

Helping *you* to support Bereaved Children and Young People

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Supporting bereaved children

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This leaflet was produced by members of the Norfolk Child Bereavement Partnership, to provide guidance to all adults who meet bereaved children, on a paid or voluntary basis. We want to encourage you to support bereaved children and hope that this leaflet will provide you with some useful tips. It is based upon our professional experience, as well as taking into account the wealth of information that is provided by The Child Bereavement Trust, Winston's Wish, Cruse, and others, including research into childhood bereavement.

When children are bereaved they need support from all the people who they come into contact with on a regular basis, whether they are family members, friends, school or nursery staff, youth group leaders, nurses and doctors, faith leaders, sports group leaders or other adults.

You might be surprised to know that many children will experience bereavement in childhood. Kindness, compassion and a listening ear go a long way to supporting bereaved children.

Helping Young People

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Whilst young people have a greater understanding of death, it is important to remember that they are not adults and many will find it difficult to cope with a significant bereavement of a family member or a friend. At a time of their development when they are becoming more independent and are starting to take more control of their life, it is important to recognise that in addition to support from friends, they are likely to also have a need for adult support. Young people may start thinking about the long-term consequences of the death of a loved one, and some may take on some significant caring responsibilities. It is helpful when adults can express their concern for the young person and let them know that they are there to listen and support.

How children react following bereavement

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Children are affected by bereavement in different ways. Some may be sad and withdrawn, others may be angry and challenging, or may not show any signs. Some children show their grief immediately, whilst others may not initially, but can later, after weeks or even months. Grief is an ongoing process which children and young people revisit as they grow up.

Children will not 'get over it', but with time learn to cope with all the changes. We know that many bereaved people continue to have a bond with the person who died – in a different way.



Children where a family member has a terminal illness 6

When someone is terminally ill, it is clearly very distressing for all family members. For people outside the family, it is important to have an understanding of the information the child has already received. Families have different ways of dealing with terminal illness. It is helpful if children can have their questions answered honestly – you may need to guide them towards someone who can give them the information they need. Preparing children for an impending death can really help them deal with it.

Some children take on a caring role, and support should be available for them. You can make a valuable difference supporting children through this difficult time.



What you can do to help

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You will only know how you can best help a child when you speak to them, and maybe also their parents/carers. Be brave and start the conversation. It shows that you care. This will give children permission to approach you when they need to, without having to tell their story again. You might think it is difficult to know where to start, but having the right words is not as important as the caring presence of someone who is willing to be there for them.

Ask whether children want others to know about their bereavement/family situation, agree what information they would like to share with other adults and children, and how.

Ask children what support they want from you. Some children are looking for normality and do not want to be treated any differently, whilst others may require a lot of support. Children may need time out, time to talk about their grief, or help with any work they need to complete.

Children need to know that it's also okay to go on living and enjoy life – you can help them not to feel guilty, having a good time does not mean they care less for the person who died. You can provide the time and space for them to talk about the person who died- if they want to. Some children might not want to talk about it – and that's also okay. Many children think about the person for years to come, and there may be few opportunities for someone who is willing to listen, especially if the bereavement happened a while ago.

When children need additional help

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Whatever your role is, you can only offer so much support to a child. When, after a period of time, a child is finding it difficult to adjust to the bereavement, if they are feeling sad all the time, maybe have trouble with sleeping, eating, etc., it is time to get them further assistance. Please make sure that you follow your child protection procedures if you have serious concerns about a child's welfare.



Supporting yourself

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It can be overwhelming to support a child who is bereaved – remember you cannot take their grief away, but you can support them in their journey, and it will be easier for them with your support.

Be sure you look after yourself by

- finding a colleague/another leader to talk to
- keep it in perspective with your own life
- pamper yourself when you are finding it hard
- realise that you can not do it all yourself – ask for support
- speak to your manager/senior lead

When someone dies, a child's life will change forever. With the right support, children can adjust, develop and flourish. You can make a difference!

Other agencies that can help

If you feel that a child needs more support than you can offer, find out if other professionals are already involved. Schools and GPs can make referrals to specialist bereavement services. Families can also contact Nelson's Journey for support.

Useful websites

www.nelsonsjourney.org.uk

www.childbereavement.org.uk

www.rd4u.org.uk

www.griefencounter.org.uk

You can find out more about locally available support for families on the local offer website.

This leaflet has been produced in conjunction with:

