



How can I support a child or young person who is experiencing a bereavement?

Even very young children feel the pain of bereavement and will need time and support to grieve and re-adjust to how their life has changed.

After a serious loss - particularly of a sibling or parent - children need stability and openness. They may also need more reassurance that they will still be cared for and kept safe.

Older children may feel angry, guilty and lost at a time when they may be dealing with teenage issues and trying to find their own identity as well. They may also feel isolated at school - as other children may find it difficult to understand what they are going through - and might also need extra support to cope with their studies (especially if they have got exams).

- Let your child, however young, attend the funeral if he or she wants to.
- Keep your child's daily routine as normal as possible.
- Meet regularly together as a family to find out how everyone is doing.
- It's important not to try and shield or 'protect' a child from the loss because grieving is the process through which we start to adapt. You can support a child (or young person) through the grieving process by showing them that it's OK to be sad or angry and to talk about the person who has died. Children learn how to express their grief by watching the adults around them.
- Answer any questions your child may have as truthfully as you can. Use very simple, honest and concrete terms when explaining death to a child. It can be confusing to say 'Grandma is sleeping now' for instance. Children, especially young children, may blame themselves for what happened - understanding the truth can help them to see they are not to blame.
- Talking openly can help a child to process and let go of difficult feelings. Children often express themselves through stories, games and art - encourage this self-expression and look for clues in those activities about how they are coping.
- Help children find ways to keep memories alive - talk about happy memories together, create scrapbooks or photos albums and encourage them to:
 - Write a letter to the person who has gone. <http://hopeagain.org.uk/hope-again-talking-writing-to-the-person/>
 - Create a memory jar <https://rainbowtrust.org.uk/for-children/memory-jar>

- Create a memory box - put together a special box (could be hand-decorated) with a collection of mementos and photos which you can keep to open and look at together, whenever you want to, for years to come.
- Help them create a list of things to do for when they are feeling sad - like listening to favourite music, stroking a pet, dancing around or watching a funny TV show.
- Your child may have difficulties concentrating, feel tired, lack energy and feel overwhelmed, at times, in the months following the bereavement. Plan for this with their school. It may also help for your child to have a person at school, with whom they feel safe, to talk to when they need someone to listen.
- It's important that children and young people know that it's still OK to do things that they enjoy. They can feel guilty about wanting to have some fun or hang out with their friends. Let them know that this is not being disloyal to the person they have lost.
- Try not to give older children grown-up responsibilities before they are old enough (like looking after younger siblings). It is important that they can still be kids and have space to develop their own identity.
- You will need emotional support as well - try not to become reliant on your child. Talk to another adult, when you need to, or consider joining a local support group instead.
- It can help for young people to meet other young people who have been bereaved so that they can share experiences - contact a child bereavement service for more information <http://lbforum.org.uk/service-type/children-and-young-people/>
- Birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas and days like Mother's Day and Father's Day can be particularly difficult - plan ahead and talk to your child about how you can remember and include the person you have lost.