

SUPPORTING CHILDREN WHO ARE BEREAVED

A Guide to Information & Resources for Adults & Children



A Y R S H I R E
cancer
Support

Visit our website at
www.ayrshirecs.org

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Ayrshire Cancer Support

offers counselling and complementary therapies to patients and family members over 16 years of age, including the bereaved.

Children and Grief

Children experience grief differently to adults. They step in and out of their grief. Their reactions may range from great distress to seeming as if they are not interested. One minute they may be sobbing, the next they are asking, "What's for tea?". It does not mean that they care less about what has happened.

The way in which young people respond to the death of a close family member will vary due to factors such as:

- their age
- the cause and nature of the death (e.g. expected or unexpected)
- family circumstances (e.g. divorce or separation, any resulting major life changes).
- previous experience of family death or trauma
- the support and care they receive
- their own strengths

The death of a parent or guardian or a sibling may leave a young person feeling some or all of the following:

- Deep sadness, that may or may not be expressed by crying.
- A hollow, achy pain inside that may be described as hunger, boredom, fear or feeling sick.
- Loneliness, feeling abandoned.
- Anxious about the health and safety of other family members and themselves. (Especially where any physical symptoms or circumstances might echo those of the person who has (since) died.
- Responsible for the family—'man of the house now'.
- Things are pointless, including schoolwork.
- Anger or rage at what has happened
- Blame or guilt for things said or not said, done or not done
- Relief—if the family situation had become difficult

Age-related Responses to Bereavement

Children express the sadness they feel about their loss in different ways at different ages.

Under Fives

Very young children do not understand what happens when someone dies and may expect the person who has died to return eventually. They may repeatedly ask 'inappropriate' questions about where the deceased person is and when they are coming back. They may also think they caused the death by being 'naughty', and they may worry that the person is cold, hungry, afraid etc. in the coffin.

Young children feel the effects of the loss because it affects their daily routine. They are very sensitive to the unhappy feelings of those around them and may become anxious, more needy of attention and more difficult to settle. Their feelings will be expressed in behaviours rather than words so that they may become more 'clingy', have more temper tantrums or regress e.g. wetting when they had been dry.

5-8 Years

This age group understand that death is irreversible and that dead people do not hear, speak, feel or become hungry or thirsty.

However, they can find it difficult to understand their feelings of guilt, fear, sadness or anger and, like younger children, they will express their upset via their behaviour. So, they may become demanding, bossy or have more regular tantrums and then, at other times, become silent and withdrawn.

In addition, they may try to protect adults and/or hide their feelings by trying to put on a 'brave' face and pretending that nothing is wrong.

As a result of their loss, they may feel different from their friends and have problems at school.

8-12 years

At this age, there is a more realistic understanding about death and what it means although 'heaven' may still be a difficult concept.

As with younger children, there may be changes in behaviour as they try to deal with their feelings. So, they may become fearful of the possibility of their own death, of going to sleep or becoming ill.

They, too, may feel different from their friends and have problems at school.

Teenagers

Teenagers understand death much like adults and are aware of how others feel.

However, they may be reluctant to admit their own upset and feelings of vulnerability. As well as feeling guilty, angry and that 'it's not fair', teenagers may become anxious about their own future and about their mortality.

Again, there may be a lot of discomfort around feeling 'different' from their peers.

How You Can Help Your Child

Most children of any age, if given support, understanding and an opportunity to express their feelings, will make a healthy adjustment to loss.

Early Stages

Adults may try to protect children from upset by not telling them what has happened, but try to be honest with your child as early as possible. Don't leave them to pick up on a tense atmosphere without understanding its cause.

Children can be helped by talking and listening, so encourage them to talk openly about feelings and to ask questions about what has happened.

Answer questions as openly and honestly as possible but if you don't know an answer then don't be afraid to say so. (Remember that sometimes children can express themselves better in more creative ways like painting, writing or drawing).

Maintain routines at home e.g. mealtimes, bedtimes. The familiar and regular will provide comfort and security.

