

HOW TO HELP CHILDREN FOLLOWING A DEATH OR TRAUMATIC EVENT

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

When someone dies, children experience similar feelings to adults. They may not be able to express their feelings in words, but you may notice changes in their behaviour.

Such behaviour may include:

- Quiet, withdrawn behaviour, including a reluctance to talk.
- Reluctance to separate from you including clinginess, not wanting to sleep alone or even unwillingness to go to school.
- A return to younger behaviours such as thumb sucking or bedwetting.
- Attention seeking behaviour and even aggression directed towards you.
- Difficulty dropping off to sleep and/or nightmares once asleep.
- Being easily upset by everyday events, including heightened sensitivity to loud noises.
- Finding it hard to concentrate especially in school.
- Loss of appetite or excessive “comfort eating” of sugary snacks.

These are all normal reactions to what, may be a very abnormal experience and are likely to fade over time.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Being honest with your child about what has happened as sensitively and calmly as you can using language your child can understand. Avoid phrases for death such “gone to sleep” or “gone on a long journey” as these may confuse or even make a child fearful of everyday events such as sleeping or travelling.

Talking about the person who has died. This keeps the memory alive and can be very comforting. In this way, you are also giving permission for the child to talk about the person who died.

Sympathetic listening including answering the child’s questions as truthfully as you can. Be honest if you do not know the answer and say so.

The Bereavement & Critical Incident Response Team
Shropshire Council Educational Psychology Service
Applying Psychology to Make the Difference

Sharing activities with your child such as going for a walk or helping with household jobs. At these times your child may be more likely to express their feelings about what has happened.

Try not to hide your own feelings from your child. It may even help your child to see that it is normal to be upset by death and that crying or showing emotion is nothing to be embarrassed about.

Be prepared for your child to be angry and feel guilty, as well as feeling sad about what has happened. These are very normal feelings when grieving and it will help your child if he/she is able to express these feelings. Help your child to understand that what happened was not his/her fault.

Resume and maintain routines as quickly as possible such as bedtimes, mealtimes, attending school and clubs. This will help to provide a sense of security.

Let your child know your whereabouts, try to return on time or let the child know you are safe. This will help provide security as your child is likely to worry that something may happen to you.

Be prepared for your child to behave at times as though nothing has happened. Children grieve differently and may be very sad one moment and laughing and playing the next.

Talk about the funeral and how your child can be included. Active participation at this time is likely to help your child come to terms with what has happened and allow him/her to say goodbye.

Allow your child to keep something that belonged to the person who died and start a memory box or photo album to help him/her to remember.

Do make time to talk to other adults about your own feelings. Children cope better when they have a parent/carer who is coping.

If after reading this guidance, you still remain very concerned about your child do not hesitate to discuss your concerns with your child's Head Teacher and/or family doctor.

Other useful contacts:

6 free counselling sessions for those affected by bereavement ☎ 0345 678 9028

“Elephants Never Forget” at the Severn Hospice ☎ 01743 236565

Hope House Children’s Hospice ☎ 01691 672618 counselling@hopehouse.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care (Shropshire) ☎ 0845 606 6812

Eclipse – Child Bereavement Service covering schools in Shrewsbury ☎ 01743 364101

Child Death Helpline – Freephone service for anyone affected by the death of a child
☎ 0800 282986 <http://www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk/>

Child Bereavement UK - A helpline for families and professionals ☎ 0800 282 986
support@childbereavementuk.org

Compassionate Friends ☎ 0845 123 2304

Winston’s Wish www.winstonswish.org.uk 08088020021 e-mail
ask@winstonswish.org.uk

The Samaritans www.samaritans.org.uk ☎ 116 123 email jo@samaritans.org

Step by Step ☎ 0808 168 2528 is a Samaritans’ service providing support to schools to prepare for and recover from a suspected or attempted suicide. Provides support for groups of staff, students and families.

Individual support following a suicide is available from
bereavementsupport@shropshiremhs.com

Educational Psychology Service ☎ 01743 258414 for specialist advice or trauma focused therapy

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