



WHITE HOUSE FARM PRIMARY SCHOOL

SUPPORTING BEREAVED CHILDREN – ADVICE FOR FAMILIES

When someone close to a child or young person has died, it can be difficult to know what to do or say to support them. The death of a family member or a close friend, whether sudden or expected, will have a huge impact on any child. As a school, we are committed to working together to support all pupils and their families who are affected by a bereavement. Whilst we cannot take away the pain of a loss, we know that we can make a difference in many other areas of a child's life. If your child has been affected by a bereavement, either recently or if they are struggling to cope with a bereavement from the past, do please let us know so that we can support them in school. Please see our school Bereavement Policy for further details.

Grief comes in many ways and may take a while to appear. It is likely to prove to be an emotional rollercoaster for all involved. But grief is normal. Children are affected by bereavement in many different ways; Some may be sad and withdrawn, others may be angry and display challenging behaviour. Some children show their grief immediately, whilst others may not at the beginning, but may do so later after weeks or even months. Grief is an ongoing process which children and young people will revisit as they grow-up and their level of understanding changes. It is important to remember that children will not 'get over it', but with time and support, they can learn to cope with the changes.

The Childhood Bereavement Network say children find the following things can help:

- Having the death acknowledged
- Being given age-appropriate information about what has happened and what is going to happen
- Having the chance to express their feelings and thoughts about the death
- Being helped to remember
- Taking part in opportunities to say goodbye and commemorate the person who has died
- Knowing they are not to blame for what has happened
- Meeting other children and young people who have been bereaved

Taking to your child about a death

When talking to children about death, it is important to be honest, use clear language and to expect questions. If you are breaking the news about a death to your child, it can be useful to have a script prepared in your mind to start, for example: *"I have some really sad news to tell you and it might make you feel upset. **** died yesterday. This means that we won't see **** again. We have lots of memories that we can think about and celebrate together."*

Although it is natural to want to protect children, it is best to avoid using terms such as 'passed away', 'gone to sleep', 'up in the stars', 'gone to heaven', 'we have lost grandma' and so on. These are vague euphemisms and for many children these statements create confusion and make them believe that grandma has been carelessly lost, their loved one is literally asleep forever or they'll be able to pop to heaven to see them. Don't be scared to use the words death, dead and died however blunt they sound. Children understand these concepts and there is no other meaning to them.

When telling a child that someone has died, allow time together for comfort, support and any questions they may have. Answer their questions honestly, but keep explanations short, clear and appropriate for their age and understanding. It is OK to say that you don't know the answer to a question, but that you will come back to them if you find an answer. For further information see: www.childbereavementuk.org/telling-a-child-that-someone-has-died

It is OK to show your own emotions too but please explain that you are sad because the person has died, not because your child's reaction is making you sad (this is something that children have frequently said – they don't want to be sad in front of others because they don't want to make other people feel sad too). Reassure them that it is OK to be sad, angry, empty, worried, confused, happy or to feel lots of these things all at once. Explain that they are not expected to 'be sad' all of the time and reassure them that it is still OK for them to have fun. For more information and advice see: www.nelsonsjourney.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/At-Time-of-Bereavement-Booklet.pdf

Tips shared by parents through the Childhood Bereavement Network:

- Try to talk to your children honestly and explain what has happened in a way that they can understand. They need information and reassurance.
- Talk to your children about the funeral. Including them by giving them choices in how they want to say goodbye.
- Talk about the person who has died - include your children in remembering.
- How children grieve will depend on their age and their understanding of events.
- Children's grief may be shown in behaviour - they may be distraught one minute and playing happily the next.
- Inform the school about your children's loss.
- Trust your instincts as a parent and don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it.

Funerals

There is no right or wrong decision on whether children should or should not attend a funeral, but where possible, children old enough to know what is happening should generally be given the choice to attend and their decision respected. The following video, produced locally, can be useful to help children understand what happens at a funeral: www.rosedalefuneralhome.co.uk/what-happens-at-a-funeral/

Self-care

Remember that you may need some support for yourself, as well as for your children. **Cruse Bereavement Care** offer a wide range of support through their website www.cruse.org.uk and free-phone national helpline **0808 808 1677**.

Using picture books

Picture books can be a good way to start discussions and provide comfort to younger children. We have several age-appropriate picture books in school, so please contact us if you would like to borrow any. We recommend:

- The Invisible String by Patrice Karst
- Badgers Parting Gifts by Susan Varley
- Always and Forever by Alan Durant
- Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine: Your activity book to help when someone has died by Diana Crossley

The death of a pet

The death of a much loved pet will also affect children and it can be useful to let the class teacher know when a pet has died. Euphemisms can be particularly tricky to avoid when telling a child that a pet has been euthanized, but saying, *"We put the dog/cat to sleep,"* can be really confusing for them. As adults we understand the meaning behind this statement, however for many children, it can cause great ongoing anxiety – "So the dog went to sleep and is not going to wake up and died, well, I go to sleep every night, so am I going to die?" Wherever possible, use clear explanations such as: *"When xxx died, his heart stopped beating and his body stopped working. He won't eat or breathe and he can't feel anything anymore. He was a really important part of our lives and we can still remember him in lots of ways."*

Useful websites

Nelson's Journey is a wonderful local charity providing bereavement support for children up to the age of 19. They have a support line **01603 431788**, where you will be asked to leave a message and a duty support worker will get back to you as soon as possible or you can email them enquiries@nelsonsjourney.org.uk. They have lots of resources on their website www.nelsonjourney.org.uk or social media channels, including sleep-tips and memory packs.

Child Bereavement UK support children and young people up to the age of 25 who are facing bereavement, and anyone affected by the death of a child of any age. They have lots of information, including video-clips on their website www.childbereavementuk.org and also have a free-phone national helpline **0800 02 888 40**.

Winston's Wish has a free-phone helpline **08088 020 021** and website www.winstonswish.org offering several specialist bereavement services including support for accident, illness, suicide, murder and military related deaths.

Point-1 is our local Tier 2 mental health support services for children and young people in Norfolk. If a child is displaying emerging mental health difficulties as a result of a bereavement, such as self-harm, not eating, not sleeping, prolonged anxiety, depression, then a Point 1 referral should be made. This can be done by school or a GP, or you can refer directly by emailing point1@ormiston.org or telephone **0800 977 4077**. See www.point-1.org.uk.