

Help
With

Supporting Children who have Experienced Loss/Grief

Death and loss is devastating for children and their families especially if it occurs suddenly. There may be no time to prepare or say goodbye. In some cases the death is violent and horrific, such as when someone dies in a road crash, or completes suicide. Often, the person who dies is a parent, brother or sister, leaving behind a bereft family.

The information below may help to support bereaved children of all ages through their grief and help them to lead full and happy lives again.

- It is often better to be as honest as possible with children and talk to them about what has happened ensuring the communication is age appropriate.
- It may help to involve them in decision making especially if the deceased has been a parent/grandparent/sibling.

After someone dies it is very normal for all to suffer shock and deep sadness. Children and young people respond to shock and sadness in a similar way to adults, but they may express these emotions differently, which can be linked to both their developmental stage as well as their limited experience in dealing with traumatic situations. They will also grieve in different ways at different times.

They may cry, get angry, be quiet, be noisy, talk about the person who died, not talk about them, and play or behave as though nothing has happened. They may suddenly switch from one reaction to another. All these reactions and many more are normal responses in sudden bereavement.

After a period of time it is normal for a child's more extreme symptoms to begin to subside, however, feelings of grief may get worse. This could include trouble eating or sleeping, terrible dreams, feeling angry, crying all the time, inability to work or concentration problems at school, being jumpy or scared to go out, or finding it hard to talk.

Whatever the symptoms, if a child isn't beginning to feel a little better, emotionally or physically, then it would be important to talk to your doctor for possible further support if required. Doing things to remember someone who has died can help a child to feel a bit better. It's also a good way for them to spend time with other loved ones.

Here are some activities that may help support your child/young person through loss/grief

Memory pictures

Art and creative activities are a great way for children to remember someone. Drawing or painting pictures featuring things that the person who died loved.

If they don't want to draw or paint, they could print off favourite photos of the person and put them in a special frame.

Get out and about

Getting out and about can help a child through bereavement as it allows them not only to spend time with other loved ones it is also good for children's physical and emotional wellbeing. This could include activities like going to the park, a bike ride, swimming and for older children playing football or having lunch/coffee time.

Things to do at home

At times it may be difficult to leave the house so the following activities could be considered. Baking cakes and buns, planting flowers/ seeds or even a small tree in memory of the person who has died. Children should always be encouraged to look after any plants that need ongoing care.

Doing activities together is a good way of being able to have discussions about their emotions and to help them through any negative ones they are encountering.