



**Villa Real School**  
*together we achieve*

# Bereavement Policy

## 2026

Responsibility: Natalie Fitzpatrick

Date: March 2026

Date to be reviewed: March 2028

## **INTRODUCTION**

Approximately 46,300 children are bereaved of a parent every year in the UK, which equates to around 127 children bereaved daily. 1 in 29 five- to sixteen-year-olds has been bereaved of a parent or sibling—roughly one child per average classroom. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, relative, friend or other significant person.

Experiencing a bereavement can make children more vulnerable. Bereavement, whether it is an expected death because of an illness or a sudden unexpected death or suicide, is something that can impact on members of our school community at any time.

Death is one of the most difficult subjects to address in school. It is inevitable though, every school community, at some point, will be affected by a death in some way or another.

This is most likely to be following the death of a students' family member, carer or friend. But it might be the death of a student, the death of a staff member or the death of a key member of the school community such as a governor or popular visitor to the school.

In the modern world, news travels fast to children and young people, often via social media. These posts or blogs often bring about big questions about death and dying to the fore. Children may look to teachers and adults in school as well as their parents and communities to help them understand what they have seen or been told about even if it does not affect them directly.

Children and young people have a health curiosity and if they are not informed of the circumstances or feel they are unable to ask questions, their normal grief process can be obstructed.

It is important that we at Villa Real have the knowledge and feel empowered to support children through these big questions or in times of bereavement where they need support in the grieving process.

## **RATIONALE**

We at Villa Real, understand that bereavement is faced by members of our school community at different times and that when the loss is of a member of our school community – such as a child or staff member, it can be particularly difficult. Pupils and students need to be supported when they experience family bereavements and other significant losses during their lives while they are at school.

This policy will provide guidelines to be followed post bereavement. The aim is to be supportive to both pupils /students and adults, and for staff to have a greater confidence and be better equipped to cope when bereavement

happens. Every death and the circumstances in which it occurs is different and this policy has been constructed to guide us on how to deal professionally, sensitively and compassionately with difficult matters in upsetting circumstances.

Villa Real School adheres to the statutory Relationships, Sex and Health Education guidance that includes learning about grief. The aim is to learn that change and loss, including bereavement can provoke a range of feelings and that grief is a natural response. We are committed to providing an environment that is as supportive as possible.

At Villa Real we are committed to the emotional health and well-being of our staff and pupils /students. We are dedicated to the continual development of a 'healthy school', and we look to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that support and prepare pupils/ students for coping with separation or loss of a loved one, either through death or divorce. We believe by adopting a planned and considered approach the school can support the emotional well-being of the child, family and staff.

At Villa Real, we recognise that:

- Grief may not always be apparent to the onlooker, but its invisibility makes it no less real
- Different religions/culture's view death and bereavement from different perspectives and all viewpoints should be taken into consideration and given equal value in the school environment
- The death of a child has huge repercussions beyond the immediate teaching/care team of that child, and every effort should be taken to inform and deal sensitively with the far-reaching contacts
- Bereavement is a loss, but many losses are like a bereavement in the way a person or child feels. For example, a divorce or separation, especially a sudden and non-amicable one, can leave the child or young person without a significant person in their life. Similarly, an older sibling moving out, or an experience of changing homes. Even a parent or carers decline in mental health can mean there is a change in personality, and a child may feel like they have lost that key person as they know them as they become distant or detached because of their mental health
- Our children at Villa Real may respond differently due to their individual ability to understand situations and deal with emotions. (See Appendix 6)

This policy is based on information and ideas from professional sources, including National charities which are experienced and skilled in supporting children, teenagers and adults with bereavement and loss.

## **OBJECTIVES**

This Policy will provide:

- A framework for all staff to give guidance in how to deal sensitively and compassionately with the bereavement
- Support for pupils, students and/or all members of staff before (where applicable), during and after bereavement
- Enhancement of effective communication and clarify the pathway of support between members of staff, pupils, students, the family and the community
- The identify of key staff within school and the governing body/Local Authority who can provide specific support and make decisions
- Clear expectation about the way school will respond to a death, and provide a nurturing, safe and supportive environment for all

### Section 1 – The death of a pupil /student or member of staff

#### Roles and responsibilities

The Headteacher will take charge of the situation if there is a death of a pupil /student or of a member of staff. This may impact the day to day running of the school, so if this is the case, the deputy head or other members of the SMT or MMT may be asked to step into to support.

In the case of a sudden or traumatic death of a pupil, the school may be called upon to be a part of a multi-agency review. If this was to be the case, a representative would need to be appointed.

The best person to liaise with the family may depend on the specific situation, relationship with the pupil/family and experience of the member of staff. This will be decided in each individual circumstance.

The indiscriminate spread of news via social media may mean that some members of the school community hear the news before others. Villa Real School will review each occasion on individual circumstances and the Headteacher will decide whether to convene meetings, send emails or make calls.

When delivering news to pupils/ students, the Headteacher will give guidance on how this should be done, depending on the situation and considering procedures and protocol laid out in this policy. It may be that the news is told to individuals, small groups or classes at a time with a familiar adult. If a pupil /student has died, the news should be shared with their close friends or class first, and the wider school community secondly, via the most appropriate format e.g. letter, School Comms etc. See Appendix 4 for letter template

It is the Headteacher's responsibility to allocate a safe place and time for grief so staff and pupils /students can feel supported. They will outline the pastoral support that is available and there is additional information and support helplines and websites in Appendix 1 of this document.

### Procedures

Clarifying the information and wishes of the family/families is important. Some families may want to share information with the school community while others may not. A simple confirmation of the death may be required until more details are available and/or the family are consulted. The school should help to prevent speculation and rumours, as well as being a source of support for the family and school community.

It is important to share the news with the school community. It helps to be prepared when delivering sad news, so a script would be useful to help organise what you are going to say before you start saying it. Do not be afraid about showing emotion, or surprised if you are emotional when you are speaking, this is just a human emotion and can also help others in the grieving process. Suggestions may include:

- Start by acknowledging you have some sad news to give
- Be honest – Give the news, stating the simple facts and use the word 'dead' or 'died'
- If known, and with the family's permission, explain briefly where and when the death occurred
- If not know, say so, and that you will endeavour to find out. If rumours are rife, say which of these are definitely not correct, if known. Where appropriate remind pupils /students and staff of their impact on social media
- Talk briefly and positively about the person who died without eulogising them
- Mention any arrangements already in place, including those needing support
- Acknowledge that not everyone will be feeling sad and that that is ok
- Allow a break in the timetable for pupils /students to process the news and take a little time out, and tell them that this is there for them and it is ok
- Say that a letter will be sent out to parents and carers about the sad news. A template letter to parents/carers is part of Appendix 4

### The first few days

Although school can provide stability and normality for staff and pupils/ students, some flexibility may be necessary, so it may be appropriate for the timetable to be adjusted maybe for some children, classes, or whole school, depending on the individual situation.

Bereaved children and young adults may need time to grieve and manage overwhelming feelings, so if necessary, being able to leave a classroom and take time in a safe space can be organised and welcomed.

A book of condolences or a tribute of some kind may be set up if it is deemed appropriate by the Headteacher. It should be in a safe place which is accessible and ideally where it can be supervised.

The Headteacher should be in contact with the family and let them know about the tribute or book and offer for them to visit if they wish to or take photographs to share with them later.

The Headteacher should consult with the staff and pupils /students before removing any temporary tribute, giving notice to prepare them beforehand.

### The funeral

Rather than making assumptions, the Headteacher or nominated family liaison person should consult the family to find out whether members of staff or pupils /students are welcome to attend. It may also be that children/staff can be involved in choosing flowers/songs/organising a collection. This will be dictated by the family.

The Headteacher will need to identify the practicalities of issues such as staff cover to allow those wishing to attend the funeral to do so. (For some circumstances it may be appropriate to close the school, for others, it may not). The Headteacher will also need to consider the arrangements for pupils /students attending the funeral, and how they will be supported or supervised. This may be by parents, carers or members of the school staff and community.

### Support for pupils/ students

School staff and Headteacher will need to consider whether support for pupils/ students can be provided for by the school staff and their in-house expertise, or whether external agencies or local services are appropriate. See Appendices for support advice.

### Support for staff

Supporting bereaved pupils /students can be a very stressful time for staff who may already be struggling with their own reactions and emotions. It is important that at this time staff speak to other members of staff to let them know that you are finding things difficult and this may need to be passed onto the MMT or SLMT so more support can be provided. See Appendices for support advice. It is important that staff welfare and well-being is reviewed and action is taken when and where necessary to support the individuals or whole staff depending on the situation.

### Remembering

The Headteacher or the person identified to liaise with the family should consult the family of the person who died about any plans for a memorial, assembly or tribute. It may be that a more permanent tribute might want to be organised such as a tree, special garden, piece of artwork or a bench, however in the future, the removal, relocation or replacement will need to be managed sensitively.

## Section 2 – Supporting a bereaved pupil/ student

### Returning to school after a bereavement

Pupils and students will return to Villa Real after many different bereavements. It may be that a very significant person in that child's life has died like a parent/carer or sibling, or maybe a grandparent or someone a little bit less significant, so the support delivered will need to be tailored on an individual basis depending on the circumstance.

With the supporting, trusting and familiar environment Villa Real provides for our pupils and students, there will generally be more than enough comfort for a grieving pupil /student. They will not need a bereavement expert, just someone who is familiar and caring.

It can be helpful for the Headteacher or the chosen family liaison person to meet with the pupil /student and their family/carers to establish what has happened and to discuss the child's return to school. This should be someone who the child will feel comfortable with and happy to see at this difficult time.

The purpose of this meeting should be to:

- Acknowledge the death
- Find out how the pupil /student would like to share the news, or if they do not
- Ask about what the parents and carers have said to the child about that deceased person, and 'where are they now?' (Parents and carers may have told the child that the person is now a star looking down on them, or that they are in heaven, or that they are a rainbow) It is important the adults supporting the child know what has been said so they can say the same thing, rather than accidentally say the wrong thing and confusing or upsetting the child more
- Organise a safe place where the child could go if they feel overwhelmed and need 'time out'. Work out a way to signal this to staff, it may be a card handed over or you may organise a time in the day when they could go. Explain that other school/ class staff know this and that it will be ok for them to be there
- Consider whether there needs to be 'time out' activities organised such as colouring, journals, art and craft, screen time etc.
- Set guidelines for communication – with the pupil, between members of staff and between home and school
- Consider and ask if Villa Real can do anything to help support the family at this time
- Consider providing support for peers when they have a bereaved friend

If the pupil /student is in this meeting, appropriate communication aids should be present to help support the pupil /student to share their views, worries, wants or needs during this discussion.

