

## STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORT

- Be available for the child to talk to or to help them – don't avoid them or feel uncomfortable
- Show genuine concern and caring behaviours, including expressing your own feelings
- Don't tell them how they should feel or imply they should feel better
- Don't avoid talking about the loss out of fear of reminding them – they won't have forgotten it but may be moving on in their own way
- Don't have conversations which may suggest it was their fault
- They may be more tired than usual so plan quiet times / early bedtimes
- If they are struggling to sleep, use soft blankets and a night light
- Coordination with the nursery can help with reassurance and planning
- Finally – remember that smiling and laughing is okay!

## HELPFUL CONTACTS

CRUSE BEREAVEMENT CARE  
SCOTLAND

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

WINSTON'S WISH

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

CHILD BEREAVEMENT UK

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

CHILDHOOD BEREAVEMENT  
NETWORK

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

### References

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Jewett, C. L. (1994). *Helping children cope with separation and loss*. London: Free Association Books.

Ward, B. and Associates. (1995). *Good Grief 1: Exploring Feelings, Loss and Death with Under Elevens* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: Jessica Kingsley.

Webb, N. B. (2002). The Child and Death. In N. B. Webb (Ed.), *Helping Bereaved Children: A Handbook for Practitioners* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: The Guildford Press.

# BEREAVEMENT AND LOSS

## IN YOUNG CHILDREN



**A guide to grief for parents  
and practitioners.**

## REACTIONS TO GRIEF

Your child may react in a number of different ways to the news of someone they know dying. This may include:

- Shock and disbelief
- Dismay and protest
- Sadness
- Anger and aggressive behavior
- Guilt or self-blame
- Anxiety
- Sleep difficulties
- Vivid memories which may become scary
- Physical issues
- Behaviour of a younger child
- Maturing and growing
- Personality changes
- Thoughts and questions about why it happened
- Continuing with usual activities
- Lack of concentration and restlessness
- Social isolation

It is also important to remember that children develop as individuals. There is no way of knowing how they may react to bereavement. A child's grieving process may be short-lived or last a long time.



## HOW MUCH WILL MY CHILD UNDERSTAND?

At this age, children have less understanding of the concept of death. While this means they often do not fully understand what has happened, it may also protect them as they do not understand the long-term implications of death.

Their understanding of the world around them is based on their own thoughts and feelings, and they believe that these are the most important with an inability to understand that other people have different thoughts and feelings. This may lead to them believing that they are responsible for the death or could have prevented it.

They also struggle to understand that death is final and the person will not be coming back, and that once a person has died they do not need physical requirements such as sleep anymore.

Their understanding of time is cyclical – they get up in the morning, do their activities, have their meals, go to sleep, and wake up again – which may lead them to believe that when we die we live again.

## HOW SHOULD I TELL MY CHILD?

Ideally, children should be told by an adult who is close to them and in a setting they feel safe in. They should be told the information in a direct way which is not too complicated but which doesn't miss out important details.

At a young age, children only understand concrete ideas which they are able to imagine. You should avoid the use of euphemisms such as “gone to sleep”. For the same reason, religious concepts should not be introduced unless they are already part of the child's life.

### WHAT ABOUT THE FUNERAL?

It is up to you to decide whether the funeral will be appropriate for your child, however it will give them an opportunity to say goodbye with others they feel close to and may help them to understand that the person is not coming back. A child should never be forced to attend. If they will be going, they should be prepared for what will happen and given support throughout.

### SHOULD I TELL THEIR NURSERY?

Telling your child's nursery will help to make their return easier and will allow the staff to provide support and plan, however this is up to you to decide.