Praise them for being helpful or thoughtful but not for being brave—it is OK for them to be upset.

Let them know they are not to blame for anything that has happened and assure them that they will be looked after.

Let other adults in contact with your child know what has happened, e.g. nursery, school, clubs, so that they can be sensitive to your child's needs.

Most importantly:

Look after yourself. Your loss is just as important. Find a trusted family member, friend or professional counsellor to talk to about how you are feeling. (See 'Support Organisations for Bereaved Adults' pp 21-23)

The funeral

Children usually find it helpful to be included in family activities, such as attending the funeral, if given the choice to do so.

Prepare the child by telling him/her what will happen at the funeral. Perhaps ask a relative or family friend to be with him/her during the ceremony and explain what is going on.

The tense atmosphere can sometimes make children laugh or giggle and is an understandable reaction to a difficult situation.

A child who is frightened about attending the funeral should not be forced to go. However, it can be important to help them find another way of saying 'goodbye'. For example, they can light a candle, say a prayer or write a poem or visit the grave.

Later on

Keep talking! Continuing to talk about what is happening and how everyone is feeling will help the child to adjust to the loss.

Even if it hurts, it is important to help your child to remember the good times by talking, looking at photographs, playing music etc.

Special occasions like birthdays, anniversaries and Christmas are particularly painful times and the temptation may be to not celebrate or even recognise the event. However, it is helpful to mark the occasion in some way by, say, putting aside a special time that day to remember the person who has died. Some families, for instance, might light a candle, make a scrapbook, or plant something to mark the occasion.

As children grow older and their understanding of death develops, they will need to re-grieve the loss. They may want to talk about the loss and to ask questions long after the death itself.

N.B. Always remember to look after yourself and to ask for extra support when you need it. This is one of the most important things you can do for your child. (See pp 21-23)

Other Sources of Support and Information for Adults Supporting a Bereaved Child

Cruse Bereavement Care

Cruse is a charity specialising in bereavement. It offers counselling for adults and has a wide range of leaflets and books about bereavement for adults and adults supporting bereaved children.

The website www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk has a section offering 'Help for Young People' and there is a 'Youth Website Link'.

To contact Cruse Bereavement Care:

- look for local branches of Cruse in the local telephone directory,
- see the list in the Find a Branch page on the website
- Cruse Central Services on 0844 477 9400 or Cruse (West of Scot.) on 0845 600 2227
- www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk
- or email: info@cruse.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care, PO Box 800,
Richmond, Surrey, TW9 1RG 020 8939 9530

Marie Curie Cancer Care

Marie Curie is a charity that also provides information for carers and families, including the bereaved.

For children they offer:

- bereavement booklets for children and teenagers
- a list of books for children and young people who are bereaved
- information about videos for children and young people who are bereaved or for the adults supporting them
- a booklist for adults who are supporting children who are bereaved
- a list of websites that children may find helpful
- support groups and chat rooms

Contact:

Marie Curie Cancer Care
14 Links Place
Edinburgh
EH6 7EB Tel: 0131 561 3900
www.mariecurie.org.uk

Winston's Wish

Winston's Wish is a charity which supports bereaved children and young people. Their interactive website is extremely user-friendly for young people.

The website includes a section for parents and carers that offers information and guidance on the needs of children and young people when someone important in their life has died. It includes a section on suggested further reading and where to find additional support.

How to contact Winston's Wish:

Winston's Wish Head Office
Westmoreland House
80-86 Bath Road
Cheltenham
Gloucestershire
GL53 7JT

General Enquiries: 01242 515157

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Email: info@winstonswish.org.uk

Other Helpful Websites

www.childbereavement.org.uk

Visitors to this site will find dedicated sections for bereaved families, young people and professionals. Features include an interactive discussion forum, downloadable leaflets and articles.

Contact:

Child Bereavement Charity, Aston House,
High Wycombe, Bucks, HP14 3AG,

Tel: 01494 446648

Email: enquiries@childbereavement.org.uk

www.rd4u.org.uk

Designed for young people aged between 12-18 who have been bereaved. The site includes details of a free helpline, plus information on coping with bereavement.

Tel: 0808 808 1677

www.childline.org.uk

A free, confidential 24 hour helpline service on 0800 1111, with information in the 'help and advice' section about death and bereavement.

Video Support

Leeds Animation Workshop

The following animated videos give parents and carers an insight into the process of grieving, its physical and emotional effects, and the special needs of children and young people.

Teenage Grief

Parents supporting bereaved teenagers.

Not Too Young to Grieve

Parents dealing with bereavement in the under-fives.

Grief in the Family

Families dealing with bereavement

(All DVDs cost £40 to buy, £10 to hire or preview.

Discounts on purchases of two or more DVDs.)

Contact:

Leeds Animation Workshop, 45 Bayswater Row,
Leeds, LS8 5LF

Tel: 0113 248 4997

Email: info@leedsanimation.org.uk

www.leedsanimation.org.uk

The Child Bereavement Trust

Someone died: "It happened to me." Price—£10

This is a video for children and teenagers who have experienced the death of someone in their family. Girls and boys between 7 and 18 years discuss what happened to them when someone close died. They talk about their feelings and how they made difficult decisions about things like going to the funeral. Parents get their say, too.

Activity Pack: The CBC Activity & Information Pack - Loss, Death & Grief Price—£10

An interactive pack designed to accompany the above video. This pack contains a range of materials to enable children and young people to explore their feelings. It includes two of our publications: 'Grief and Bereavement - Understanding Children' and 'A Teenage Guide to Coping with Bereavement'.

See p.15 for contact details

Books for Everyone

There are a huge selection of books available to support children and young people who are grieving.

Books are available in general for children about death and bereavement and specifically for the loss of a parent, grandparent, sibling or other close relative.

Books are also available to help both family adults and professional adults to support grieving young people and children.

Apart from the aforementioned organisations which offer books, i.e. **Cruse**, **Marie Curie & Winston's Wish** (pp12—14), online book shop, **Amazon.co.uk**, has a large selection of bereavement books.

N.B. Don't forget your **local library** where any of the librarians will be able to help you to access books—and other material - appropriate to your needs and the age of your child.

A Selection of Books for Adults
Supporting a Bereaved Child

'Helping Children Cope with the Loss of a Loved One: a guide for grown-ups.' W.Kroen & P. Espeland Free Spirit Publishers
1575420007 £12.99

'How to go on Living when Someone you Love Dies.' Therese Rando Bantam Books (Publisher)
0553352695 £13.00 (circa)

'The Grief Recovery Handbook: the action programme for moving beyond death, divorce and other losses.' W. James, R.Friedman & J.James Perennial (Publisher) 0060952733
£8.99

When Your Child Loses a Loved One (Hope & Healing) Theresa Huntley, Augsburg Fortress Publishers 0806642629 £5.00

The above books can all be found on Amazon.co.uk and the prices are for new books. Secondhand copies are also available at reduced cost.

Children Who Need More Support

In time and with support most children and young people will adjust to the death of a family member. However, in some cases additional support may be needed where there is an extended or severe grief reaction.

In the first instance, it is as well to consult with your doctor who can assess whether or not your child would benefit from a referral to a more specialist service.

One such service, based in Glasgow, is The Child and Adolescent Support Service. This is a psychology-led service based within the department of Clinical Psychology at the Beatson West of Scotland Cancer Centre.

The aim of this service is to provide a psychology service to children who have recently lost a family member to cancer at the Beatson West of Scotland Cancer Centre and/or Palliative Care Services. The service is available to children and young people up to the age of 18.

