shown that teenagers are affected by bereavement for a long time. The Harvard Bereavement study reported that a significant proportion of children and young people showed more emotional distress two years after a death, than immediately following their bereavement.

SHOULD STAFF SHARE THEIR OWN FEELINGS WITH TEENAGERS? HOW CAN STAFF SUPPORT EACH OTHER?

- Young people learn from others. Often it is through adults talking about their thoughts and feelings that teenagers make sense of their own experience.
- In supporting a young person we need to focus on their experience rather than our own. However it is important to acknowledge your own feelings, especially where they also recognise a teenager's loss e.g. "I felt so sad when I heard about your brother's death".
- Talking about your own experience of loss can be very helpful.
- All staff that work with a bereaved teenager need to be informed as quickly and clearly as possible about a death.
- In supporting staff it is important to respect individual differences. Some may need the opportunity to talk; others may prefer to cope by getting involved in other activities or focussing on the needs of the young people. It is valuable to acknowledge the impact a bereavement may have on the staff.
- Some time at staff meetings can be given to acknowledge the impact of a death and to address any issues and questions that have arisen.

ARE THERE ANY SIGNIFICANT TIMES OR EVENTS WHERE WE NEED TO BE ESPECIALLY THOUGHTFUL ABOUT A BEREAVED TEENAGER'S EXPERIENCE?

- Birthdays, religious festivals, visits or meetings with people that have a particular connection to the deceased may all trigger strong feelings of loss. All these occasions also provide opportunities to remember the person who has died and honour the importance of their relationship.
- Openly acknowledging the anniversary is helpful. Sometimes the young person may tell you about a significant date, at others it may be valuable for a key member of staff to make records so that they are aware of important dates.

- Having acknowledged someone's absence it can be helpful to give a clear message that it is OK for teenagers to have fun and carry on normal activities. For instance, "Happy Birthday Joe, you must miss your mum today, but I bet she would really want you to enjoy your birthday".
- Some aspects of the school curriculum may need to be handled sensitively, for example, in science, the topic of rotting and decomposition (where someone has been buried), or in English, history or RE, stories or beliefs about loss and death. It is important not to avoid these subjects, but to be aware that they may have a different impact on a bereaved young person.
- School parents' evenings, reports, exam results and even routine letters home may be hard for a teenager who has lost a parent.

HOW MIGHT OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE REACT WHEN ONE OF THEIR PEERS IS BEREAVED?

- They may react in a whole host of ways; some common reactions are fear, disbelief, denial, anger and sympathy.
- Being given clear information about the death and how to support the bereaved person will help them.
- Teenagers sometimes use 'difference' as a cue to bully. The bereaved young person's own behaviour may add to the perceived difference. For example they may exhibit angry and aggressive behaviour that triggers reprisals.
- Bullying often comes about from fear and lack of understanding or knowledge. Teenagers find it frightening to think that someone so significant can die. They may bully as a reaction to their own uncomfortable feelings.

HOW WILL A DEATH AFFECT A TEENAGER FOR WHOM THIS IS JUST ANOTHER DIFFICULT THING IN THEIR LIFE THAT THEY HAVE TO DEAL WITH?

- For some young people, home situations and relationships can be complicated and confusing. When a death occurs they may struggle to identify for whom they are grieving and what their relationship to that person was.
- Occasionally a death may bring relief from a difficult or abusive relationship, but once someone has died it feels like there is no chance to put things right. This may result in mixed feelings of guilt, confusion, regret, anger and new hope for the future.
- The combination of difficult feelings and circumstances may lead to a young person "acting out" their internal distress. They may be more likely to get into trouble or take risks (for example, with drugs or alcohol).
- Sometimes grieving goes on hold until other issues are dealt with, or a death may be a catalyst to deal with other problems.
- Teenagers might need help to unravel the complexities in their life and then support with

bereavement counselling when the time is right. They will need to feel reasonably safe and supported to be able to process their feelings around a death.

SHOULD WE TALK ABOUT HEAVEN?

- For many young people and families it is natural and important to talk about heaven or another form of after-life. Equally other families believe there is no life after death. The teenager's belief may not be the same as their family's, and may change over time. It is important to acknowledge and respect this part of a teenager's reality.
- When there is a death this can challenge beliefs or raise issues that have not seemed so important before.
- In a secular setting, it may be appropriate to reflect on a range of beliefs, e.g. "Some people believe ... , other people think..." or to encourage the young person to talk about their own beliefs.
- Remember each family and individual has their own interpretation of religious or other belief. Where this is important, consult the young person.

WHAT DO YOU SAY IF A PARENT HAS DIED NOT FROM ILLNESS BUT FROM SUICIDE, MURDER, DRUG ABUSE OR A PREVENTABLE ACCIDENT?

- We need to acknowledge this loss like any other. We naturally want to protect people from difficult and traumatic events but pretending that they have not happened does not help in the long run.
- Sometimes it may be appropriate for a teenager to learn the whole story about a death piece by piece. It takes time for the reality of a sudden death to sink in. Giving more, and repeated information about the death can help, whilst being sensitive to what the young person can cope with at any one time.
- There are occasions when certain details about a death are public knowledge and the young person may be surrounded by people talking about a death. In these cases it is important to give the teenager the best information possible.
- Sometimes we may doubt a young person's story about a death because it shocks us or does not seem to make sense. Initially accept their version of events and if unsure find a way to check. This may be complicated because different rumours spread around communities following traumatic death.
- If there is a great deal of anger in the family about a death, then some understanding of who or what the anger is directed at helps a young person to know that they are not being blamed.
- Traumatic death may be an area where professional support is especially useful for staff, young people and their families.

HOW CAN WE HELP BEREAVED TEENAGERS TO FEEL MORE SECURE?

- Though they may not ask for it, bereaved young people do need comfort and reassurance. In particular, the first time they do something after a death may be the hardest, for example, coming back to school, or doing something they would normally have done with the deceased.
- Wherever possible give them some control and choice, for example, asking whether they want to come in at the beginning of school or after break-time on the first day.
- At school, college or work it can help to have a nominated person that a teenager can go and see if they are feeling overwhelmed.
- Continuity is helpful, and the chance to do things that are familiar. Often a priority for teenagers is to spend time with their friends.
- Encourage the young person to take part in activities (like sport or music or having a bath) which are relaxing, soothing or allow them to let off steam.

HOW DO YOU HELP A TEENAGER WHILE THEY ARE ADJUSTING TO A NEW HOME OR CARER?

- Be sensitive to the impact of the change; pay close attention to how the young person is responding.
- Acknowledge the reality of the change by talking about differences. For example, “It must be very different now that you are sharing a room with Chris,..”
- Where possible allow the young person some choice. Even being given small choices (“Which duvet cover do you want?”) helps to give a sense of some personal control.
- Find out about familiar routines and keep as many as possible.
- Allow the young person to take their time to adjust; allow them to express negative feelings about the change, including towards new carers in their lives.
- This situation may be one where a professional setting – school, youth club or work – may provide valuable continuity and familiarity.

WHERE COULD WE RAISE ISSUES ABOUT DEATH AND BEREAVEMENT IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM?

- Sometimes a school may need to find ways to respond to a death within its community. One way may be to use particular subjects as a forum to explore relevant issues. It is important to provide opportunities for pupils to explore their feelings, as well as address their needs for information and reassurance. For example art or English are ideal subjects to creatively express feelings and memories. Science could be used to provide information about an illness that led to a death.
- The topic of death and bereavement is so important that it should be included in the

curriculum as a matter of course. This may help young people who have been bereaved in the past and prepare them for future losses.

- Ideally this would be addressed when teachers are planning their work for a coming term or year. For example in Citizenship, PSHE and RE, customs and rituals surrounding death could be explored with classroom discussion. History and Geography may provide an insight into different human experiences of death and change.
- Examples of lessons linked to particular subjects in all key stages are available on the schools' section of the Winston's Wish website. The Childhood Bereavement Charity website includes a book list, including for example 'Childhood Bereavement: Developing the Curriculum and pastoral support' by Nina Job and Gill Frances (2004).

IF A PARENT WHO DIED WAS ESTRANGED FROM THE ONE WHO IS NOW LOOKING AFTER A YOUNG PERSON, WHAT ISSUES MIGHT ARISE?

- There may be family conflict, including issues about custody of the young person.
- The teenager may have to cope with a lot of further changes. These might include moving house, changing school/college/work, losing or gaining contact with relatives or friends and having a new main carer.
- This is a potentially difficult situation for everyone. It will make a great difference if people can see the young person's needs as a priority when considering practical arrangements.
- Where there was little contact with the parent who died it may take longer for the death to fully register. This may be a death and relationship that the young person will need to re-visit as they get older.
- The surviving parent or carer may need to contain their own negative feelings about the deceased, to allow the teenager to freely mourn their loss.

CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS FACTORS

Remember:

- Each family and each child is unique.
- It is helpful to know about a family's cultural and religious beliefs.
- Do not assume that because a religion, family or culture believes or does something that an individual child shares that belief or practice.

It may be helpful to know or be aware of:

BELIEFS ABOUT LIFE AND DEATH

Every individual, family and culture has a different way of approaching death. This includes during terminal illness – this will impact how much information, thoughts and feelings are shared prior to a death.

It may be helpful to be aware of what messages a child has been given or heard about what happens after death? They may have their own beliefs and/or questions.

Remember that for some people making sense of a death involves practical understanding of the cause of death, for others there may be more of a focus on philosophical or religious understanding and for many it will be a mixture of the two.

RITUALS FOR THE BODY

How much has the child been involved and/or made aware of what happens to the body?

Has the child had an opportunity to see the body of someone after they died or seen the person while they were seriously ill?

FUNERALS AND CEREMONIES

How involved have children been in the planning and/or participation in ceremonies around the death?

Have lots of people been involved or just close family members?

LANGUAGE AND EMOTION

A child or family may benefit by being able to talk to someone in their native language. Someone may be better able to be truly understood in their own language. However it is important to consider that language extends beyond the precise meaning of words, it may also relate to how feelings are expressed. Some cultures are more at ease with open emotional

expression; others prefer to keep feelings hidden. (This may impact how individuals journey from Restoration to Loss orientation; see Dual process model [page 32](#))

CONFLICT BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND CULTURAL BELIEFS OR PRACTICES

It is important to recognise that individual needs may not always be best served by a particular belief or practice. They may find that there is conflict between what they want to do or believe and what is 'expected' or 'demanded' of them by others.

As with any issue it may be helpful for someone to help a child or individual explore this inner conflict. This may be done by accepting and understanding their own thoughts and feelings without judgement.

Occasionally there may be good reason to gently challenge a particular family or cultural belief, where it does not seem in the best interests of a child. For instance, if there is a strong message about not including or talking with a child about a death, it may be helpful to provide a family with information (for example about the needs of bereaved children), that may help a child to be better supported.

A guide to beliefs and practices of 6 major religions can be found at "ifishoulddie.co.uk" (<http://www.ifishoulddie.co.uk/religious-traditions-and-beliefs-c37.html>)



BEREAVEMENT AND ATTENDANCE AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Clearly there are a multitude of factors which affect attendance and academic performance amongst others these include: relationships with other pupils, being bullied, self esteem, learning difficulties, other family issues, support for attendance from the family and peer pressure.

Most bereaved children and their families are grateful for the continued routine and stability of school and their attendance, apart from specific family related events, will be unaffected. However there are some specific issues which may arise or be exacerbated as a result of a death in a family these include:

Anxiety – a pupil may feel anxious particularly about a parent/carer's health and well being. This may be because of concerns that a parent might die too (especially following the death of a parent), or because a grieving parent is so distressed that the child is concerned for their well-being. Sometimes a parent's anxiety will be directed at the child – either because they are frightened of losing them as well or because they look to the child for emotional and/or practical support.

