

## Supporting bereaved children

There are no set rules for grieving, when to start or when to stop, everyone is an individual and will grieve in their own way.

Bereavement can make children vulnerable as their physical and emotional health may suffer, they may find it difficult to concentrate in lessons, and there could be financial and emotional difficulties at home.

Bereaved children's feelings are similar to adults but they may not have the ability to understand their emotions, the language to express them and the skills to manage them. It is thought children grieve in 'puddles' dipping in and out of grief. It is no longer thought that grief goes in linear stages, but is more like a spiral, spinning backwards and forwards. Therefore, if children have been through a period of crying or being angry, it does not mean they won't feel like that again at a later stage.

It is very important to acknowledge a child's loss so they know you know as it opens the door for them to talk to you about how they feel. Don't assume they are ok if they are not crying or angry; ask them what help they would like.

Children need to understand and get used to the permanence of death, before they can begin to manage their feelings. It is advised to use the words 'dead' or 'died' when talking to a child about someone dying, rather than 'going to sleep' as they might then become anxious about going to bed to go to sleep either for themselves or other members of the family. They will probably want to know where that person is now, so you need to think about what you are going to tell them, depending on your own family beliefs, commonly heaven, fairy dust, stars in the sky.

If a child is feeling upset but not able to talk about how they feel, you could draw a body outline and get them to point to where it hurts - maybe tummy, heart or head and that gives you somewhere to start a conversation.

Be aware of significant dates, events and curriculum areas for the future that may affect the child.

There are lots of nice activities than can be done with children to help with expressing and managing their feelings and then moving onto making memories. There are also some good story books you could share.

If you would like some more information or ideas, or need someone to talk to yourself, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Marie Regan  
Family Liaison Officer