#### Longer term support

The pupil /student will continue to grieve for the rest of their life and may require on-going support. Significant dates or anniversaries, mothers' /fathers' day etc. may be particularly difficult. These significant dates or days personal to the child, should be written down and shared with other class staff and new class staff when transitioning through the school so everyone supporting that child is aware. Regular contact with their family/carers will help to build up an overall picture of how the pupil /student is coping, this should be the responsibility of the Headteacher, the person identified to liaise with the family or perhaps the class teacher.

Class teams should be identified and responsible for the monitoring of the pupil, in terms of emotional well-being and their learning, and then identifying any concerns with the Headteacher and the family liaison.

Bereaved young people can find change difficult, so preparing them in advance (where possible) may help them to voice their worries and ease the process. Additional support may be needed, particularly at major transition times in school like the start of a new school year.

#### Death, grief and bereavement in the curriculum

The teaching of death, grief and bereavement will help pupils /students to understand feelings of grief and prepare them for the future. Informing parents and carers in advance will help to gather information about previous bereavements so that vulnerable pupils /students can be prepared for the lesson. Recently bereaved pupils /students may find it helpful that they are given the option to work elsewhere or step outside, if they think it would be too painful to attend.

Teaching of these topics can be linked into many different parts of the curriculum. They lend themselves to PSCH, but there are links to many other subjects like Science, PE, History etc. See Appendix 7.

#### Support for staff

Being alongside anyone who is experiencing a loss can be emotionally draining and supporting a bereaved pupil /student particularly so. At Villa Real, we encourage adults to take part in the online training opportunities from the National Charities, See Appendix 1 and 3. If additional emotional support is required, support could be found from people within school or from outside agencies.

## Appendices

1. List of online resources and information
2. List of books for use with pupils /students to support
3. List of books/online support for professionals supporting pupils /students and students
4. Template letters
  - a. To parents informing them of a students' death
  - b. To parents informing them of a staff death
5. How to support pupils /students– a protocol
6. Safe Spaces
7. A child's understanding of death according to ages and stages of child development
8. Cross curricular links associated with teaching and learning about death, grief and bereavement

Appendix 1  
List of online resources and information

# USEFUL WEBSITES

## BackPocketTeacher

SEND advice, resources and training for parents and professionals, specialising in bereavement, grief and loss.  
[www.backpocketteacher.co.uk](http://www.backpocketteacher.co.uk)

## Inclusive Technology

Supplier of software and hardware for people with SEND.  
[www.inclusive.co.uk](http://www.inclusive.co.uk)

## Intensive Interaction Institute

The institute defines, develops and disseminates the theory and practice of Intensive Interaction.  
[www.intensiveinteraction.org](http://www.intensiveinteraction.org)

## Makaton

A language programme using signs and symbols to help people to communicate. It is designed to support spoken language and the signs and symbols are used with speech, in spoken word order.  
[www.makaton.org](http://www.makaton.org)

## Sensory Directory

Resources for children with SEND.  
[www.sensorydirect.com](http://www.sensorydirect.com)

## Signalong

A key word sign-supported communication system based on British Sign Language and is used in spoken word order. It uses speech, sign, body language, facial expression and voice tone to reference the link between sign and word.  
[www.signalong.org.uk](http://www.signalong.org.uk)

## TTS

Supplier of teaching resources including resources for children with SEND.  
[www.tts-group.co.uk](http://www.tts-group.co.uk)

## Widgit

Widgit symbols aid communication. They are simply drawn, colourful symbols which illustrate a single concept in a clear and concise way.  
[www.widgit.com](http://www.widgit.com)

## WHERE TO SEEK FURTHER SUPPORT

### BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT

#### Childhood Bereavement Network

Provides a directory of organisations around the country that can offer local bereavement services to families and young people. Also offers publications, information and training.

Phone: 020 7843 6309  
Email: [cbn@ncb.org.uk](mailto:cbn@ncb.org.uk)  
[www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk](http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk)

## Winston's Wish

Winston's Wish offers guidance, information and support to those caring for a bereaved child through a Freephone National Helpline and a range of publications and resources (including memory boxes).

Freephone National Helpline: 08088 020021  
Email: [ask@winstonswish.org](mailto:ask@winstonswish.org)  
[www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org)

## SEND SUPPORT

#### Action on Hearing Loss (formerly RNID)

The UK's leading charity supporting people with hearing loss, deafness and tinnitus.

Phone: 0808 808 0123  
Textphone: 0808 808 9000  
SMS: 0780 0000 360  
Email: [information@hearingloss.org.uk](mailto:information@hearingloss.org.uk)  
[www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk)

#### BILD (The British Institute of Learning Disabilities)

Phone: 0121 415 6960  
Email: [enquiries@bild.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@bild.org.uk)  
[www.bild.org.uk](http://www.bild.org.uk)

**British Dyslexia Association**

The BDA is the voice of dyslexic people. They aim to influence government and other institutions to promote a dyslexia friendly society, that enables dyslexic people of all ages to reach their full potential.  
 Phone: 0333 405 4555  
 Email: [helpline@bdadyslexia.org.uk](mailto:helpline@bdadyslexia.org.uk)  
[www.bdadyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk)

**Down's Syndrome Association**

Information and support for families and professionals.  
 Phone: 0333 1212 300  
 Email: [info@downs-syndrome.org.uk](mailto:info@downs-syndrome.org.uk)  
[www.downs-syndrome.org.uk](http://www.downs-syndrome.org.uk)

**MENCAP**

The Learning Disability Charity – working with children and adults with a learning disability and their families and carers to improve their lives and opportunities.  
 Phone: 0800 808 1111  
 Email: [community@mencap.org.uk](mailto:community@mencap.org.uk)  
[www.mencap.org.uk](http://www.mencap.org.uk)

**Mind**

Mind is the leading mental health charity in England and Wales and works for a better life for everyone with experience of mental distress. Local groups offer supported housing, counselling, befriending, advocacy, employment and training services etc.  
 Phone: 020 8519 2122  
 Email: [supporterelations@mind.org.uk](mailto:supporterelations@mind.org.uk)  
[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

**NASEN** (The National Association for Special

Educational Needs)  
 Phone: 01827 311500  
 Email: [welcomes@nasen.org.uk](mailto:welcomes@nasen.org.uk)  
[www.nasen.org.uk](http://www.nasen.org.uk)

**National Autistic Society**

The UK's leading charity for autistic people and their families. The goal of NAS is to help transform lives, change attitudes and create a society that works for autistic people.  
 Phone: 020 7833 2299  
 Email: [nas@nas.org.uk](mailto:nas@nas.org.uk)  
[www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

**PAMIS** (Promoting A More Inclusive Society)

PAMIS support people with profound and multiple learning disabilities – their families, carers and professionals.  
 Phone: 0141 572 0782  
 Email: [tayside@pamis.org.uk](mailto:tayside@pamis.org.uk)  
[www.pamis.org.uk](http://www.pamis.org.uk)

**Pets as Therapy**

Pets as Therapy seeks to enhance health and wellbeing in the community through visits of trusted volunteers with their behaviourally assessed animals. It provides a visiting service in hospitals, hospices, nursing and care homes, special needs schools and a variety of other venues all across the UK.  
[www.petsastherapy.org](http://www.petsastherapy.org)

**RNIB**

The Royal National Institute of Blind People is a UK charity offering information, support and advice to almost two million people in the UK with sight loss.  
 Phone: 0303 123 9999  
 Email: [helpline@rnib.org.uk](mailto:helpline@rnib.org.uk)  
[www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

**SCOPE**

The disability equality charity in England and Wales. SCOPE provides practical information and emotional support and campaigns for a fairer society.  
 Phone: 0800 800 3333  
 Email: [helpline@scope.org.uk](mailto:helpline@scope.org.uk)  
[www.scope.org.uk](http://www.scope.org.uk)

**Sense**

Sense supports people with complex disabilities, including those who are deafblind.  
 Phone: 0300 330 9256  
 Email: [info@sense.org.uk](mailto:info@sense.org.uk)  
[www.sense.org.uk](http://www.sense.org.uk)

(Taken from the Book We All Grieve from Winston's Wish)

<https://chums.uk.com/bereavement-service/> - A bereavement support service for children who have suffered a loss

<https://www.juliashouse.org/about-us/how-we-help/support-family> – A support resource for bereaved siblings

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/pages/category/short-animated-films>  
 an animated story of bereavement for children

<https://www.hopeagain.org.uk/> Young People Living After Loss support

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/znvts82>- Information on the way bereavement affects children.

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/> - Offer free, confidential, digital bereavement support by telephone, video or instant messenger, to families wherever they are in the UK.

## Appendix 2

### List of books for use with pupils/students to support

#### Books for Supporting Bereavement

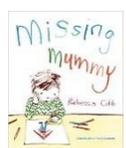
Most books for younger children are written to be read aloud by an adult and inspire questions, answers and conversations. These books include themes that can help youngsters understand what happens when someone dies, or prepare them for a bereavement, in ways that will not overwhelm them.

#### Under 5 Years



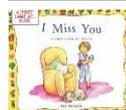
**Someone I know has died** - Author: Trish Phillips.

Normally available from Child Bereavement UK. Innovative activity book with interactive features written for bereaved children to do by themselves or with adult help. For pre-school and early years.



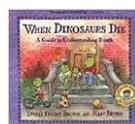
**Missing Mummy** -\_Author: Rebecca Cobb.

Beautifully illustrated and with moments of wonderful warmth, this is a touching, honest and helpful book about the death of a parent. With minimal text, it covers some of the worries and fears that a young child may have after a death, offering reassurance and hope. For pre-school and early years.



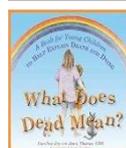
**I Miss You: a First Look at Death**\_ Author: Pat Thomas

This book helps children understand that death is a natural complement to life, and that grief and a sense of loss are normal feelings for them to have. For pre-school and early years.



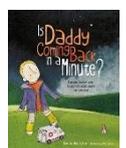
**When Dinosaurs Die – A guide to understanding death** -\_Authors: Laurie Rasky Brown and Marc Brown

A comprehensive, sensitive guide for families dealing with the loss of loved ones, 'When Dinosaurs Die' helps primary aged children understand what death means, and how best to cope with their feelings.



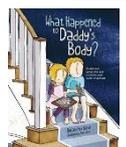
**What Does Dead Mean?** -\_Authors: Caroline Jay and Jenni Thomas, OBE

A book for young children to help explain death and dying, based on the many questions that children ask. This book looks at questions such as why 'Why can't doctors and nurses make people better?', and offers practical help for children, as well as guidance for parents and carers when a child is bereaved.



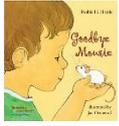
**Is Daddy Coming Back in a Minute?** -\_Author: Elke Barber & Alex Barber

Alex is only three when his father has a heart attack. All on his own, Alex manages to get help but his beloved Daddy dies at the scene. Explains sudden death to pre-school children using words and illustrations they will understand.



**What Happened to Daddy's Body?** -\_Author: Elke Barber & Alex Barber

Using ideas very young children can understand, this sequel to "Is Daddy Coming Back in a Minute?" sensitively and honestly explains what happens after death. It helps children to understand cremation, burial, and spreading the ashes. It reassures children that it is okay to be sad, but it's also okay to be happy.



**Goodbye Mousie** -\_Author: Robie H Harris

The story of a young boy dealing with the death of his pet mouse is handled with the sure touch of an author familiar with children's tender emotions. Simply told by the boy, in a matter of fact tone with a dash of humour, he recounts his reactions to the death of his pet mouse.

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**Tough Boris** -\_Author: Mem Fox

Boris von der Borch is a mean, greedy old pirate – tough as nails, through and through, like *all* pirates. Or is he?

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**Suzie Goes to a Funeral** -\_Author: Charlotte Olson

Join Suzie as she goes to Grandma's funeral and says goodbye. Suzie can help explain to a child who may be anxious about going to a funeral for the first time. A simple story to help and show what they might experience on this day.

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**5 – 11 Years**

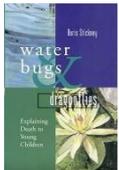


**Remembering** - Author: Dianne Leutner. Illustrated by: Daniel Postgate.

Normally available from Child Bereavement UK.

It's part book, part scrapbook and was created to help keep a child's memories alive after the loss of someone special and to give children a place to return to whenever they wish.

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**Waterbugs and Dragonflies:** Explaining Death to Young children

Author: Doris Stickney

Written from a Christian perspective, this acclaimed book can be used to help explain the concept of death to young children. The story illustrates that death is inevitable, irreversible but natural.

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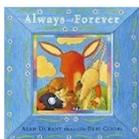
**Badgers Parting Gifts** -\_Author: Susan Varley

Badger is so old that he knows he will soon die. He tries to prepare his friends for this event, but when he does die, they are still grief-stricken. Gradually they come to terms with their grief by remembering all the practical things Badger taught them, and so Badger lives on in his friends' memories of him.

The new, 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of the book features a reading guide from Child Bereavement UK that provides tips for reading *Badger's Parting Gifts* with children and helping them better understand grief.

Download our online information sheet *Talking With and Supporting Bereaved Children* with further notes and guidance, using examples and illustrations from the book.

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**Always and Forever** - Author: Alan Durant

When Fox dies the rest of his 'family' are absolutely distraught. How will Mole, Otter and Hare go on without their beloved friend? But, months later, Squirrel reminds them all of how funny Fox used to be, and they realise that Fox is still there in their hearts and memories.

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**Love Will Never Die** -\_Author: Clare Shaw

Using clear but child-friendly language, large colourful illustrations, this rhyming book addresses the mixed feelings a bereaved child might go through. It offers support and understanding alongside interactive areas where the child can express themselves through writing and drawing.

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### **Saying Goodbye to Hare**

Author: Carol Lee

This is an uplifting story written for children aged 5-9 years about death and dying. As young Rabbit witnesses the life, illness and death of his dear friend Hare, the story explores some of the emotional and physical feelings, and some of the questions children have at this time. The story is sensitively written to give a positive, thoughtful message about death and dying. It also includes guidance notes for adults supporting a bereaved child.

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### **Benny's Hat** -\_Author: Juliet Clare Bell

Benny's Hat deals quietly with the huge subject of a sibling dying, from the viewpoint of the sister. It shows how children and young people might deal with serious illness and death differently to adults. The story gives adult readers examples of how to support children when a sibling is not expected to live, not only from the section for parents at the back, but also by watching Friz's parents' reactions to her behaviour.

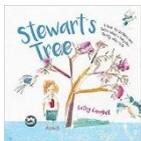
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### **Ben's Flying Flowers** -\_Author: Inger Maier

When Emily loses her brother after a long illness, she feels alone, angry, and very, very sad. With the understanding and support of her parents, Emily learns that it helps when she snuggles with her parents. It helps when she talks about her feelings and asks questions about Ben. And it helps when she does regular kid stuff too. But mostly, she learns that remembering Ben and their happy life together builds health and helpful images that soothe her sad feelings and provide much comfort to her and her family. Written for children aged 4-8.

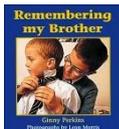
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### **Stewart's Tree** -\_Author: Cathy Campbell

Ellen's new baby brother Stewart has been "lost". Ellen looks in all the cupboards for Stewart, and even in the washing machine – but then her family understands that Stewart has died and isn't going to come back. Together they plant a tree for Stewart, so they will always have a place to remember him. This book for children aged 3+ helps explain sibling loss shortly after birth, and provides guidance for adults written by qualified clinicians.

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### **Remembering My Brother** -\_Author: Ginny Perkins and Leon Morris

In 1993, Chris Reed died. The author of this book has worked with his family to put this book together which aims to show the importance of talking about grief and loss and remembering with love someone important who has died. It relates ordinary family events alongside an account of the family's visit to Chris's grave.

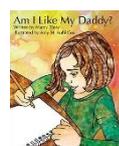
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### **Isaac and the Red Jumper** - Author: Amanda Seyderhelm

Isaac is heartbroken when his best friend Freddie dies. His house freezes. And his red jumper turns grey with grief. His friends try to console him, and it's only after Isaac receives a special visit from Freddie that he understands love and friendship last forever, and are alive in spirit.

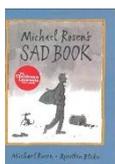
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### **Am I Like My Daddy?** -\_Author: Marcy Blesy

Join seven-year-old Grace on her journey through coping with the loss of her father while learning about the different ways that people grieve the loss of a loved one. In the process of learning about who her father was through the eyes of others, she learns about who she is today because of her father's personality and love. This story is based in the United States but relevant to all.

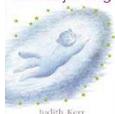
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**Michael Rosen's Sad Book** -\_Author: Michael Rosen

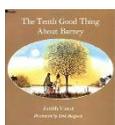
A very personal story that speaks to adults as well as children. The author describes feeling sad after the death of his son and what he does to try to cope with it.

Goodbye Mog



**Goodbye Mog** -\_Author: Judith Kerr

Mog was tired. She was dead tired...Mog thought, 'I want to sleep for ever.' And so she did. But a little bit of her stayed awake to see what would happen next. Mog keeps watch over the upset Thomas family, who miss her terribly, and she wonders how they will ever manage without her. Eventually the family are able to begin moving forward in their lives, but little Debbie says she will always remember Mog. 'So I should hope,' thinks Mog. And she flies up and up and up right into the sun.



**The Tenth Good Thing about Barney** -\_Author: Judith Viorst

A book looking about death from the perspective of a child. Though dealing with the death of a pet, it helps children deal with the reality of any death, including why we have funerals. This book does not have religious overtones, so it can be used by families with all different sets of beliefs.



**The Lonely Tree** -\_Author: Nicholas Halliday

This beautiful and moving story follows the first year in the life of a lone evergreen tree growing in the heart of the ancient oak woodland of the New Forest. The evergreen is befriended by the oldest oak who has lived for hundreds of years. When winter arrives all the oak trees must go to sleep, but of course evergreens never sleep. Finally, after a long, cold and lonely winter, spring brings both sadness and joy to the little tree. *There is also a colouring book that accompanies this story.*



**Rabbityness** -\_ Author: Jo Empson

This is the story of a very special rabbit. He enjoys doing rabbit things, but he also loves – well, un-rabbit things. His boundless creative talent is a source of joy and inspiration to the other rabbits. When Rabbit suddenly disappears, no one knows where he has gone. His friends are desolate. But, as it turns out, Rabbit left behind some very special gifts for them, to help them discover their own un-rabbit talents!



**When Someone Very Special Dies: Children Can Learn to Cope with Grief -**

Workbook  
Author: M Heegard

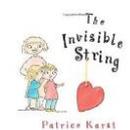
This work book was designed to teach basic concepts of death and help children understand and express the many feelings they have when someone special dies. Communication is increased and coping skills are developed as they illustrate their books with their personal story.



**Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine: Your Activity Book to Help When Someone Has Died**

Author: Winston's Wish

Characters Bee and Bear make friendly companions on this journey through a host of activities and exercises for children to do, with the help of an adult. This keepsake book aims to help them make sense of their grief, while finding a balance between remembering and having fun.



**The Invisible String** - Author: Patricia Karst

This story that teaches of the tie that really binds. Mums (and Dads) feel the tug whenever kids give it; and kids feel the tug that comes right back: the Invisible String reaches from heart to heart. Does everybody



have an Invisible String? How far does it reach anyway? Whether it is a loved one who has died, or a parent who is just in the next room, this book illustrates a new way to cope with a child's fear of loneliness and separation. Here is a warm and delightful lesson teaching young and old that we aren't ever really alone.

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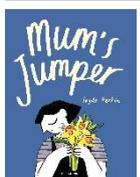


**The Scar** - Author: Charlotte Moundlic

A little boy responds to his mother's death in a genuine, deeply moving story leavened by glimmers of humour and captivating illustrations.

When the boy in this story wakes to find that his mother has died, he is overwhelmed with sadness, anger, and fear that he will forget her. He shuts all the windows to keep in his mother's familiar smell and scratches open the cut on his knee to remember her comforting voice. He doesn't know how to speak to his dad anymore, and when Grandma visits and throws open the windows, it's more than the boy can take -- until his grandmother shows him another way to feel that his mom's love is near.