Referrals are accepted where children are experiencing excessive emotional, social or behavioural difficulties associated with their bereavement. Reasons for referral may include:-

- Excessive sadness with loss of interest in daily activities and events.
- Problems sleeping, changes in eating habits, prolonged fear of being alone.
- Acting like a much younger child for a long time.
- Withdrawing from friends.
- A sharp drop in school performance, or refusal to attend school.
- Unexplained aches or pains of likely psychological aetiology.
- Excessive irritability, aggression or anxiety.
- Excessive concerns about cancer or fear of the future.

Contact

Beatson West of Scotland Cancer Centre
Child and Adolescent Support Service
Department of Clinical Psychology (Level 1)
Gartnavel Hospitals Site
Great Western Road
Glasgow, G12 0YN
Tel: 0141 301 7377 /Fax: 0141 301 7380
(Wednesday afternoons and Thursdays)

Seasons for Growth Programme

Another external support that may be available in your area is the '*Seasons for Growth*' programme: a peer support programme for children, young people and adults coping with change and loss.

Seasons for Growth facilitators are available in all local authority areas of Ayrshire. Educational Psychologists in all 3 areas also have undertaken training. In addition, The Princess Royal Carers Trust also has trained Companions as do other voluntary agencies.

The programme involves groups of between 4 to 7 participants, which run over an eight-week period for up to one hour a week. In school this is usually during class time, with pupils being given permission to attend groups. It may also be held after school.

A Celebration Session will follow this when participants (and parents/carers) can come together to acknowledge what the group has achieved. Following this there are two Reconnector sessions, to allow the group to catch up and address any difficulties.

It may be best for families to ask the children's school if the programme is available or contact your school or Carers' support service.

And Now To You...

Important Reminders:

Remember that super parents don't exist. Just do what you can.

Accept that some things can't be 'made better' in a short space of time.

Talk to children using words they understand and ask questions to check they understood you.

Show children how you are feeling. It helps them to know that it's OK to show feelings, too.

Encourage children to ask questions and keep answering them.

Answer questions honestly and simply and don't be afraid to say 'I don't know'.

Keep talking about the person who has died.

Trust yourself and your instincts—you have not forgotten how to parent your children.

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF, TOO

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- www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk
- or email: info@cruse.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care, PO Box 800,
Richmond, Surrey, TW9 1RG 020 8939 9530

The W.A.Y. Foundation (Widowed & Young)

This charitable organisation aims to:

- provide a social and support network for those widowed under the age of 50
- offer support for members' children (by liaising with already-existing counselling and therapy schemes)
- offer information about existing organisations and what they can offer
- raise public awareness of the needs of those widowed and young

Contact details:

Suite 35, St Loyes House
20 St Loyes Street
Bedford
MK40 1ZL
Tel: 0870 011 3450

Email: info@wayfoundation.org.uk
www.wayfoundation.org.uk

Ayrshire Cancer Support

This local, charitable organisation, established, in 1982, has many years of experience in supporting patients with cancer and their families, including the bereaved, in Ayrshire.

It is a unique organisation in that it offers a number of support services free of charge to patients and families in Ayrshire from diagnosis, through treatment and beyond, including bereavement.

The organisation is a charity and works in partnership with NHS Ayrshire & Arran, the Princess Royal Trust for Carers and other local organisations.

The organisation offers bereaved adults (16+):

- professional counselling,
- complementary therapies
- information

In addition to the above services, Ayrshire Cancer Support offers a hospital transport service to Glasgow and support groups for patients and carers.)

The organisation has 2 centres in Ayrshire, in Ayr and Kilmarnock. It provides a drop-in centre in Ayr and, is staffed to do outreach work in the community where necessary.

If you think you would benefit from any of the services described then, please, do not hesitate to contact us or for more information see our website on:

www.ayrshirecs.org

Contact details:

22 Wellington Square, Ayr, KA7 1EZ

Tel: 01292 269888

16 Portland Road, Kilmarnock, KA1 2BS

Tel: 01563 538008

Email: info@ayrshirecs.org

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Ayrshire Cancer Support provides emotional support and practical help for cancer patients and their families throughout Ayrshire.

Ayrshire Cancer Support is a registered Scottish charity,
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