

### Ideas for Bereavement

<b>Strategies:</b>
--------------------

<b>Consider completing a Bereavement Support Plan</b>
---

<p>The Bereavement Support Plan was developed by Rollercoaster (Barnardo's Bereavement Support Group) and can be found on the ABLe site. It involves the child or young person in self assessment and helps them understand their grief and the process towards acceptance and coming to terms with their loss. You may want to consider completing one of these with the child/young person, if you have been trained to do so and the team around the child agree it is appropriate.</p>
--

<b>What else can I do?</b>
----------------------------

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Modify your approach depending on the child, their level of development and their understanding of death</li></ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask the child how they are feeling, don't make assumptions. Children's reactions are often different to those of adults, so how they are feeling may not always be obvious. Children may feel isolated during their grief experience if they think that nobody understands their feelings</li></ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Spend time with the child and listen to what they have to say, let them tell their story if they want to.</li></ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Give children information to help them make sense of what has happened. Use simple, clear language and words they will understand. Check back with to ensure they have understood what you have said.</li></ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Answer the child's questions honestly and simply, in a way that is appropriate to the child's level of development. Some questions will be easy, and some will be more difficult. If you don't know the answer, don't be afraid to say so.</li></ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Give factual information. For example, if you need to give children information about the dead person's body, it can be helpful to explain that when a person has died, their body doesn't breathe, doesn't need to eat or drink, can't feel pain and won't ever wake up. If children ask what happens to a person when they die, you could tell them that different people have different ideas about what happens, although nobody really knows for sure.</li></ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Help them understand that they are not to blame. Sometimes children will have 'magical thinking' i.e. remembering a parent saying "you'll be the death of me" or the child saying "they wished their brother was dead".</li></ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recognise that these conversations with children and young people may feel uncomfortable or awkward, but try to put these feelings aside and discuss things openly and freely - this will reassure children that these issues are OK to talk about.</li></ul>   |

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reassure children that whatever they are feeling is OK. People have many different reactions to death, and all are normal and natural.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help children to name and understand their feelings, especially yearning, and to understand that overwhelming emotion comes in waves and will pass if allowed out.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you are upset, don't be afraid to show it. This can help children see that it's OK to show how you are feeling.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that children and young people know that it is OK to cry. However, it is also important to be accepting if children don't cry. Ensure that children and young people know that it is OK to cry. However, it is also important to be accepting if children don't cry.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reassure children that it is OK to feel happy, and that they shouldn't feel guilty if there are times when they don't think about the person who has died.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help children to find appropriate ways to express their feelings. Children need acceptable safe ways for expressing anger and other feelings, for example, sport, physical exercise, shouting or noisy play, cushions or punch bag, or messy painting session.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children often think that they are to blame for the person's death, for example because they had been naughty, or even because they had thoughts about someone dying. You should explain that it was something else that caused the death and help them to understand that it is not their fault.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some children may be concerned about what life will be like now, and what will happen to them. Try to make them feel secure and reassure them that they will still be loved and looked after.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address any fears the child may have about being abandoned, or about other people or themselves dying.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect the religious and cultural beliefs of the child or young person's family.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect the family's views about whether the child should see the body or attend the funeral, but if they are asking, encourage them to include the child, with the right support and preparation</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are some practical things that children can do to help them in the grieving process and to help keep a connection with the person who has died. Some suggestions are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide parents with resources to help them explain death and bereavement to their children.</li> <li>- Try to maintain the child's normal routine as far as possible.</li> <li>- The child's school will play an important role in supporting them. It can be useful for a teacher to contact the family before the child returns to school to find out how the child is doing. The child should be involved in deciding how to tell other children about what has happened. They may find coming back to school difficult, so it can be helpful to talk to them</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

about what additional support they might like. The child should be encouraged to talk to their teacher or a special friend if they feel upset or alone at school.