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**Mum's Jumper** - Author: Jayde Perkin

If Mum has gone, how do you carry on? Missing her feels like a dark cloud that follows you around or like swimming to a shore that never comes any nearer. But memories are like a jumper that you can cuddle and wear. And Mum's jumper might be a way to keep her close.

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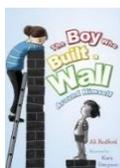
**The Memory Tree** - Author: Britta Teckentrup

Fox has lived a long and happy life in the forest. One day, he lies down in his favourite clearing, takes a deep breath, and falls asleep for ever.

Before long, Fox's friends begin to gather in the clearing. One by one, they tell stories of the special moments that they shared with Fox. And, as they share their memories, a tree begins to grow, becoming bigger and stronger, sheltering and protecting all the animals in the forest, just as Fox did when he was alive.

This gentle and comforting tale celebrates life and the memories that are left behind when a loved one dies.

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**The Boy Who Built a Wall Around Himself** - Author: Ali Redford

Boy built a wall to keep himself safe. Behind it he felt strong and more protected.

Then Someone Kind came along. She bounced a ball, sang and painted on the other side of the wall, and Boy began to wonder if life on the other side might be better after all. Written for children aged 4 to 9, this gentle full-colour picture book uses a simple metaphor to explain how children who have had painful or traumatic experiences can build barriers between themselves and other people. It will help children explore their feelings and encourage communication.

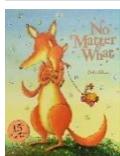
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**I Miss My Sister** - Author: Sarah Courtauld

Normally available from Child Bereavement UK.

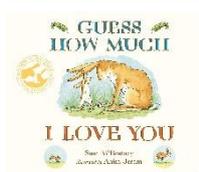
This book written by Sarah Courtauld and illustrated by Holly Surplice, is recommended for children aged 4-10 years old. The beautiful and expressive colour illustrations help to guide the child through the different emotions they may encounter following the death of a sibling, as well as the different categories of grief over a period of time. Now awarded 'commended' in BMA Patient Information Awards 2010.

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**No Matter What** - Author: Debi Gliori

'I'm a grim and grumpy little Small and nobody loves me at all,' said a small fox. But that's not true and Small's mother is determined to prove that her love is limitless - no matter what! With sparkly foil stars and a small, sturdy board format, this is the perfect story to share with the very young. A beautiful, lyrical, loving book about setting big worries to rest.



### **Guess How Much I Love You** - Author: Sam McBratney

When you love someone to the moon and back...

Sometimes when you love someone very, very much, you want to find a way of describing how great your feelings are. But, as Little Nutbrown Hare and Big Nutbrown Hare discover, love is not an easy thing to measure!



### **Saying Goodbye to Hare** by Carol Lee

This story has been written for an adult to share and read aloud with children aged between five and nine. Inspired by author Carol Lee's experience of supporting her own children through their father's illness and death, the beautifully illustrated story follows young Rabbit as his good friend Hare becomes ill and dies. As with some of the best books on death and dying, it addresses questions and feelings that younger children may have about death, with honesty and warmth.



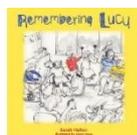
### **The Heart and the Bottle** by Oliver Jeffers

This story is about a little girl who begins to forget about the other things she loves when someone special to her dies. Keeping her heart in a bottle will keep it safe from more hurt, she thinks, until she meets another little girl whose infectious curiosity reminds her about how she used to be. This lovely book is also available as an interactive app, narrated by Helena Bonham-Carter.



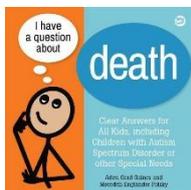
### **The Lonely Tree** by Nicholas Halliday

A young evergreen tree starts to grow in an oak forest and feels lonely, until he makes friends with a very old oak growing nearby. When winter comes, all the oak trees fall asleep, but when their leaves begin to unfurl in the spring, the ancient oak does not come back to life. The other trees explain to the evergreen that his friend has died and help him through his sadness by reminding him of old oak's love and kindness to him.



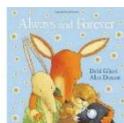
### **Remembering Lucy** by Sarah Helton

When Lucy died, Joe and his friends were very sad to learn that they wouldn't see her again. Then Joe thinks about all the wonderful things Lucy did. How messy she was when she was painting, and the time she giggled through the school play when her crown kept slipping off. Now Joe knows that remembering Lucy means he doesn't have to feel so sad. This picture book is suitable for sharing with children aged three and up. Author Sarah Helton is a specialist in special educational needs, with a focus on loss and bereavement. This book includes a guide for teachers and support staff in schools to talk about bereavement, grief and loss.



### **I Have A Question About Death** – By Polsky, Meredith Englander, Gaines, Arlen Grad

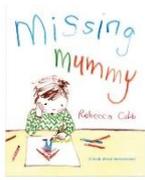
It's the winner of Moonbeams children's book award, 2017/18, non-fiction and the straightforward text and images walk children through what it means when someone dies. It talks about how ways they might want to react or to think about the person, aimed at 5-11 years, ASD and Special Needs.



### **Always and Forever** by Alan Durant and Debbie Gliori

This picture book may help children understand that feelings of great sadness can eventually give way to comforting memories. Otter, Mole and Hare are so sad when their friend, Fox, dies that they can't help but think about all the things they miss about him. This makes them feel sadder until Squirrel pays a visit and makes them laugh about some of the happy times they spent with Fox. Squirrel also suggests something

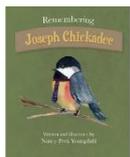
they can make, in memory of Fox. This is another book that lets you support Winston's Wish, when you buy it via Little Parachutes.



### **Missing Mummy by Rebecca Cobb**

We said goodbye to mummy, but where did she go? This beautiful storybook explores the death and loss of a parent from a small child's point of view and feelings, with thoughtful words and pictures.

Author and illustrator Rebecca Cobb welcomed support from leading child and family bereavement counsellor Jenni Thomas OBE, when she created this highly-praised book for very young children.

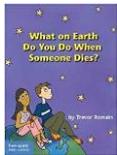


### **Remembering Joseph Chickadee by Nancy Peek Youngdahl**

When wise and kind Joseph Chickadee passes away, other birds of the forest come together to remember him. This touching picture book discusses the concept of loss and mourning with relatable characters and charming imagery.

Nancy Peek Youngdahl has crafted a lovingly written and beautifully illustrated story that helps children understand the more complex ideas that come with losing a loved one, and how they might themselves be thankful for having known them.

## **Books and Journals for Teens (think carefully about whether these books are suitable for our 'teenage' students)**



### **What on Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies? - Author: Trevor Romaine & Elizabeth Verdick**

Suggests ways of coping with grief and offers answers to questions such as 'Why do people have to die?' and "How can I say Goodbye?" Friendly, accessible text and illustrations aimed at ages 8-14.



### **Grief Encounter - Author: Shelley Gilbert**

Aimed at 8-15 year olds. The focus is on the death of a parent, but suitable for the loss of a sibling, grandparent, friend. Author recommends that the book is used with an adult, at least initially.



### **Still Here with Me: Teenagers and Children on Losing a Parent - Author: Suzanne Sjoqvist**

This book is a moving and thoughtful anthology of the experiences of thirty children and teenagers who have lost a parent. In their own words, children and young people of a variety of ages talk openly and honestly about losing their mother or father. They describe feelings of pain, loss and anger, the struggle to cope with the embarrassed reactions and silence of others, and the difficulties involved in rebuilding their lives. They also share happy and loving memories of their parents, and talk about the importance of remembering while learning to accept their parent's deaths.



### **From a Clear Blue Sky - Author: Timothy Knatchbull**

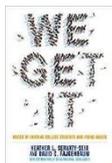
A powerful survivor's account of the IRA bomb that killed the author's 14-year-old twin brother, his grandparents and a family friend, published on the 30th anniversary of the atrocity.



**Sometimes Life Sucks: When Someone You Love Dies** - Author: Molly Carlile

Teenagers experience loss in all kinds of ways. Whether it's the death of a grandparent, pet or school friend, a teen fatality, a peer with terminal illness, living without a mum or dad, or the death of a celebrity. Like everyone else teenagers also struggle to come to terms with their shock and grief. Full of great tips, stories and gentle advice, *Sometimes Life Sucks* helps teens to navigate their personal experience of grief.

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**We Get It**

Authors: Heather L. Servaty-Seib and David C. Fajgenbaum [Buy on Amazon](#)

A unique collection of 33 narrative by bereaved students and young adults in America, this book aims to help young adults who are grieving and provide guidance for those who seek to support them. It has been described as like having a group in a book.

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**Teenage Guide to Coping with Life after Death: Helping teenagers through the death of the Mum, Dad, Sister or Brother**

Author: Grief Encounter [Download from Grief Encounter](#)

This guide is to introduce young people to some ideas, to Grief Encounter, and to other things that may help. Grief Encounter aim to help young people feel less alone, acknowledge what they are going through, and to help them feel back in control.

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**Grief Encounter** - Author: Shelley Gilbert

Aimed at 8-15 year olds. A workbook to encourage conversations with children, young people and adults about death. Grieving is hard work, especially for parents and children in deep grief. The upward spiral of grief replaces stages theory and allows time for people to adjust to the fact that someone special has died. The book is full of creative activities and offers incredible comfort to mourners-old and young. The focus is on the death of a parent, but suitable for the loss of a sibling, grandparent, friend. The author recommends that the book is used with an adult, at least initially.

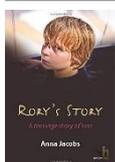
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**Everything's Changing: the young person's guide to grief and loss** - Author: Ann Atkin [Buy from Everything's Changing website](#)

'Everything's Changing' services as a catalyst to important conversations with young people, and a useful record for the young person to refer back to in the future. The book draws on tried and tested bereavement support resources, which have been re-worked in order to appeal to people in the 13-25 years age group.

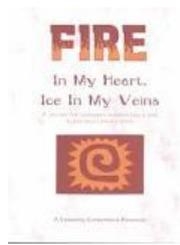
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**Rory's Story** - Author: Anna Jacobs

Rory is an adolescent boy who is struggling with the loss of his mother. Confused and bullied at school, he attempts to run away and finally returns to face his feelings. This therapeutic story is a gritty, readable story that teenagers will relate to; it explores the teenage experience of loss and bereavement; it can be used to support young people who have experienced loss; it can help teenagers understand the needs of their peers when loss occurs; it has notes for discussion on the themes of each chapter.