Additional roles and responsibilities – To some extent a shift in roles and responsibilities is inevitable following a death and these can often, in time, be positive for a child. However there are some cases where these may get in the way of a child's school work and attendance. These changes may have both a practical and emotional impact. Examples of things that, at an extreme level, could affect attendance include:

- Excessive demands for doing housework, shopping, or helping with a family business.
- Being a 'confidant' and companion for a parent – this may be doubly tiring because a child may stay up later and also be emotionally tired.
-

Ability to concentrate – many children and young people do not have either the ability to concentrate or the energy that they had prior to a bereavement. Factors that may affect their ability to concentrate include:-

- Tiredness, this may be due to the emotional and physically exhausting effect that grief may have. Also it can be as a result of disturbed sleep patterns.
- Anxiety (as mentioned above) may lead to intrusive thoughts which get in the way of the child's current task or activity.
- The impact of shock, trauma may impact for a time the normal functioning of the brain. People of all ages may say "I cannot think straight".
- Some children may feel less confident in general and this may make them less likely to attempt to do things they would have previously, or to give up more quickly.

Bullying / isolation from peers – as mentioned elsewhere there are occasions where perceived difference, vulnerability or quickness to anger may mean that bereaved children become targets for bullying. Positive action to help classmates and/or friends to support bereaved children and young people can prevent these issues arising. It is vital to take seriously any complaint or concern a child raises in this area – in particular, to realize how painful it can feel if others use the bereavement or memory of the person who died, to taunt a child (and this is not uncommon).

Of course bereaved children may be bullies themselves. A previous pattern of behaviour may be exaggerated by the loss. Sometimes young people look for conflict because of the need to get their inner anger and frustration out. Negative feelings that relate to the death or the person who died or other family members may be directed at other individuals or groups at school or elsewhere.

HELPING CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES COPE WITH BEREAVEMENT

INTRODUCTION:

Learning difficulties and behaviour difficulties are sometimes, but not always linked. A learning difficulty includes communication and interaction delay, sensory impairment, cognitive delay and sometimes a combination of these. These difficulties can make it very hard for a young person to take in what has happened and understand the consequence of the loss. They are likely to feel more confused, anxious and frustrated, if the behaviour of those around them change. Children with a limited vocabulary may express their feelings more through behaviour and physical symptoms than words.

CYP WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

Those students with learning difficulties need to understand what has happened both emotionally and cognitively. Intervention needs to be adapted for them at an individual level so they can access the support.

- Using aspects from the science curriculum to distinguish the differences between dead and living things can be helpful, e.g. a dead insect or fish – noticing that it is cold, observing no breathing or movement can help a child to understand that the body is no longer working.
- Alternatively, and also linked to the science curriculum, buying a bunch of flowers and observing them wilt, wither and die can be helpful in showing that death is final and the flowers do not come back to life.

In some instances issues that may arise for younger children may be relevant (some of these are covered in developmental section, [page 50](#), and Frequently Asked Questions [page 59](#)).

If the learning difficulty concerns communication (speech and Language) there are alternative ways of communicating (see also activities [page 95](#));

Computerised talking aid

Drawing and artwork

Sand play

Using objects – buttons, shells etc

Having conversations using musical instruments

Feeling textures – sand, clay, playdough

Creating stories using the pupils choice of objects

The most important aspect of helping these pupils is to value what they speak about. A page divided into two, headed by a sad and a smiley face, enables the child to tell you about their day, their week or their home life. Also useful is a picture of a snaking road on which the pupil draws rocks to show what is getting in the way of them feeling happy again.

Memory boxes and photo albums help CYP keep links and 'continuing bonds' with a family

member who had died. Whatever the pupil wants to include is significant and can be treasured.

Using straight forward language is essential. A child with autism who working literally with language, might think someone who has 'lost' a relative has just been careless.

Being listened to and valued can do much to raise self esteem. One to one sessions can be like gold in the life of the special needs pupil.

Making the most of support staff (TAs, LSAs learning mentors) who have a good relationship with the bereaved child makes good sense in school. It is much easier for the pupil to express their feelings when feeling safe and secure.

BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES

'Behavioural difficulties' is a term often used to describe disruptive classroom behaviour. These outward signs that show a real concern, are very likely to be exacerbated by bereavement and loss, whether a teacher, a friend or a family member.

These difficult behaviours often become worse with the inevitable changes in routine which accompany a death, such as moving house or having changes in a primary carer. In some more extreme cases the young person might self harm (hair pulling head banging or cutting themselves). If the CYP are unable to express strong emotions in words they sometimes show themselves in actions.

HELPING RESILIENCE

Time out of the classroom is often essential. Some pupils are allowed to carry a 'time out' card. When a CYP feels they cannot keep their behaviour under control, the card allows them to go to a prearranged safe place with an adult they can talk to for a specified time.

Keeping boundaries is of vital importance in managing behaviour. Boundaries (e.g. of time and place) not only 'contain' feelings around grief, but also provides a barrier to kick against. Teachers liaising with home, and vice versa prevents a pupil from receiving mixed messages. If counselling is on offer the young person should be allowed to attend the appointments; time to herself to grieve can be a vital stepping stone in controlling behaviour.

Feeling different in the classroom can compound unwelcome behaviour. Death of a family member can set a pupil apart (to them and other pupils). Circle Time can let other class members know about news of a death, along with peer mentoring and peer support providing a longer term back-up.

Labelling is often a contributor to bad behaviour. A 'class clown' even a grieving one can feel the need to live up to his name and reputation. He does not know how to stop, even if he wants to. Counselling or mentoring can provide strategies for a different way of behaving still within their control.

Linking with learning difficulties. If the work is too hard or 'boring', the CYP behaves badly to divert attention from the work. If a parent has died the young person can feel totally unsupported and without an advocate. The cycle of work- bad behaviour- more work-more bad behaviour, needs to be broken. Praise by the right person at the correct time can help the CYP grow in self esteem and can go towards breaking the cycle.

Some peers might believe death to be **catching** as if a **disease**. Class members and friends sometimes shun a grieving child in case they too will lose a parent. Encouraging other young

people to behave normally around the CYP and mention the dead person, if appropriate, can help acceptance and healing.

Communication within learning support departments, as with the wider school population benefits from being linear. If one person is responsible for home school liaison as well as with outside agencies mixed messages are less likely to occur. The communicator can be a teaching assistant, a senco or another adult who has a good understanding of the pupil and of the impact of the death on that pupil.

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Children in care of the local authority, whether long or short term, are often a forgotten group when writing about bereavement.

A pupil might be taken into care when a parent dies, and associated with this death might be multiple losses – home school friends relatives. In one extreme case a father murdered a mother and the children lost both parents when the father ended up in prison.

