

A large, stylized graphic on the left side of the page, composed of several thick, curved purple lines that resemble a partial smile or a series of concentric arcs.

# Helping children cope with a death in the family

Rehabilitation and Support

A guide for patients and carers

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When someone dies, it can be a very difficult and confusing time for everyone. When you are given bad news, you can have lots of different feelings and emotions and everyone can react differently. You might feel upset, sad or guilty - or you might feel nothing at all and wonder why. The important thing for adults to realise is that children do grieve, at whatever age, and protecting them by not talking about a serious illness or death, will only make them feel confused and excluded.

## What to say?

- Tell them that you have some sad news to tell them
- Be as honest, simple and open as possible. Try not to use euphemisms - like lost, or gone to sleep, because a child may interpret this literally and this creates other fears
- Give plenty of time for questions or repeated explanations
- Be prepared for many different reactions. Children may be distraught one minute then go off to play with friends or go back to watching a favourite programme on the television
- Let them know who will care for them and reassure them about all the things that will remain the same

- Tell them that nobody was responsible for what happened and no-one was to blame. Tell them that the person did not choose to leave them and that they are not able to return. Let them know that everyone deals with this differently and that they have a right to their own feelings
- Explain that they will feel sad for a long time and that these feelings will come and go
- Let them know that it is normal to be upset and to cry or think about the person a lot
- Reassure them that you are there for them and that there are also other people that could help, if they want to talk to someone

## How can you help?

Children should be given the opportunity to attend the funeral (if they wish) and help choose music, readings etc, and be involved

- Talk openly about the person who has died, communicate
- Discuss feelings and emotions with them. Help them express their feelings
- Talk about your own feelings and share the grief as well as the good memories
- Find practical ways of keeping memories alive e.g. plant a tree, make a memory box or name a star



- Keep to normal routines where possible
- Inform the school and ask for support from a class teacher
- Allow children to comfort others. Some children like to help and can be very practical and sensitive in dealing with other children or older people
- It is also ok to do nice things and have a good time - they do not have to be sad all the time
- Seek help from friends and family, or if you have any concerns, ask for support from professionals

## Resources

There are lots of resources available for parents and children, which include telephone helplines, websites, books and activities. You can also speak to your GP, school or local Hospice. They may be able to advise on other services which could be available in your local area.

### **Childhood Bereavement Network**

[www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk](http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk)

### **Child Bereavement UK**

[www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)

### **Cruse Bereavement Care**

[www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk)

Tel: 0844 477 9400

**Young People's helpline:** 0808 808 1677 and website:  
[www.rd4u.org.uk](http://www.rd4u.org.uk)

### **Winston's Wish**

[www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)  
Tel: 08452 03 04 05

### **Child Grief and Bereavement**

[www.griefencounter.org.uk](http://www.griefencounter.org.uk)  
Tel: 020 8371 8455

## **Books (general)**

### **Caring for Your Grieving Child. Martha Wakenshaw**

New Harbinger Publications, Inc. (2002) ISBN 1 - 5 7224-306-6

### **How to help a Child Cope with Grief. Janice Perkins**

Foulsham Books (2007) ISBN 978-0-572-03309-5

### **Someone Very Important Has Just Died. Mary Turner**

Jessica Kingsley Publishers (2005) ISBN 1 - 843010-295-1



## Books (for children)

### **Badger's Parting Gifts. Susan Varley**

Collins (Picture Lions), London (1994) ISBN 0006643175

### **Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine. Diana Crossley**

Winston's Wish/Hawthorn Press ISBN 1 - 86989058 - 2

### **Waterbugs and Dragonflies. Doris Stickney**

Continuum, London, (2006) ISBN 0-8265-7181-1

### **When Someone Very Special Dies. Marge Heegaard**

Woodland Press, USA ISBN 0-9620502-0-2

## Books (for teenagers)

### **Help for the hard Times. Earl Hipp**

Hazelden, USA ISBN 1-56838-085-2

### **When a Friend Dies. Marilyn Gootman**

Free Spirit Publishing, USA ISBN 0-915793-66-0

If you need this leaflet in large print, Braille, audio or different language, please call 0151 556 5570.

**If you have a comment, concern, compliment or complaint, please call 0151 556 5203.**

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