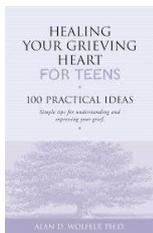
This story can be used in conjunction with the practical workbook 'Supporting Teenagers through Grief & Loss'. This useful tool which will help teachers, therapists and carers to support and understand the needs of adolescents facing loss.



### Fire In My Heart Ice In My Veins

This journal has been around for a while (since 1992, to be exact) and was the first grief journal for teens that I ever saw. This book is a grief journal in the truest sense. It revolves around the death and includes prompts for remembering the person who died, resolving complex emotions, identifying strengths, identifying supportive people, addressing unfinished business, and thinking about the future. The pages are blank, rather than lined, allowing flexibility for writing, drawing, or collaging (though most questions and prompts seem to assume that a teen will write their response).

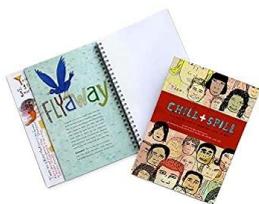
**Cool factor:** The cool factor is a bit lacking here. Though the prompts are good and the blank pages nice, this book isn't the kind of thing my 14 year old self would have felt okay having out on my nightstand when friends came over or that I would have tossed in my school bag. It is a bit large and glossy, which gives it the feel of a school workbook.



### The Healing Your Grieving Heart Journal for Teens

If you know anything about grief resources you know Alan Wolfelt. With resources for so many grief topics, Wolfelt partnered with none other than his teenage daughter for this one. This journal is extremely thorough and covers the widest range of grief challenges a teen may face, with over 100 packed pages of prompts. To squeeze in all this content, the spaces for responses are small, often with two or three prompts per page. Response areas are lined, making this a journal that is best for teens who really like to write, rather than those who prefer drawing, collaging, or other forms of expression. This journal has more explanation of grief in it than most others, making it great for teens who may wish to read about common grief symptoms and experiences.

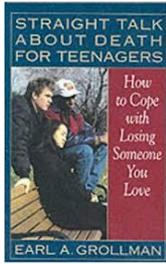
**Cool factor:** Though I had high hopes, knowing that Wolfelt collaborated with his daughter, this book doesn't get many cool-points. The lined pages are a bit restrictive for a creative teen and the cover is a bit of a downer. It is a better size than Fire In My Heart, in that it could be easily tossed in a purse or bookbag.



### Chill and Spill

This is a journal put out by Art With Heart out of Seattle and, though not exclusively a grief journal, this journal is designed for any teen dealing with a traumatic event. Whereas the above journals incorporate a lot about the person who died, this journal focuses almost exclusively on the teen – from their experiences, strengths, thinking, current challenges, etc. Each prompt page is followed by 5 blank pages that would be great for writing, drawing, or collaging (or any combination!). This is a great journal for teen who are creative and autonomous, but may not be a good fit for teens who need more guidance and direction. One of the most exciting thing about this journal is that you can also purchase a therapists companion, should you wish to use this journal with teens in a therapeutic setting.

**Cool factor:** This journal is by far the “coolest” on this list, with great illustrations, bright colours, and a lot of flexibility for teens to make it work for them. It is an easy size to carry, has a durable cover, and is spiral bound. This last one may not seem like a big deal, but the fact that this journal will lay flat is huge!

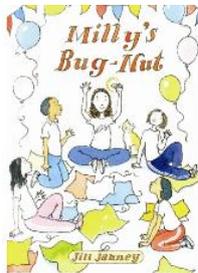


### **Straight Talk about Death for Teenagers**

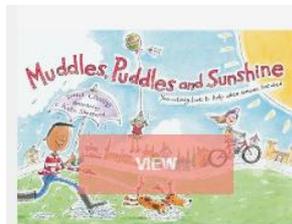
This is not a journal, but rather a book that helps teens understand what is normal when you are grieving, different things to expect, and tips for coping. It is broken down between early days, coping, facing the future, and looking forward. This book is 143 pages, but each page only has text on half of the page (or less). When I first flipped through I actually thought perhaps there was space for writing because there were prompts, but there are not. If you are worried your teen won't read a long grief book, this one is not all that long by word count and is a quick read.

**Cool factor:** A stock photo of sad kids has never, ever been a recipe for cool. So again, my 14 year old self would be hiding this book if a friend came over. The short pages may be a bonus for some teens, as it keeps things in manageable doses.

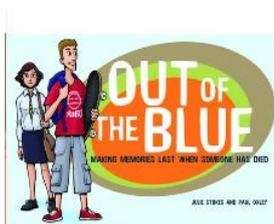
### Resources from Winston's Wish Website



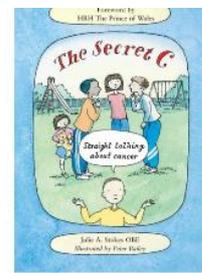
**Milly's Bug Nut**  
£4.99



**Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine**  
£10.95

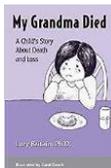


**Out of the Blue**  
£8.95



**The Secret C**  
£4.99

### **When a Grandparent has died**



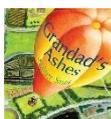
#### **My Grandma Died: A Child's Story about Grief and Loss** - Author: Lory Britain

A young child talks about the emotions felt after Grandma's death. Includes a list entitled "Things I can do when someone I love dies."



#### **Granpa** - Author: John Burningham

Adorable Granpa gamely nurses his granddaughter's dolls, eats her pretend strawberry-flavoured ice cream, takes her tobogganing in the snow, and falls in step with her imaginary plans to captain a ship to Africa like all good grandfathers should. Winner of the Kate Maschler Award, this poignant tale of friendship and loss is one children will long remember.



#### **Grandad's Ashes** - Author: Walter Smith

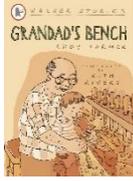
This beautifully illustrated picture book for children aged four to eight tells the story of four children who embark on an adventure to find their Grandad's favourite place, they are faced with plenty of challenges on the way. Told with gentle humour, this is a charming story for children and an ideal resource for parents or professionals to read with a child as a way of broaching issues surrounding loss or bereavement.



**Remembering** - Author: Dianne Leutner

Normally available from Child Bereavement UK. Part book, part scrapbook, Remembering was created to help keep a child's memories alive after the loss of someone special and to give children a place to return to whenever they

wish.



**Grandad's Bench** - Author: Addy Farmer

This is a beautiful, sensitively told story of love and loss and of a special relationship between grandfather and grandson.

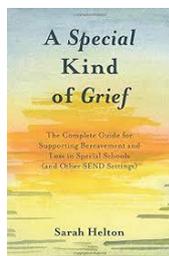
Jake loves playing in Grandad's workshop. One autumn day, Grandad teaches Jake how to chisel his name in a piece of wood, and afterwards they go to the park. Grandad shows Jake the tree that grew from an acorn he planted when he was a boy. Jake goes off to buy ice-creams and returns to find Grandad on the ground. The ambulance arrives. Mum and Jake go home without Grandad. Jake grieves for his grandfather all winter. But Grandad has left him his workshop and Jake wants to make something special. With Mum's help, he does – a plaque for the bench under Grandad's tree. It is spring; for the first time in months, Jake feels happy.

### Appendix 3

## List of books/online support for professionals supporting pupils and students

A Special Kind Of Grief – by Sarah Helton

A complete guide for supporting bereavement and loss in special schools. Amazon have it for £15.43.



### Winston's Wish Website Publications

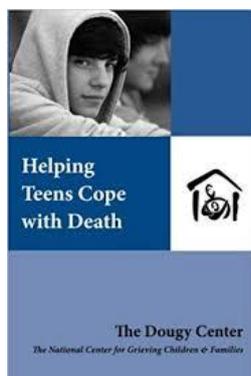
<p><b>A Child's Grief</b> £5.99</p>	<p><b>As Big As It Gets</b> £7.50</p>	<p><b>Beyond the Rough Rock</b> £5.99</p>	<p><b>Hope Beyond the Headlines</b> £5.99</p>

<p><b>We All Grieve</b> £7.50</p>	<p><b>You Just Don't Understand</b> £6.95</p>

<p><b>Never Too Young To Grieve</b> £7.50</p>	<p><b>The Family Has Been Informed</b> £7.50</p>

## Books for Adults Supporting Teens

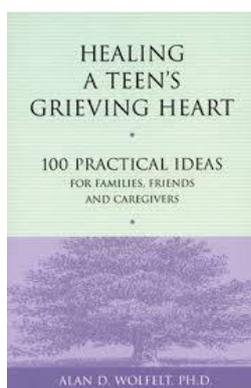
### Helping Teens Cope with Death



Though this book seems on the surface to be a book for adults supporting a grieving teen, I love that it is written in such a way that it easily could be read by teens. This book goes through what to expect from teens, information about teens and different types of death, tips for memorializing and coping, and information about things like nightmares, eating disorders, and physical symptoms. Though it is a short book, it is packed with great information. The Dougy Center rarely disappoints, and this is another great resource from them. If you missed it, we [did a review of their activity books for child survivors of suicide here](#), which is another great book!

**Cool factor:** The cover of this book doesn't scream cool, but the inside is great. It includes some great illustrations and quotes about grief by grieving teens, as well as covering topics in just enough detail to be thorough without being overwhelming.

### Healing a Teen's Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas for Family Friends and Caregivers



This book does have a good intro with some details about teens and grief, but for the most part it is really just a list of ideas for honouring and remembering, and supporting, interacting, and communicating with a grieving teen. It includes some great tips on practical gifts to give a grieving teen, as well as some tips for specific things an adult can say and do to be supportive. This book may not teach a lot about the psyche of a grieving teen, but it is a good pick if you are just looking for some really concrete and specific ideas for supporting a teen.

**Cool factor:** Again, sorely lacking. If you use this book, I would encourage reading it away from your teen and just sprinkling suggestions in here and there. Had I known my mom had a book like this and was trying to apply it, I can imagine my 14 year old self putting up some serious resistance, with a lot of sighing and eye rolling. So, apply tips in moderation!

Appendix 4  
Template letters

**A template of a letter informing other parents of the death of a pupil**

Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a pupil, permission must be gained from the child's parents/ carers. The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the parents of the child and the school.

Address  
Date

Dear Parents and Carers,  
Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the pupils/students of the death of <name>, a pupil /student in <Year>.