Often familial links are tenuous for looked after children, but those working with them can liaise with social workers to help complete life -stories and memory boxes. This gives the CYP continuing bonds or links with their dead relative, and in turn can help them cope with and remain in their placement.

AND FINALLY.....

Those staff members doing the supporting for a bereaved special needs child need support themselves. It is vitally important to find support within the department or from other members of staff. The work can be draining so do look after yourself.

LOSS IN THE CURRICULUM

There are many opportunities to explore death, loss and bereavement in the school curriculum. Death and loss are part of life and it is natural that we help children deepen their understanding about these subjects. In many cases these topics also help children to develop empathy, emotional intelligence and consider the needs of others.

As well as considering how you may include these topics in your general lesson planning you will need to consider the impact on bereaved pupils. Often if they are informed and given opportunities to help shape a lesson they will want to be involved. At other times they may prefer an alternative task or topic. Similarly it is always important to be sensitive to the impact that a specific assignment that is not directly related to loss may have: for instance, about families or holidays.

LESSON PLANS

Specific lesson plans for different key stage pupils embracing a range of subject including: PSHE, Art, Design and Technology, Music, Science and Citizenship are available on Winston's Wish and the Child Bereavement Charity websites schools sections (see [page 103](#)).

The Child Bereavement Charity also has a lesson plan for 'Mother's day activities' which could also be adapted for Father's day or other occasions

OTHER LOSSES

This resource will focus on loss through bereavement but there are many other important losses and transitions in children's lives.

Some common losses in childhood with estimated incidence:

Divorce – separation: 25% of 15 year olds parents have been divorced, 40% live with only one parent (source:).

Mental health - 10% of school aged children have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder (source: Young Minds).

Learning disability – up to 10% of children are estimated to have some form of learning disability, nearly 2% moderate to severe. ([page 86](#))

Physical disability – some form of physical limitation recent estimates range from 5% to 10%. 2.6% with a life limiting condition according to 1991 census.

It is beyond the scope of this resource to provide more information on most of these other losses, though there is a brief section on relating the needs of bereaved children to divorce and separation ([page 92](#)).

Whilst every individual's situation and needs are different it is probably true that any young person experiencing a significant loss in their lives need two apparently opposing needs to be taken into account. One is that they are to some extent treated the same as anyone else, the other is that their experience which may define them as different to others is acknowledged. This relates extremely well to the dual process model of grief (see [page 32](#)).

GENERAL / FAMILY LOSSES

Serious illness / disability

Mental health

Moving – house and friends

Relationship break ups

Starting playschool/nursery, school, college, work

Moving country / jobs

Examinations/job hopes

Learning disability

Loss of confidence / self-esteem

Debt

Redundancy

Bereavement

Unemployment

LOSSES IN EARLY YEARS

Weaning

Potty-training

Parent(s) going to work

Birth of a sibling

Sibling starting school

Attachment and separation from primary carer

Parental relationship break-up

Bereavement

Parental illness – physical or mental e.g Post-natal depression

Starting play-school, nursery or with a child minder

Starting primary school

Loss of self-confidence, self-esteem

LOSSES IN OLDER CHILDHOOD / TEENAGE YEARS

Changing school / college

Loss of childhood

Changing relationships

Bullying

Difficult relationships with peers or teachers

Parental relationship breakdown

New parental partners

Physical changes, hormones

Leaving home

Changing expectations from others

Conflict with parents – independence / responsibility issues

Exam pressure

Loss of confidence / self-esteem

Feeling isolated from peers

DIVORCE AND SEPARATION

Children will be affected by divorce, even if they do not obviously show it. In the long run it is likely to be beneficial for children to be encouraged to find ways to express their thoughts and feelings.

There are likely to be two main issues for children: grief that their original family is no more and worries about loss of contact with one of their parents. Where there has been extreme conflict and/or abusive behaviour (between parents and/or towards the child) the situation is likely to be more complicated and difficult for a child to work through.



NEEDS OF CHILDREN

Though the circumstances are different the needs of bereaved children as identified by William Worden are still relevant (see [page 55 & 69](#)). The notes that follow add some brief thoughts about how these relate to divorce or separation.

APPROPRIATE HONEST SENSITIVELY GIVEN INFORMATION

It is vital that information about what is happening makes it clear that parental break up is not connected to the children. It is purely about the adults' relationship with each other.

It is helpful for information to be shared in a way which avoids children feeling like they have to take sides. Any criticism of a partner is likely to make children think they need to take sides - either to defend against or agree with this negative opinion.

If one partner poses a real danger of harm to the other partner and/or the children this needs to be acknowledged.

FEARS AND ANXIETIES ADDRESSED

This is a key and particularly challenging area following separation and divorce. Ideally parents will provide a consistent and reassuring message, but there will be situations where this is difficult. If there is some form of custody battle going through the courts then inevitably there will be uncertainty. Whatever the circumstances it will be important to provide whatever reassuring information is possible – which may simply be that both parents love and care for the child and that practical arrangements will be worked out in time.

EXPLICIT REASSURANCE THAT THEY ARE NOT TO BLAME

Children are likely to blame themselves. After all if there are arguments between two parents it is likely that some of the arguments will have been related to the children and that children will have overheard these. Also, it is inevitable that parents will have been angry or frustrated with children in the normal course of family life (it is all too common for children to think it was because they were 'naughty' that a parent has left).

It is vital to actively reassure children that they are not to blame in any way for the break up of the relationship.

CAREFUL LISTENING AND WATCHING

Children will not necessarily express their feelings about changes, in words. It is likely that some indication of how they are feeling will come through their behaviour and/or in signs of physical distress and upset.

HELP IN DEALING WITH ANGER/BLAME TO OTHERS

Children also may blame one particular parent for the break up. It is important that they are able to talk about and express their feelings in relation to what has happened. Sometimes there may be good reason to blame one parent, at others there may not. It may be helpful for children to find ways to express their anger and work it through so that it does not lead to long term resentment.

Respect and validation of their unique feelings is vital. This may allow them to separate their own feelings from those a parent may have.

HELP IN DEALING WITH AMBIVALENT FEELINGS

It is natural to feel all sorts of conflicting feelings at this time. Here are just a few with some examples of thoughts that could go with them:

Anger (e.g. "This should not happen, we should all be together") versus relief ("At last no more arguments")

Guilt ("I am too much trouble") versus blame ("She should not have left").

