

SUPPORTING PRIMARY AGE CHILDREN WITH LOSS AND BEREAVEMENT

By Karen Preston and Lucy Chapple
Educational Psychologists

Sources

"Good Grief", Exploring Feelings, Loss and Death", by Barbara Ward and associates, White Crescent Press 1989

"Helping Children Cope With Grief", Rosemary Wells, Sheldon Press 1998

www.winstonswish.org.uk

www.childbereavement.org.uk

*Compiled by Karen Preston and Lucy Chapple, Educational Psychologists
Bournemouth Educational Psychology Service, 2012*

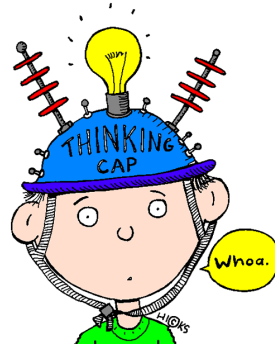


Bournemouth Educational Psychology Service

Your main aim:

To create:

- a space
- a time
- a face



Seek professional help:

- If unusual or intense behaviour continues
- If children show no grief or delayed grief
- If children seem unusually vulnerable or anxious
- If the young person is at risk of depression or suicide
- If they feel 'stuck' in their sorrow
- If they withdraw from or avoid social activities
- If they are always tired
- If they take unnecessary risks
- If they don't have anyone safe and trustworthy to talk to
- If they feel there is no purpose in being with others or doing anything
- If they are under other significant stresses at home

A few thoughts to consider ...

- Each child's grieving is personal and unique.
- Mourning is not indulgent—it is healthy and necessary.
- Think in terms of a grieving space not a grieving period.
- We revisit grief and this is normal.
- Mourning can be triggered by different things at different times in different situations.
- Try to find out the facts and respond as truthfully as possible to questions.



Seeking professional help is a sign of courage. It shows the young person is ready to move on.



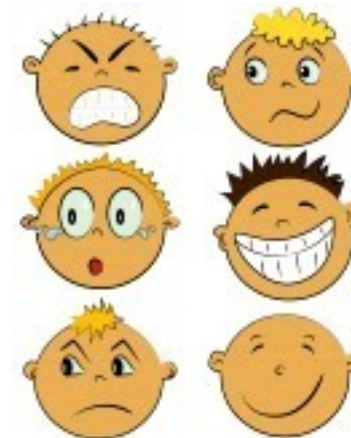
- Tune into the verbal and non-verbal message
- Listening and allowing for silence and contemplation is the best support



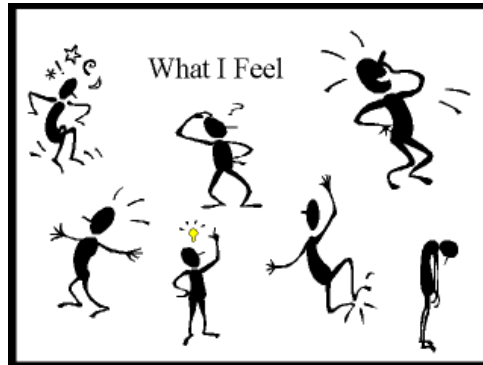
- Have a bank of resources available for children and young people to explore feelings (sometimes crayons and paper is enough)
 - books
 - puppets
 - photos
 - letters
 - postcards
 - DVD/video
- Focus on positive memories
 - memory box
 - memory candle
 - writing and drawings
 - photo album
- Try to resist wanting to 'fix it' or trying to 'cheer up' the young person—stay with their feelings



- Children may deny the death has happened at first and search for the dead person - this is normal.
- Attending the funeral can be helpful for those grieving.
- Try to keep daily routines going at home and school.
- Behaviour difficulties and anxiety can increase for a while—deal with these with caring and compassion.
- Reassure the young person that the pain of loss will lessen with time.
- Being jealous of others happiness is normal, (Why are they having fun when I am so sad?).
- Concentration can deteriorate and emotions will go up and down. Reassure the young person that they will feel in control again soon.
- Older children may worry they are "going mad" with grief. Encourage them to talk and be reassuring.
- Make sure the person supporting the child has support themselves.



The feelings:



- Listening to the feelings is sometimes all that is needed.
- Be sincere ... Children pick up "phoney" responses quickly.
- Re-assure the child that what they feel is normal—there is no right or wrong feelings.
- Don't rush to move children through feelings—they need time and space.
- Anger, guilt, blame and depression are normal.
- Children may 'act out' feelings in different ways.
- Children may "withdraw".
- Fear of losing remaining family members is not unusual.
- Despair may take place once child accepts the loss of a loved one. Patience and care is needed.
- Anger may manifest in anti social behaviour.
- Separation issues / physical problems / sleep difficulties are common. They maybe linked to anxiety and depression.
- Anxiety can be linked to real fears (where will we live? will we have enough money?).
- Relief may be felt (especially after a long illness—this may be linked to feelings of guilt).
- Acceptance can be achieved with time but this does not mean the love has diminished.

Dealing with suicide:

- Children can have very confused feelings (shock, horror, guilt, shame).
- It can be harder to establish the facts. (Suicide is a bigger taboo than death).
- You may have to explain mental illness—(where thinking and feeling can be so painful—its like a physical illness you can't see).
- The most difficult feelings are guilt linked to self blame (if only I had).
- Be aware of the child being at risk of depression or even suicide themselves (especially teens).
- Feelings of abandonment are profound.
- You may have to cope with press/news/facebook/texting.



- Reassure the child they are loved by those caring for them.