*(<Name> dies from an illness called cancer. As you may be aware, many of the children who have cancer get better but sadly <name> had been ill for a long time and died peacefully at home yesterday.)*

He/she was a very popular member of the class and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her. Our thoughts are with <name's> family at this time.

When someone dies, it is normal for their friends and family to experience lots of different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion. The students/pupils /students have been told that their teachers are willing to try to answer their questions at school but if there is anything more that your child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we would be more than happy to help you.

*(We will be arranging a memorial service in school in the next few months as a means of celebrating <name's> life)*

If you would like any further support, please see the links on the school website associated with supporting children and adults in times of grief and bereavement.

Yours sincerely,  
<Name>  
Head Teacher

## **A template of a letter informing other parents of the death of a member of staff**

<Address>

<Date>

Dear Parents and Carers,

Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the <tragic> death of <name> who has been a teacher at this school for a number of years.

Our thoughts are with <name's> family at this time and in an effort to try to respond to his/her death in a positive way, all the children have been informed.

When someone dies it is normal for family and friends to experience many different feelings like sadness, anger and confusion, and children and young adults are likely to ask questions about death that need to be answered honestly and factually in terms that they will understand.

The pupils/students have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school but if there is anything else you or our child needs to know, please do not hesitate to ring the school office and we will be more than happy to help you.

*(We will be arranging a memorial service in the school in the next few months as a means of celebrating <name's> life.)*

Yours Sincerely

<Name>

Head Teacher

## Appendix 5

### How to support pupils/ students

It is advised for children of any age you do the following:

- Acknowledge their presence, their importance, their opinions, thoughts, and feelings
- Be patient and open-minded. Allow them to grieve in their own way
- Be available – Sit with the child, listen to them, and answer their questions
- Let them know that a range of different emotions is normal
- Validate their feelings and do not minimize them
- Check in with other adults involved in their life – teachers, school counsellors, coaches
- Find age/stage-appropriate resources

#### **Activities and ideas to support which may be appropriate**

##### *Create a memory box*

Working together to create a memory box can be a great way to remember your loved one and keep treasured keepsakes from that person safe. Photos, gifts, ornaments, or mementos make good additions. For younger children, try including hand-drawn pictures, or write down their favourite memories of the person.

##### *Read together*

Books can help children explore and understand their emotions. By reading about loss and grief through characters, events, and situations in a safe environment, they may be more able to recognise their own feelings.

Working through a grief or bereavement activity book together can be an effective way to get children thinking, talking or drawing about what's happened. Picture books explaining death can be a gentle way to initiate conversation with them about their feelings and understanding of the situation.

##### *Encourage Journaling*

Accepting that a loved one is not there anymore can be tough. Talking out loud about their loss can be hard. By encouraging journaling, children can write letters, poems, draw pictures, or make collages to put on paper what they may have trouble expressing verbally. For younger children, a bereavement activity book can provide a great, structured way to work through their thoughts and feelings.

##### *Build a photo album*

Children may worry that they'll forget the person who's died. Looking at photos can be a good way to talk about happy times. Decorating a frame, or creating an album together, can also give your child the time to open up, think and talk about happy memories of the person.

##### *Make a bracelet*

It can feel pretty lonely when someone close dies. Some children may feel like there isn't anyone they can talk to, or worry about upsetting others by talking about their lost loved one. One simple, visual reminder of the people who are there for them is a friendship bracelet.

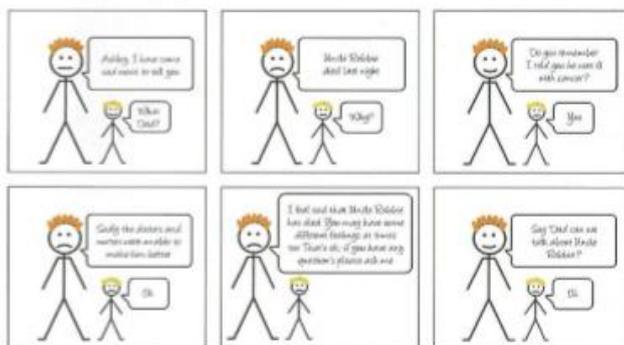
Get your child to list five or six people who care about them, and taking a different coloured piece of thread for each person, plait them together, and help your child tie it on. Now, whenever they feel low or unsure, they'll have a visual reminder of the people they can talk to.

# SUPPORTING A BEREAVED CHILD WHO HAS AUTISM

There are many stereotypes as to what a person with autism 'looks like', 'acts like' 'understands' and 'feels'. **All children are individuals – all children with autism are individuals.** Therefore we cannot provide one scenario of what a bereaved child will 'look like' or one way we should help them when they are grieving. The same applies to a bereaved child with autism. Instead, below is a range of things to consider when supporting a bereaved child who has autism.

- **Acknowledge their grief.** Just because the child may not respond to a death in a way we expect or that is similar to how other children react does not mean that they are not grieving.
- **Are they affected by the death?** You may be unsure as to how much the child is affected by a person dying. Think about how the child behaves on a typical day and then assess how far they are deviating from their 'norm'. Most people who receive bad news will behave a little differently, so we should not be overly concerned when a child with autism does this too. If the child's reaction involves them becoming angrier and more physical, we need to ensure that they are safe by removing dangerous objects etc. Wait until this physical emotion has passed and then talk to the child using AAC (see page 27) about the person who has died and how it is affecting the child.

- Use **very concrete language** when talking about the death. Euphemisms such as 'they are no longer with us' will cause a great deal of confusion to children with autism. They may interpret this as 'the person is no longer living with us, they are living with someone else, so we may get to see them again in the future.'
- Many children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) benefit from the use of **social stories or comic strip conversations** to help them understand new information or situations. A social story is a short description of an event or situation and the text is often supported with pictures, photos and/or symbols. A comic strip conversation is made up of simple drawings and stick figures which accompany the information. Colour can be added to the words in the comic strip to help represent the emotional content of the statements.



24

- Be prepared that a bereaved child with autism may become **more impulsive** in their behaviour and reactions. Such changes might indicate that they require an even greater level of support to help understand what has happened and why their life has changed in certain ways.

*The child may typically seek opportunities for sensory stimulation from spinning objects and looking at their movement, but following the bereavement they may take this to a new and dangerous level e.g. climbing onto high furniture to spin both the objects and themselves.*

- Some children with autism may struggle to see how the death is impacting others. They themselves may not be too affected by the bereavement but others around may be, which they cannot understand. This may result in them appearing insensitive to others.

*A pupil in the school has died but because it wasn't someone they knew they aren't sad about the loss and they don't understand why other children are upset and crying.*

- **Tough questions.** You may be asked some difficult questions or some that you do not see as important. For example **'What temperature is the fire at the crematorium?'** To an unprepared person this could be a very upsetting question. Remember, for the child, this question equals a concern. An unanswered question or concern will lead to anxiety and distress. If you do not know the answer to the question, tell the child you will find out for them and then do so as quickly as possible. If the child has numerous 'tough questions' that are all being directed to one person (who is finding it upsetting), find someone who is comfortable answering such queries and ensure the child knows they can go to them with these questions.

- The child's **preoccupations**, if they have any (such as reciting lines from favourite cartoons, spinning small objects, playing with water etc.) may increase in intensity following a bereavement or they may develop new preoccupations. Children with autism tend to dislike changes to their routines and a death in the family will typically result in many changes occurring. This can lead to the child's anxiety levels rising. To help lower their anxieties, keep explaining (using the child's preferred mode of communication) what has happened and that the death is not their fault (see page 17).
- After someone has died there are many **rituals** that can take place. The child will probably never have experienced most of these before, such as dressing up to go to a big building that echoes and having to sit still on a very hard pew. Such things can seem strange and bewildering. Talk to the child about such events and rituals in advance of them taking place and, if possible, support this with a social story (for further information see page 24) and having practice runs, e.g. visiting the church before the funeral etc.
- A child with autism may experience **sensory difficulties** (issues with smells, sounds, textures, light etc.). There can be many sensory elements associated with funerals – wearing restrictive formal clothes to a memorial service, the scent of flowers, the feeling of sitting on hard seats and immovable pews. If your child experiences such sensory difficulties, try to:
  - **alleviate** as many of these as possible (e.g. do they have to wear a shirt and tie to the service?)
  - **adapt** to the situation (e.g. take their favourite cushion and blanket to the church for them to sit on)
  - **prepare** them for the differences that are going to occur with social stories, trials of the sensory issue (e.g. practise wearing different shoes) and visits to the new environment they will be visiting)

25

# SUPPORTING A BEREAVED CHILD WHO HAS COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES

For children who are pre-verbal, non-verbal or have limited language, it is crucial that a wide range of AAC techniques and tools are employed when talking to them about death, bereavement and grief.

**Note:** Verbal language and cognitive understanding are two very separate things. A child may be unable to vocalise their thoughts through verbal words but this does not necessarily mean they do not understand at a typical level. We must always remember the cognitive level of understanding of the bereaved child and speak to them at this level. Do not just see the physical disability and assume that all areas of the child's life are functioning in this way. Each child is an individual. For children with a good understanding of language, but non-standard means of 'speaking' to us, we must remember to speak to them at the level of their understanding, using their preferred mode of communication (e.g. sign language, communication aid, eye gaze, etc.).

This particular section is focused on children who have learning difficulties and difficulties producing verbal language. For these children there are many different communication techniques, strategies, resources and pieces of equipment that we can use to help when sharing the news of the death, answering their questions or concerns, as well as providing good ongoing support.



26

# SUPPORTING A CHILD'S UNDERSTANDING OF DEATH USING AUGMENTATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION (AAC)

There are many different types of AAC:

**No-tech:** does not require anything beyond the user's body

**Low-tech:** involve something external to the user that may be non-electronic or a simple electronic device

**High-tech:** electronic devices similar to computers

## NO-TECH AAC

**Body language, gestures, eye-pointing, facial expression.**

**Sign language** There are many different sign language systems (Makaton, Signalong, British Sign Language, etc).

**Intensive Interaction** Takes place when a child and an adult sit (or whatever position is most comfortable for the child) closely together and the adult copies whatever noise and/or movement the child makes. The child quickly sees that they are making something happen. Whenever they do something, it is copied; they are in control of the interaction. This repetition and reinforcement of their sounds and movements, the back and forth of the exchange, is a conversation. The power of using Intensive Interaction with bereaved children is that it clearly shows the child that the adult is listening to them. When Intensive

Interaction is an integral part of a child's learning programme, it not only helps them to develop early language skills, it also gives them greater confidence and empowers them to express their emotions and feelings. Following a bereavement, the grieving child may make some different sounds. This is a way of them releasing their emotions. When the adult copies the child's more guttural, sad sounds, the child sees they have been listened to and that they are not the only person feeling the way they do.