Love ("I need and want you") versus hate ("I am angry with you leaving me")

INCLUSION AND INVOLVEMENT

Children can often be "forgotten" in a separation when parents may be naturally pre-occupied with their own emotional turmoil. In this case, involvement and inclusion is not about consulting them about the major decision (i.e should mum and dad divorce), but allowing them to be aware that this process is going on. For instance "Mum and Dad have some problems... we don't know how it is going to end but we are working hard to solve the problems but we do not know what the solution will be".

When it is clear that parents are going their separate ways, it may be possible for children to be involved in some aspects of practical arrangements. This could be something as simple as how a room is decorated in a new home, or choosing an after school-activity. Having some choice about their lives will help to restore a sense of order and some control.

CONTINUED ROUTINE ACTIVITIES

Children will naturally be concerned with how any changes affect their daily lives and interests. Wherever possible showing them and letting them know about things that can stay constant in their lives despite major changes will be helpful.

Ideally parents will plan changes in a way that enables a child to continue to do as many things that they like or which work well for them, as possible. This may include contact with members of the extended family on both sides.

MODELLED BEHAVIOUR

While a child may have different thoughts and feelings about a divorce from a parent – there is still much that they can learn from adults sharing with them. Adults sensitively sharing some of their own experience may be very helpful. For instance a parent could share their sadness at the end of their marriage and that the family cannot stay together. It is also important that they give clear messages and do not give false hope of reunion. Sometimes other adults may be able to share their own experiences or talk about how they imagine they might feel in a similar situation.

When parents treat and talk about each other with respect, it will greatly help to reduce any inner conflict a child experiences about having to take sides with one parent or the other.

OPPORTUNITIES TO REMEMBER HOW THINGS WERE

It is important that children are able to talk honestly about good and bad things from the past. For instance, it is helpful if they are able to positively remember something that involves the other parent or that is based on the whole family being together. Similarly they may need to be able to express difficult feelings about past conflict.

They may also need to express sadness at other losses – for example if they have moved away from friends or a school that they liked. Parents may naturally want to minimise the loss and pain associated with their break-up – but it helps children to be able to express sadness and regret about changes.

ACTIVITIES TO HELP

If you are trying to help a child it is important that you feel comfortable with any methods that you use. Often you may find your own ways of communicating and these may be the best. Any activity is worthwhile if it helps in communication, building a relationship, exploring our understanding or as a means of expression. Sometimes an activity may produce something very clear, for example, a child's misunderstanding or fear. At other times neither the child nor adult may know what (if anything) has been expressed or communicated in an activity. It is important to remember that giving a child clear, caring, honest attention in a safe environment is valuable in itself. They also may be expressing or exploring something that does not have words, or is easier to handle in play than any other way.

The following is a list of some activities or materials that can be used to help a child. Two activities: 'a jar of memories' and 'feelings charts and bodies' are given in more detail; these are activities we do with children's groups.

ARTS AND CRAFTS - CREATIVE MEDIA

If you are in the role of supporting a bereaved child you may find it helpful to offer different means of expressing thoughts and feelings – it is important that the child or young person and you, are both comfortable with what you are offering. It is also important to make sure that the environment is conducive (is there quiet, appropriate privacy, space, will you not be interrupted). There are no set ways of supporting a child with creative media; however there are some suggested guidelines

- Reflect what you see and notice without judgement (e.g. "I notice that there are no leaves on the tree", "I see you have made 3 people, one looks much bigger than the other two").
- It may be helpful to ask open questions. "Can you tell me what is happening here (pointing to a drawing or part of a drawing)", "If this was a story I wonder what it might be about?" "Would you want to change anything in this picture?"
- Give the child the option to leave what they have created behind (some people working therapeutically will encourage a child to leave everything they do each session and then give them the option to take or leave what they want when they finish counselling).
- Where you have a good relationship with a child you may feel it is appropriate to offer connections between something they have produced and their own situation. If you do this it is important to offer your thoughts very lightly and be guided by the child's response. It is what sense a child makes of things that is important, not our interpretation.

DRAWING/PAINTING:

Often children or young people need no suggestion – they will know what they want to put down on paper. However, others may look to you for suggestions, or you may decide it is helpful to give some more structure. Some things that people have suggested include:

Draw something you worry about or that you are angry about or that scares you.

- Draw yourself, use words to describe yourself.
- Draw a recent dream that you have had.
- Draw the ugliest picture you can.
- Draw a house, a tree and/or a person.
- Draw your family/your life – before the death, during the death and now.
- Create a cartoon to illustrate life changes... you might draw the boxes for the child to fill in.

CLAY MODELLING / PLAYDOUGH

Winston's Wish (a grief programme for children in Gloucestershire) use clay hurled against a wall to help release anger. Children throw the clay at pictures of things, events or people that they feel anger towards. Having vented their anger they make something out of the clay.

Tactile things such as clay and playdough may help relaxation and conversations can be easier whilst making something or simply fiddling with or rolling a piece. It can also be hit or thumped on the table in a satisfying way.

As with any media children may use this to express thoughts or feelings or memories. Or make something that helps them. At times what is done with the playdough may be almost incidental, the activity may provide a relaxing environment for conversation to take place. In groups we have found it is satisfying to punch playdough, make weird faces, perform strange operations and generally have fun. Children seem to appreciate a variety of strong colours.

PUPPET ACTIVITIES

Ready-made puppets can be offered to a child, or they can be made from small paper bags (cutting out and drawing on features).

WRITING ACTIVITIES

Writing out feelings can be helpful for older children (and adults). This could take the form of some kind of diary, or writing may take place when there are particular feelings and thoughts that need to be expressed.

LETTERS

It can be helpful to write letters to the deceased. This may help to complete unfinished business or simply be a way of acknowledging the continuing bond with the deceased. It is important that this does not further confuse a child who is unclear about the permanence and irreversibility of death. A child's understanding can be checked by asking questions, "What shall we do with the letter? Do you think Sian (the deceased) will get the message?". This conversation could go into areas where no-one knows the answer. Even so, important issues can be clarified by distinguishing between belief (spiritual or otherwise) and fact (someone who is dead will not come back to life, at least in this world).