- Children find pets and soft toys comforting. Many children are soothed by physical contact, such as a gentle massage or a cuddle. Relaxing music, story tape or relaxation tape can be helpful, especially if children are having difficulty sleeping.
- Be patient. The child will need time to learn to cope with what has happened.
- Expect some behavioural changes, for example expression of anxiety and possible behaviour problems or lack of attention.
- Encourage children to keep on talking about the person who has died. A while after the death, people often stop asking bereaved people how they are, and bereaved people find this period very difficult. Children sometimes need to be told that even after a long period of time it's OK to continue to talk about the dead person and to show their feelings.
- Children can sometimes benefit from meeting other bereaved children. It can be helpful to realise that they are not alone, and that other people have had similar experiences.

### **What should I not to do?**

- Don't avoid the subject of the death, even though this might be your natural reaction. The majority of children will really appreciate the chance to talk about what has happened and it will help them deal with it. Avoiding the topic is likely to give the impression that you don't care or even that it has never actually happened.
- Don't worry that you might make things worse by talking about the death. The child has just experienced a terrible life-changing event. So long as you are sensitive, respectful and careful, children will benefit from talking.
- Don't use language that may confuse children. For example, saying that "we have lost Daddy" may make the child wonder why nobody is looking for him. A child who is told that heaven is in the sky may want to visit the dead person in an aeroplane.
- Don't encourage children to suppress their emotions by telling them to be "big and brave" - children need to be able to express their emotions. Comments such as this are likely to make children keep their feelings inside.
- Don't tell children that they will now be "man/lady of the house" or that they will "have to look after their mum/dad". This will put unnecessary pressure on them and worry them with unrealistic responsibilities.
- If you don't feel very confident or comfortable talking about death, try not to show it. The child might pick up on your feelings and get the message that death is a subject that shouldn't be discussed.
- Don't punish or criticise children if they display reactions that seem inappropriate to you.

### **Should children attend funerals?**

Families will often have their own ideas about whether they want children to attend the funeral or see the body. These views should be respected but also have an awareness of the child's rights in relation to the mourning rituals. Bereaved children value the opportunity to decide for themselves. To do this, they will need plenty of information so they know exactly what is involved and what to expect. These rituals are designed to be helpful in the bereavement process, and children can often benefit from being included. For example, they can help the child accept that the death has happened and allow them to say goodbye to the person who has died. Research shows that the majority of children will choose to be involved with the funeral if they are adequately prepared. However, children should never be forced to participate in anything they don't feel happy with.

If they do not wish to attend or it is not possible or appropriate for them to attend, there are other positive ways they can say goodbye. It is never too late to have a memorial or other ceremony.

### **What other memorial ideas are there?**

- Scrapbook of memories filled with photos, stories, cards and letters.
- Memory box.
- CD of songs.
- Candlelight ceremony.
- Balloon release.
- Calendar of important dates and ways in which they could mark them.
- Plant some bulbs or a tree dedicated to the memory of the person who has died.
- A 'First Aid Kit' – a collection of things that make them feel better on bad days.
- Write poems, songs, letters to, or about the person, or draw.
- Memory bench.
- Memorial garden
- Visit a special place/cemetery

### **When should I contact a mental health specialist or partner agency?**

**Please see 'taking a closer look' document**

*(Adapted from Hands On Scotland - [www.handsonscotland.co](http://www.handsonscotland.co).)*

### **Other support/training in Dundee**

- Dundee Educational Psychology Service (see school's link E.P. or telephone 01382 432980)
- Barnardo's Roller Coaster 01382 436621, Child Bereavement UK, CAMHS
- CAMHS
- Click here: [www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk) Dundee
- Excerpts adapted from Winston's Wish website, <http://www.winstonswish.org.uk/>
- [www.griefencounter.org.uk](http://www.griefencounter.org.uk)
- [www.handsonscotland.co.uk/find.html](http://www.handsonscotland.co.uk/find.html) (click on Life Events and then Bereavement)