Non-verbal communication, such as Intensive Interaction, provides the bereaved child with another means to help cope with an overwhelming situation.

*"Jenny always enjoys Intensive Interaction sessions, but after her brother died I noticed that the sessions were even more important to her. I had been caught up in planning the funeral and didn't give her as much attention as I should have. One morning she was rocking and banging her wheelchair. She wasn't crying but I could tell she wasn't feeling good. I went and sat by her and started to copy her actions and sounds. Within five minutes her body seemed to relax and her movements and sounds were happier."* Lou (foster mum of an 18 year old with PMLD)

27

## LOW-TECH AAC

**Photographs of the person who has died** are essential. Ideally, this would be a collection of photos you can use when you are talking to the child so that they know exactly who you are referring to. This ensures there is no confusion for the child about who has died. After you have informed the child of the death, have the photos easily accessible to the child. This allows them to use a photo to tell you when they want to chat about the person, e.g. by bringing a photo to you, pointing to it or looking at the photo. A constantly accessible collection or book of photos is also good for the child because it gives them the ability to look through the images. This activity can be comforting for them, helping them to think about the person as well as the information they have been given and, in turn, process the loss.

**Objects of reference** are items typically used to represent an activity (e.g. a toy car to communicate 'We're getting in the car and going somewhere', a spoon to say, 'It's time to eat'). They can also represent a place (e.g. a piece of soap for the bathroom, a plastic flower for the garden). Objects of reference can be used to support bereavement and grief by having an item that can be used alongside the photo of the person. For example, if the person who died loved scarves and tended to wear them a lot, you may use one of their scarves when talking to the child. This object not only helps to make the child aware of who we are talking about, but the fact that it belonged to the person who has died means that it can also be a reassuring and comforting item – a tactile item for them to touch and explore.

**Images and other photos** such as pictures of a coffin, hearse, the crematorium, etc. help the child prepare for what they will be doing. It is also helpful to provide graphics showing different emotions that the child can look at, explore and use when they are struggling with how to express what they are feeling.

**Switches** are simple battery operated devices that allow you to record a single word or short message. The child then activates the message by pressing down on top of the switch. Switches come in a range of formats, single, double etc. When a child is bereaved, they may like to have a switch to say when they are feeling sad, or want to talk about the person who has died.



28

- **Symbols.** There are many different **symbol systems** (Boardmaker, Widgeit, Makaton, etc.) Symbols are graphic representations of words. Symbols help to explain information, a concept, request, question, etc. to the child. The child will also use the symbols to share information, thoughts, questions, etc. with the adult. Some children will be working at a single symbol level, while others will be able to put symbols together to create sentences.



- **PECS** is a symbol-based communication system which allows children to develop a functional means of communication. A bereaved child who is a proficient PECS user will be able to express how they are feeling in simple terms (e.g. 'I feel sad', 'I want a hug').

- **PODD (Pragmatic Organisation Dynamic Display)** books are another symbol-based communication system, a resource that both the child and adult use to communicate with each other. The bereaved child can use the PODD book to point to symbols to express how they are feeling as well as to ask a question. There is a universal structure and layout to PODD books and it is a means of organising whole word and symbol vocabulary in one place. PODD books can be physical books or in an electronic form that children use on a tablet or via eye gaze technology.



29

## HIGH-TECH AAC

- **Communication aids** are devices that have been made purely for the means of communication. The child selects the words that they wish to say and then the device 'speaks' these words.
- **Tablets.** There are various communication apps that can be loaded onto electronic tablets. The child chooses the words (which are commonly supported with a symbol) to say what they think, want, feel, etc. and the tablet then 'speaks' these words.



- **Eye gaze** is a way of accessing a computer using just your eyes. The equipment tracks the movement of the child's eyes, allowing their eyes to be the mouse and therefore the means of controlling the computer. Eye gaze can be used in conjunction with many computer programmes including communication software, enabling the child to express themselves, ask questions, etc. by using their eyes.

*Whichever mode of AAC your child is using it is imperative to check that all of the relevant vocabulary is included. For example the word crematorium may not be included in the 'Places' section of the child's PODD book. The app on a communication device may not have all of the words necessary for the child to be able to 'tell the story' of the death and to allow them to ask questions about the bereavement. Ensure you add all appropriate vocabulary to communication aids and teach this new vocabulary to the child.*

*Whether it is high, low or no-tech the important thing is that it is always available to the child. How can they express how they are feeling if they do not have their 'voice' with them?*

30

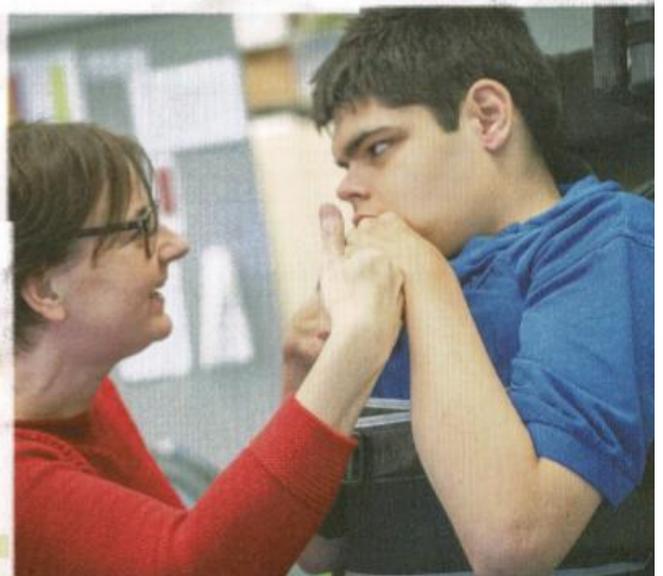
## SUPPORTING A BEREAVED CHILD WHO HAS PROFOUND AND MULTIPLE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES (PMLD)

Children who have PMLD can face many extra barriers to receiving good bereavement support: for example, physical barriers such as wheelchairs, postural aids, medical equipment, etc.

Most children who are upset will want to be comforted, which involves closeness and physical contact. Make sure the equipment that children with PMLD require does not become a barrier to them receiving comfort.

How can you do this?

- When talking to the child about the person who has died, make sure that they have time out of all of the equipment. When we are feeling emotional, our bodies and breathing can become very tense. This will be the same for a child with PMLD. By being out of the wheelchair, they are able to have some freedom to release their tensions and emotions.
- Make use of the power of touch: touch equals 'I'm here for you, I'm listening, I care'. Even if the child is in their wheelchair you can still provide comfort through positive touch: a hand on their shoulder if they are sad, removing their shoes and socks and giving them a foot massage if they are distressed, etc.



31

**If a child has limited communication skills, are they grieving?** YES! Remember – when a baby's main caregiver dies, the baby picks up on the changes in its life. They will notice that the smell, touch and feel of the person caring for them is different. The baby is attuned to differences in the atmosphere and mood of the home and the people around it (see page 5). Children with PMLD will (at the very least) be experiencing this, so we must talk to them about what is going on, supported by their preferred mode of communication (see page 27).

**Talking helps us to deal with a bereavement.**

While using AAC that the child is familiar with, talk to them about the person who has died. Not only explain in simple terms that the person has died and they will not be coming back, but also share memories (that involved the child) about the person.

Intensive Interaction is a great device for supporting bereaved children with PMLD as it supports them to express themselves and release their emotions. Massage and aromatherapy are two other good ways as they both encourage the child's body to relax and release their feelings.

**Using the arts to support bereaved children.** Music, art and dance are all excellent ways to support bereaved children with PMLD (see page 60).

**The power of breathing.** You may not be able to teach a child with PMLD how to do a three-part yogic breath but we can encourage them to breathe more deeply and fully. The easiest way to do this is to sit close to the child, relax and breathe deeply and slowly yourself. Given enough time, we tend to naturally mirror the breathing rhythm of the person we are with. If you slightly emphasise your breathing, this will make it a little easier for the child to pick up the deeper breathing technique. You can also, if the child is happy to do so, place their hand on your stomach so that they can feel it expanding as you breathe in and contracting as you breathe out. If the child is happy for you to do so, you can then place your hand on their stomach to encourage them to do the same.



From 'We All Grieve' by Winston's Wish

## Appendix 6

# A child's understanding of death according to ages and stages of child development

## UNDERSTANDING HOW CHILDREN WITH SEND GRIEVE

For a child with SEND, their functional level of understanding (rather than actual chronological age) will be the biggest factor in how the child reacts to a death and what they will be able to understand.

Knowing what children at different developmental stages understand about death will help you feel more confident when talking to them about a bereavement.

The information in the following pages outlines what children at different developmental levels:

- will understand
- what you may see (their responses and the behaviours they may exhibit)
- what you can do to help

Children with SEND can often have spiky developmental profiles and therefore do not always fit neatly into one box. The bereaved child you are supporting may display aspects of one or more of the developmental stages. Please bear this in mind as you read the following pages.



## CHILDREN WITH SEND WHO ARE FUNCTIONING AT A 0-12 MONTHS LEVEL

### What they understand

- The death of a parent/significant caregiver will be understood as the absence of the person who cared for them. They will acknowledge and miss the touch, sound, smell etc. of this person, but they will not understand why they have gone.
- Other deaths will be experienced by the child as a change in their environment. They will pick up on the emotions of the people around them who are grieving and the possible subsequent changes in their daily routines, although they will not understand why.
- They can feel strong emotions but they are unaware of what these are or what is causing them.

### What you may notice

- Grief is expressed through loss of security and this may be seen in changes in their eating and sleeping habits.
- They may cry and generally appear less settled, more irritable and even inconsolable.
- They may become more clingy to the adults in their life.
- The child's emotions are expressed through their body language.