LISTS

Lists can be useful in clarifying a child's understanding about death. For instance a list of ideas about death in general or one death in particular could be drawn up. An adult and child could then discuss this list and break it up into 3 categories. Things we know are true, things we know are false and things we believe though may not know for certain.

'True' things' might be - a dead body does not feel pain, or need food, someone who has died cannot come back to us (in this life), it hurts when I remember the death, I love and miss the deceased, and endless others facts and feelings.

'False' things' might be - we should feel OK one month after a death, or this death is a punishment for something I have done wrong, or if I have fun then I do not care, or he died because I shouted "I hate you". As with the true things the list is endless.

'Beliefs' might be – the deceased is in heaven and we will see them again, or they will be reincarnated, or that there is no after-life.

Such an exercise may involve a long process of discussion. Compiling such lists would challenge anyone. Any work in this area requires sensitive handling. It is obviously important to respect family, cultural and individual beliefs. The object is to help clarify a child's knowledge, whilst respecting their individual beliefs.

MEMORIALS

How would a child redesign or create the funeral to the deceased? What words would they put on the grave stone?

MEMORY BOOK OR BOX

Memories – photographs, writing, pictures and precious objects can be placed in either an album or a box. Worden suggests that families create these together; in this way they may help members to share memories and thoughts about the deceased.

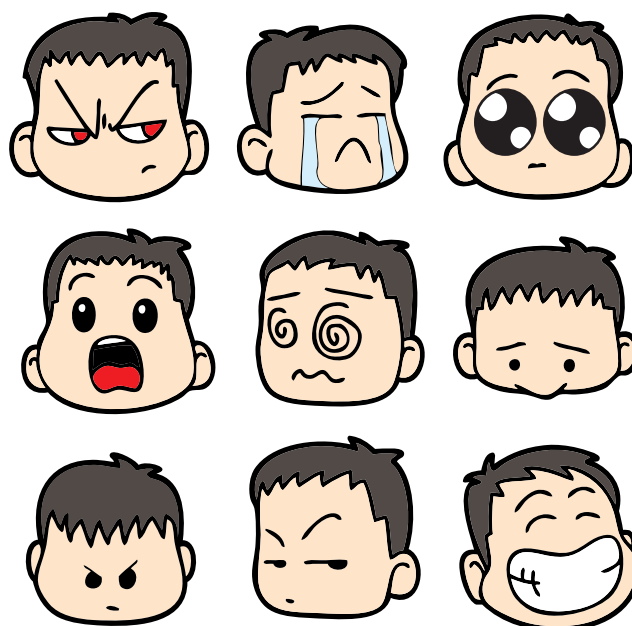
JAR OF MEMORIES (OR SALT SCULPTURE)

This is a way of creating a jar full of memories. This exercise can be useful for anyone of any age, and it is something that families can share together. A child may need help with some of the practical aspects (depending on age and ability).

You need:- different coloured chinks, a small jar with a well fitting lid, sandpaper, one nice

piece of paper, some rough paper.

- Ask the child to write down 5 or so memories involving the person who died. It is important to allow them to include good and difficult memories. Write these on the nice piece of paper.
- Make a mark next to each memory with a coloured chalk which will represent that memory in the jar.
- Fill the jar with salt.
- Now divide the salt into as many piles as there are memories (say 5) and pile the salt onto the rough pieces of paper. Add a small amount of salt to each pile so that there will be plenty to fill the jar.
- Encourage the child to vary the sizes of the piles if some memories are more important to them than others.
- Choose which pile will represent a particular memory. Use the sandpaper to grate the chalk onto the salt. It can help to reduce mess to transfer the salt into a little bowl for mixing and then return it to the paper when it is the correct colour.
- Repeat this process until all 5 piles are coloured to the child's satisfaction.
- Pour the salt into the jar in the child's desired order. Make sure the jar is completely full (otherwise movement will mix up the colours and eventually it will be all brown).
- Put the lid on. The lid can be sealed with adhesive tape so as not to be accidentally removed.
- A cloth cover may be filled over the lid and/or a label with the memories colour code. These can be held in place with a rubber band.
- Encourage a child to keep the list of memories safe with the jar (perhaps in a memory box).



FEELINGS CHARTS AND BODIES

This exercise may be used to explore feelings in any circumstances (not only following a death). It is particularly helpful in small groups where the discussion (see below) can encourage important sharing.

You need: some outlines of the human body (like a 'gingerbread man') cut out in card, coloured felt tips and a chart similar to the one below:

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Angry											
Sad											
Lonely											
Happy											
Guilty											
Scared											
Confused											
Different											
Safe											

- Discuss each feeling. Questions like: "What makes you angry? What do we do when we are angry?" It may be important to share some of your own experience depending on the group or individuals.
- Having discussed all the feelings (even if only briefly), children use colour to show how much of a feeling they generally have (not just at this moment). Ask them to choose one colour for each feeling. For example: Angry 9 red squares, Sad 8 blue squares etc.... Where time is short you may need to be directive about just marking the squares with the colour chosen (some children strive to 'colour in' perfectly otherwise).
- When the chart is complete, bring out the cut out body shapes. Children now use colour to mark on the body shape where the feelings on the chart are felt in their bodies. For example, if scared was coloured green on the chart and they feel fear in their legs they would colour them green.

Sometimes this exercise throws up some quite strong images. It is important to acknowledge

what the children have expressed, but not necessarily to analyse it with them.

We ask teenagers and adults to create their own feelings charts: they use their own words for feelings important to them (as few or as many as they want) and ways of charting them e.g pie charts, pyramids, circles. They then draw an outline of their own body and apply the feeling colours to the areas they associate with particular feelings using the colours they have chosen in the chart.

In a group, or individually, you could use a large roll of paper and draw around someone's body and then use this shape to record feelings on. At the Laura Centre we have done this in teenage groups (they have written words on it), or with individuals who have painted it in over many weeks as part of their process.

STORYTELLING

Sharing a story about death, or feelings or worries can help a child to understand something of their own experience. Alternatively they can be asked to write their own story.

A number of websites with current book lists and brief descriptions are listed on [page 103](#).

GAMES

Board games, drawing games or active games can all help.

