



Helping Children with Bereavement

How do Children show their grief? And how can caregivers help?

Age (years)	What caregivers might notice?	Support
0-2 <i>Respond to how those around them are feeling</i>	1. Changes in daily habits such as sleeping/eating	1. Keep a basic routine in place 2. Provide comfort as you normally would when your child is distressed – hugging/soothing/ reassurance
2-4 <i>Respond to how those around them are feeling</i>	1. Changes in daily habits such as sleeping, eating, toileting (bedwetting) 2. Changes or regression in things they have learned (not uncommon for children to forget words they already know) 3. Become clingy	1. Playing, drawing 2. Keep a routine in place 3. Provide comfort as you normally would when your child is upset – hugging/soothing/ reassurance
4-7 <i>Likely to ask questions about the person that has died</i> <i>Talk about the person that has died through play.</i>	1. Changes in daily habits such as sleeping (nightmares), eating, toileting (bedwetting) 2. Changes or regression in things they have learnt (words they already know or skills they have learnt) 3. Might start to become more aggressive in their play	1. Give age appropriate answers to questions they ask 2. Do things that can help your child to say goodbye or show how they are feeling (see p.4) 3. Keep a routine in place 4. Provide comfort as you normally would when your child is upset



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<p>7-11</p> <p><i>Ask more detailed questions about the person that died.</i></p> <p><i>Have an understanding of death.</i></p> <p><i>May fear own death or losing other family or friends</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. May show signs of distress through changes in how they play, how they act, how they talk or communicate 2. May struggle with school related tasks 3. May try to spend more time on their own, or show signs of low mood 4. Increased worry or fixation on their health or symptoms of coronavirus 5. May notice changes in some of the things they have learnt (not uncommon for children to forget skills) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gently invite your child to talk about how they are feeling. You might ask about what they are showing in their play or creativity (see p.3) 2. Do things that can help the child to say goodbye or show how they are feeling (see p.4) 3. Respond appropriately to questions 4. Keep a routine in place 5. Provide comfort as you normally would when your child is upset
<p>11-18</p> <p><i>Ask detailed questions about the person that died.</i></p> <p><i>Have an understanding of death.</i></p> <p><i>May fear own death or losing other family or friends.</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. May try to care for others. 2. May display more feelings of anger and/or guilt because of the death, may show their distress through what seems like challenging or out of character behaviours. 3. May seem lower in mood. 4. May be in denial about the person that died 5. May want to talk to friends rather than family 6. Increased worry or fixation on their health or symptoms of coronavirus 7. Might notice changes in general day to day habits and behaviours. 8. May struggle with schoolwork 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Important to listen, be available and be prepared that some days they might want to talk more than others. 2. When they do talk, listen, don't try to fix, advise, or problem solve 3. It can be normal to turn to friends as an older child. Reassure them that this is okay but also let them know that if they are worried about anything, they can talk to you too As with younger children, keep a routine in place



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Routine

Keeping routine is important following bereavement. This is likely to be different currently but as much as possible try to establish a small routine. Here are some ideas:

- Getting up, napping and going to bed at similar times
- Mealtimes at similar times each day
- Plan small tasks for each day and tick them off
- Continue social contact with family or friends through online mediums

Ways to talk about death and dying

These are a summary, for more detailed resources on grief in children and young people and talking to children about coronavirus, please see p.4

- **Use simple clear language.** Try to avoid phrases such as 'they have gone to sleep', or 'they have gone away'. Some children might think the person will wake up, they might become frightened of going to sleep or think when someone goes away, they don't come back.
- **What is the language of death and dying** used in your family and community? Try to use an understanding that might be familiar to your child.
- **Give a brief explanation** of what happened to the person that died, you don't need to go into lots of detail but be prepared to answer questions. Some of the question's children ask are different to adults but follow their lead as best you can.
- **Normalise feelings.** Let the child know that people feel lots of different feelings and emotions after people die and there is no right or wrong way to feel. Depending on the age of the child might want to tell them how you feel about the death of the person
- **Specific to coronavirus:** children may have worries or fears that other people might die or that they might die from the coronavirus. Important to be honest but reassuring.



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- **Blame and Guilt.** Children sometimes blame themselves for someone dying. Especially with coronavirus related deaths, children might worry that they passed on the virus or that they didn't wash their hands enough. Important to reassure them that it was not their fault, or anyone else's fault.
- **Talk to your child about funerals and rituals.** This might be different at this time or different to what your child expects. Explain what is going to happen in simple language. If some funeral arrangements that would normally take place cannot, explain this to your child what you are planning to do instead or what you plan to do in the future.
- **Don't be afraid of showing your feelings** to your child, showing your child that it is okay to grieve can help to show them not to be afraid of their own feelings
- **Take care of yourself.** Allow time to grieve the loss, it is important to look after yourself as best you can. Make sure that you take time to talk to people around you.

Ways that can help children grieve

Saying Goodbye

Ask your child if and how they would like to say goodbye to the person. They might want to light a candle, write a letter, sing a song, write a poem, or plant something in the garden.

Memory Box

Make a memory box of photos, drawing, small gifts, certain smells or fragrances or other significant items that remind them of the person who has died (see Macmillan resource on p.4-5)

Creativity

Children might show their feelings in creative ways through play or art.

For *younger children*, ask about what their characters or drawings represent; 'can you tell me what is happening here?', 'who is this?', or 'what is this person doing?'. Try to ask curious open questions.



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For teenagers, you might want to check in, but be prepared that there are times they want to talk and other times they don't. Ask about emotional feelings and how they feel in their bodies physically. These feelings might be easier for some children and young people to access and talk about.

Online

For teenagers, it might help them to read about how other children feel when someone dies.

Below are some ideas where children can read from trustworthy sources

Online Resources

- ***Talking to Children about covid-19***

British Psychological Society – Advice: Talking to children about Coronavirus:

<https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy%20-%20Files/Talking%20to%20children%20about%20coronavirus.pdf>

Place2be - Coronavirus: Helpful information to answer questions from children:

<https://www.place2be.org.uk/about-us/news-and-blogs/2020/march/coronavirus-information-for-children/>

Coronavirus: 7 simple tips on how to talk to kids about Coronavirus:

<https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/how-you-can-help/emergencies/coronavirus-uk-outbreak-facts#coronavirus>

- ***Bereavement – Resources for Parents to support children***

Winston's Wish – Bereavement During Coronavirus

<https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus/>

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust – short animation and booklet about talking to children about death of a loved one during coronavirus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SnIYOmeAZE&feature=youtu.be>
<https://indd.adobe.com/view/eafec4d8-5699-4f34-8342-9c3de45c26af>



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Child Bereavement UK - What helps grieving children and young people

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=f468eec4-3b7c-4a1e-9690-6eed73d5db02>

Macmillan Cancer Support – Making a memory box

<https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/treatment/if-you-have-an-advanced-cancer/end-of-life/making-a-memory-box>

Cruse Bereavement Care – Resources for parents and carers

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/for-parents>

- ***Bereavement – Resources For children***

Child Bereavement UK – When someone dies

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=1448a7a6-8823-4f15-bfb0-4d478d13527e>

Young Minds – Grief and Loss

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/feelings-and-symptoms/grief-and-loss/>

- ***Books***

Child Bereavement UK – List of Books arranged by ages

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/resources-for-children-and-young-people>