Make sure that games are not prescriptive (suggesting that there is a right or wrong way to grieve).

'All about me' is a simple board game available from Barnardo's that can help a child to share feelings and events. It is important that adults join in games like this because part of the benefit is in their modelling for the children.

It's not fair when – simple game where children bang a shoe box on the floor and complete the phrase 'it's not fair when'. After they have all had a turn the boxes are piled up and knocked over.

Younger children may spontaneously start games as monsters, dragons or princesses; where it has been possible we have joined in these games. Often children like to be scary and it may be helpful to express our fear of their monster ("Oh no I'm frightened, please don't hurt me", etc). In our work cushions have been used in a variety of ways, most commonly someone has been buried underneath them.

DVD'S / WEBSITES

Some DVDs are listed in the useful resources sections and some websites have links to video footage of children and young people talking about their experience (see [page 104](#)).

These could be used for individual support of a child or family, they may also make a useful focal point for a group or class discussion around grief. They can play a useful role in normalising a range of feelings and experiences. It may be useful to play a particular clip or scene, have some discussion about what this raises, and then move on to another one.

MUSIC

Music is a powerful medium for people of all ages. It connects us with thoughts, memories and feelings. It may provide a wonderful opportunity to connect with and understand a child or young person's experience. All ages may benefit from the opportunity to play musical instruments. For instance using a drum to show how they feel.

Some songs or pieces of music may evoke memories or feelings about the deceased. You can invite children or young people to bring these into you on a CD or play them on a computer. Sometimes they will spontaneously want to play music that might be on their phone or MP3 player.

We invite young people attending groups at the Laura Centre to bring music and/or objects that remind them of the person who died. We have found other group members are very respectful and honouring of things that are shared in this way.

OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE

At the Laura Centre we are in a wonderful position to bring together bereaved people of all ages. We have found that children and young people (as well as parents) benefit enormously from the opportunity to share with others. Benefits from this include 'normalising' their own experience and really knowing that they are not the only person who has suffered a major bereavement. There are also invaluable opportunities to learn from others – sometimes another group member will share their experience in a way that enables others to make sense of their own feelings and thoughts for the first time. It is also important to be able to have fun with others.

In schools there may be opportunities to bring children together in group activities (perhaps those who have experienced a wide range of losses). Even where this is not practicable there may be an opportunity for two children to come together who have suffered similar losses. Sometimes an adult may share some of their own relevant experience with a child and this enables that child to feel less alone and more able to share.

STORY TELLING AND WRITING

Making up stories can be a valuable therapeutic activity. Play almost invariably involves the telling of a story (even if it is a very simple and short one). Drawing and other creative activities similarly may involve a narrative. Some therapeutic techniques involve encouraging a child to tell a story. For instance, starting off a story yourself, then passing it over to the child who tells a bit more and then passes it back to you and so on. In stories it is often valuable to reflect the themes of the story in your comments and/or show empathy for what happens to the characters in it.

There may be a hero or someone with magical powers in the stories – which may provide important elements of hope, or strength and inner resources in the child.

If you are interested in this area there are many books on the subject, including a number by Margot Sutherland.

RELAXATION RESOURCES

There are many ways to encourage children and young people to relax and many of these are every day activities. Relaxing everyday activities include:

- Listening to music
- Reading a story
- Swimming
- Going for a run, cycle or walk
- Playing or watching sport
- Having a warm bath or shower
- Playdough or clay or another tactile substance
- Any activity that requires positive attention and involvement both by the child and/or others

Specific techniques tend to focus on using guided visualisation or imagery and breathing techniques.

It can be valuable to picture oneself in a safe place, real or imagined as part of being able to relax. Many people find this a simple and accessible technique, once they have a picture of a safe place they can picture themselves in this place whenever they need to.

A simple relaxation exercise using the breath involves contracting and relaxing the muscles with in/out breath. Take a deep breath in and squeeze all your muscles together, then breath out and relax all your muscles. Repeat this two or three times.

On a one to one level you may help someone simply by helping them notice their own breathing patterns. When we are anxious we may take very brief tense breaths. Slowing down our breathing and making sure that we exhale fully, can help relax us and reduce anxiety.

There are many books and or resources on the internet. At the time of writing, these include <http://www.handsonscotland.co.uk/topics/techniques/relaxation.htm> and <http://www.theschoolrun.com/articles/relaxation-techniques-for-children-59> .

USEFUL INFORMATION / ORGANISATIONS

FOR SCHOOLS AND PARENTS/CARERS

THE CHILD BEREAVEMENT CHARITY has articles, information and user forums covering a wide range of issues for professionals, parents/carers and young people. The section for schools includes guidance on school policy, support for young people and introducing death and loss in the curriculum www.childbereavement.org.uk

THE CHILDHOOD BEREAVEMENT NETWORK (CBN) has information for professionals and parents and carers. The CBN aims to influence policy and practice for all those working with and affecting the lives of bereaved children. There is useful information for parents/carers and professionals. There is also a directory of services throughout the UK that offer support to bereaved children. www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

THE LAURA CENTRE website has details of The Laura Centre service, local training courses for schools and other professionals as well as downloadable versions of some of the information in this resource (e.g. needs of bereaved children). www.thelauracentre.org.uk

WINSTON'S WISH's website has extensive resources for parents/carers and schools as well as young people. There is also a section on helping families and professionals talk to children and young people about serious illness. There are lists of books and other resources for all subjects and some DVD's, films that can be viewed directly from the site.

For parents/carers topics include: preparing for a funeral, talking with children about death, memorial events, ideas about supporting children following particular causes of death including murder and suicide.

For schools downloadable resources include guidance on school strategy and lesson plans for different key stage pupils. www.winstonswish.org.uk

WEBSITES FOR BEREAVED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

There are now lots of excellent places you can go to learn more about how other people feel when someone dies. To access some of the areas on these websites you need to register with an email address, and then log in after you have confirmed your registration. If you write a message there is usually a delay while it is 'moderated' before it is put on the website.

THE CHILD BEREAVEMENT CHARITY has articles and information covering a wide range of issues (including about loss feelings, understanding about death, returning to school...) aimed at children and young people – www.childbereavement.org.uk

GRIEF ENCOUNTER – has message boards for children (click on 'Kids Zone') and young people ('Teen Zone') – www.griefencounter.org.uk

CRUSE bereavement care has an interactive area for children and young people called rd4u (the 'Road for you'), this includes sections with information for all ages, message boards, a fun zone, as well as an area for 'lads only' – www.rd4u.org.uk

WINSTON'S WISH's section for 'young people' includes interactive message boards covering a wide range of topics, individual stories of bereaved children and young people can be seen and heard online through DVDs and podcasts, there is also a place to do things (includes remembering people, things to do with feelings and lots more). www.winstonswish.org.uk

DVDS / WEBSITES

LEEDS ANIMATION WORKSHOP (www.leedsanimation.org.uk) – has produced 3 DVDs on the impact of death on young people:

NOT TOO YOUNG TO GRIEVE – this looks at a variety of issues that affect younger children, particularly relevant to under-5s and early primary. This can be used in conjunction with the training package downloadable from the Childhood Bereavement Network (www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk).

TEENAGE GRIEF – this looks at a variety of issues that affect teenagers following death, includes scenarios from sudden death and suicide. This can be used in conjunction with the training package downloadable from the Childhood Bereavement Network (www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk).

GRIEF IN THE FAMILY – is a film which explores the impact of a death in the family and the feelings that all members of a family may feel.

Young people talking about their experience – the Winston's Wish website includes downloadable DVDs and Podcasts of bereaved young people sharing their story. There is also a downloadable Teacher's TV programme.

BOOKS AND OTHER RESOURCES

WINSTON'S WISH AND CHILD BEREAVEMENT CHARITY (see previous entry) – both have updated lists of books for children and young people. Winston's Wish is particularly good for age specific reading; the Child Bereavement Charity has an excellent list of resources for professionals in schools.

Healthy Schools Leicestershire have also produced an excellent resource on bereavement (age related section reproduced on [page 49](#) of this resource). This guidance can be downloaded from the emotional health section of the Healthy Schools Leicestershire website <http://www.leicestershirehealthyschools.org.uk>

DIVORCE AND SEPARATION

PARENTING PLANS – Putting Your Children First – a guide for separating parents – produced by the DFES - an excellent resource with practical information as well as suggestions on communication freely available at <https://www.tsoshop.co.uk/bookstore.asp?FO=1161370&ProductID=9780117037618&Action=Book>

PARENTLINE PLUS – covers a wide range of issues for parents website and helpline – has a section on divorce and separation - <http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk> or 0808 800 2222

RELATE 2 U –there is a service available in Leicester for children and young people 10-25 affected by family breakdown or conflict. Tel 0116-222-0012, info@relateleics.org or www.relateleics.org

RELATE FOR PARENTS – provides resources and information for parents including around divorce and separation website <http://www.relateforparents.org.uk>, they also have a web based chat line for support for parent and a helpline 0300 100 1234.

ADOPTION AND FOSTERING WEBSITES

Adoption UK - <http://www.adoptionuk.org>

Fostering - <http://www.fostering.net>

British Association for Adoption and Fostering - www.baaf.org.uk

Adolescence

Young people in Focus - range of issues including transitions - <http://www.studyofadolescence.org.uk/>

Mental health and wellbeing in young people

Young minds – information, resources, interactive website – parents helpline 0808 802 5544 website: <http://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-people>

LOCAL SUPPORT

LEICESTER CITY COUNCIL - PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE.

The Psychology Service Offers:

Work with children and young people aged 0-19 years of age. The service works directly in schools, early years settings and family homes providing psychological advice including statutory assessments relating to young people's learning, behaviour and emotional well-being. The service employs a number of professionals, Educational Psychologists, Bi-lingual staff and Family Support Workers, who work together to ensure the most appropriate service is offered to children and families.

Training offered on child development, e.g. The Solihull Approach. Parenting courses and therapeutic approaches. Group work interventions and training packages can be tailored to meet specific requirements. (Charges apply).

Targeted group work in schools developed and evaluated to increase children's emotional and psychological well being and resilience. (Charges apply).

The service also hosts the Child Behaviour Intervention, (CBII). This is a multi-agency citywide early intervention and preventative service for children and young people aged 0-11 years and their families who are vulnerable because of children's behavioural, psychological or mental health needs and where children are at risk of underachievement and social exclusion.

Contact Details: Principal Psychologist: Dr Joe Dawson, Leicester City Psychology Service, Collegiate House, College Street, Leicester, LE2 0JX. (joe.dawson@leicester.gov.uk)
Tel: 0116 221 1200 - General E: [mail: psychology@leicester.gov.uk](mailto:psychology@leicester.gov.uk)

THE LAURA CENTRE PROVIDES:

- free confidential support for bereaved children and their families and anyone affected by the death of a child
- information and support for professionals
- regular training days, workshops and courses for professionals, bespoke and in-house training is also available (charges apply)
- 3 training days (modules 1, 2, and 3) cover the information contained in this resource
- clinical supervision for professionals (charges apply)
- our website provides some downloadable material, useful links and further information.

The Laura Centre, 4 Tower Street, Leicester LE1 6WS. www.thelauracentre.org.uk Info@thelauracentre.org.uk. Tel: 0116-254-4341

THE LAURA CENTRE always needs funds in order to continue to support bereaved children and families. If you or your school are interested in fundraising please contact us on 0116-255-6676 or visit our website.

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE - add details

RELATE 2 U – provides support for children and young people affected by parental separation. www.relateleicestershire.org.uk or telephone 0116 222 0012.

For other bereavements CRUSE Leicestershire provides support from trained befrienders and training for their volunteers – local branches: Leicester 0116-284-4119, Charnwood and NW Leicestershire 01530-510909, Melton and Rutland 01664-500802. The national CRUSE website has useful information as well as details of other local branches and a link to the young person's website www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE (Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland) – helpline for professionals with concerns about a child or young person's mental health telephone 0116-295-5050 open Mondays to Fridays 9.30 – 1.00 pm.

OPEN DOOR LEICESTER – counselling for children and young people aged 11-19, www.opendoorleicester.org. Tel: 0116-223-2397

SUPPORT IN OTHER AREAS

A directory of Childhood Bereavement services across the UK is available at the Childhood Bereavement Network www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk This gives details of service by geographical area.