### What may help

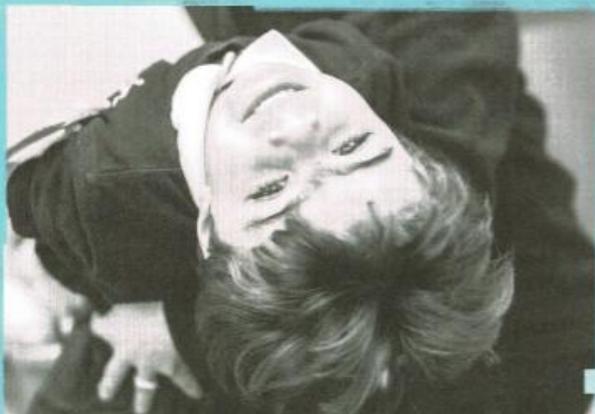
- Where possible, try to keep their routines the same as they were before the death. This will help them to feel safe and secure.
- The child will experience the world mainly through their senses and physical sensations, so try to surround them with familiar smells, textures, sounds, rhythms and tastes. This could be by giving them an item of clothing worn by the person who has died, which still bears their scent.
- Make sure they have easy access to all of the usual things that give them comfort: a weighted blanket, twiddle toy, musical instrument etc.



# CHILDREN WITH SEND WHO ARE FUNCTIONING AT A 1 TO 3 YEAR OLD LEVEL

## What they understand

- They may be aware that someone is missing, but will not fully understand why.
- They will not understand the finality of death and so may expect the person who has died to come back.
- They will notice the changes in their life caused by the death, particularly changes relating to their routines and care.
- They will react to other people's emotional state, which they may not understand.



10

## What you may notice

- They may try to search for the person who has died.
- They will show their feelings through changes in behaviour and play.
- You may see some angry behaviour or emotional outbursts.
- They may become more withdrawn.
- You may notice more crying.
- They may become clingier towards key adults in their life.
- Their eating, sleeping and toileting habits may change and/or their skills in these areas may temporarily regress.
- They may become anxious in the company of strangers.

## What may help

- Take their worries and questions seriously.
- Listen and help them feel that they are not alone.
- Try to keep their routines the same.
- Talk to them frequently about what has happened – in very simple terms.
- Pay attention to what the child is doing; their play and behaviours may give an insight into how they are feeling.
- Looking at simple picture books about death and loss together.

# CHILDREN WITH SEND WHO ARE FUNCTIONING AT A 3 TO 5 YEAR OLD LEVEL

## What they understand

- They will struggle to understand what dead means.
- They may expect the person who died to return.
- They will miss the person who has died.
- A child at the top end of this developmental level may understand some of the physical reasons behind a death but will still find this difficult to grasp.
- They may be able to recognise some feelings but are unlikely to be able to link it to their grief.

## What you may notice

- They will listen to what adults are saying, even if they do not fully understand what it means.
- They may learn to use words associated with death without understanding them.
- They will take explanations literally.
- They may ask the same question time and time again.
- They may think that they did something to cause the death.
- Changes in behaviour and play as they act out their feelings.
- Increased anger, shown in emotional outbursts or shouting, often linked to anxiety.
- Increased fears and worries.
- They may experience difficulty separating from their parents or carers.

- Difficulty concentrating on activities.
- They may become withdrawn from friends and could find it more difficult to relax and enjoy themselves.
- Their eating, sleeping and toileting habits may change or regress temporarily.
- A child may develop physical symptoms like tummy aches and headaches.
- Some children may appear not to react much to the death at first.

## What may help

- Love, comfort and reassurance to build a child's confidence and help them to feel safe again.
- Reassurance that they are cared for and knowing who will look after them.
- Explaining the death in simple, concrete terms that reflect their developmental stage.
- Maintaining routines and boundaries.
- Voicing emotions for them.
- Learning how it affects other people helps them to learn to express their own feelings and feel less alone, developing emotional literacy.
- Help the child remember the person who has died: by talking about them, looking at things that belonged to them etc.
- Participating in family rituals to say goodbye.
- Continuing to talk to them about what has happened.

11

# CHILDREN WITH SEND WHO ARE FUNCTIONING AT A 6 TO 9 YEAR OLD LEVEL

## What they understand

- They will be beginning to develop an understanding that death is irreversible.
- That death is something that will happen to all living things but they may still be confused about it and have many questions.
- It is not uncommon for children at this developmental level to think of death as something spooky, like a monster or a spirit that comes to get you.

## What you may notice

- They may display what you feel is an overly strong interest in the physical aspects of death such as what a dead body looks like and what happens to a body after a person has been cremated.
- They may worry about how the person who has died will eat, breathe and keep warm.
- Children at this stage may complain of a sore tummy, headaches or of just generally not feeling well. These are what we call somatic complaints, where unexpressed feelings and emotions can lead to physical symptoms or discomfort.
- Children at this functional age may have difficulty expressing feelings verbally and may retreat into themselves. In dealing with their feelings of helplessness, you may notice increased aggression.

## What may help

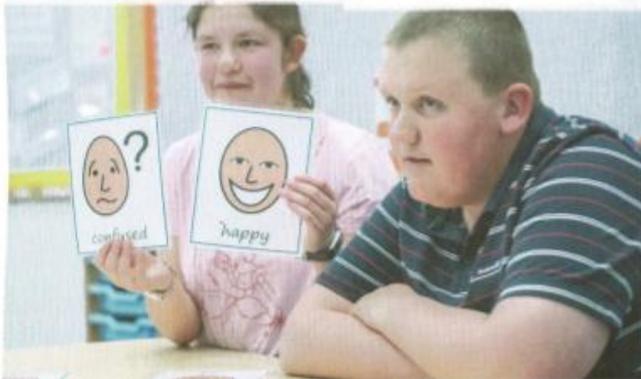
- Curiosity about death is natural and the child will benefit from clear explanations.
- It is important to give them information and tell them that once someone has died, the body doesn't feel pain any more, nor does it feel hot or cold or get hungry.
- It is important that their specific worries are spoken about, that they share bad dreams and are told that what they're feeling is normal.
- Children are reassured by having their worrying and negative thoughts talked through.
- Somatic complaints are normal but it is important that routines are maintained while gently acknowledging that it hurts when someone important dies.
- It is important to avoid clichés such as: 'You're such a brave boy/girl'. Children may interpret this to mean that you don't want them to share their feelings. They need you and other important people in their lives to show them that it is OK to express their feelings.

12

## CHILDREN WITH SEND WHO ARE FUNCTIONING AT A 10 TO 13 YEAR OLD LEVEL

### What they understand

- At this developmental level children are much more aware of the finality of death and the impact the death has on them.
- They are able to understand death as both concrete and abstract.
- Children at this stage are beginning to think of the longer-term consequences of the loss of the relationship.
- They are aware of the loss they feel in the present but also of the losses they will experience in the coming months and years. The child will begin to understand that there will be further grief in the future – as the person who has died will not be with them for important milestones or occasions.



13

### What you may notice

- Children may experience difficulties in their interactions with their peers.
- The death of someone important can make them feel different when they desperately want to be the same as everyone else.
- At this developmental age children are beginning to move away from dependence on the family and they start to form important relationships with other children.
- Big emotional releases (such as anger or distress) are not uncommon but can be scary for children at this stage.
- Their ability to manage their feelings may be disrupted and can lead to mood swings or more definite ups and downs in their feelings.
- That the death of someone important can easily destabilise a child/young person.

### What may help

- The child needs to know that they have the safety and security of their family.
- It is important to find ways to build their self-esteem.
- Your willingness to listen and your assurances that their feelings are normal.
- Finding ways to normalise their thoughts and feelings; this might include sensitively sharing your own experience and/or common feelings and thoughts of others who have been bereaved.

## CHILDREN WITH SEND WHO ARE FUNCTIONING AT A 13+ YEAR OLD LEVEL

### What they understand

- At this stage children will have a full understanding of death, the fact that it is permanent and that it is something that affects all living beings.

### What you may notice

- They may withdraw and act very matter of fact and detached, or angry and protesting.
- They may be so busy with different activities that they don't stop to reflect. This can be an effective way of keeping intense feelings under wraps if they are worried about losing control of their emotions.
- That their friends and peers are very important and they will probably talk to them about the death rather than their family.
- They may be developing many of their own ideas and thoughts about the world and could challenge their family's beliefs and views on death.
- They may struggle to make longer-term plans as the death of someone important causes them to reflect on 'the meaning of life' and ponder on the question 'What's the point?'
- You may see some risk-taking behaviour at this stage as they test the boundaries.

### What may help

- Remain open and available to them and let them know it is natural to have questions or thoughts that they need to come back to.
- Remind them of your continued love and support.
- Remind them that you are there for them but if they would prefer to speak to someone else that is OK. You can then help them find peers or other trusted adults to support them.
- To understand that they want to be accepted by other important people in their lives.



14

## Appendix 7

Cross curricular links associated with teaching and learning about death, grief and bereavement to create a bereavement-aware culture.

# A CURRICULUM TO SUPPORT THE ISSUES OF BEREAVEMENT AND GRIEF

Children are never too young to talk about life and death.

- The tree that has died in the playground
- The chicks that have hatched
- Seeing the cut flowers change over time from a beautiful bouquet to dead flowers
- The birth of a baby brother
- A badger on the side of the road

Schools should consider having a curriculum that embeds the teaching of life, death and loss across its subjects and across all year groups. Children need to develop an understanding of what life and death are before they can accept and manage their own feelings of loss and grief.

Having a curriculum that covers life and death will not only build the students' understanding of what it means to be alive and dead but it will also help them to cope with bereavements when they occur.

Here are a couple of examples for each of the different subject areas. For further curriculum ideas visit our website [winstonswish.org](http://winstonswish.org).

With all of these examples it is important that the information is presented at the child's developmental level of understanding (see page 8), using their preferred mode(s) of communication (see page 26).

### PSHE (PERSONAL, SOCIAL, HEALTH AND ECONOMIC)

- When learning about our body and how it works, emphasise what the key signs of life are and that when these are no longer present, a person is no longer living; they are dead.
- Teach what different emotions look and feel like, including the physical impact they can have on our body, e.g. when we cry a lot, we can get very hot and tired.

### PE

- During PE lessons talk about the breath and heart rate. When the children experience their heart rate increasing, ask them to put their hand on their chest to feel their heart beating and when they feel out of breath to put their hand in front of their mouth to feel the movement of air. Explain that all of these things mean we are alive. When someone has died, they stop breathing, their heart stops, and they are no longer alive.

### ENGLISH

- When reading works of fiction and non-fiction and someone or something (animal, plant etc.) dies, do not gloss over this. Use it as a discussion point for what alive and dead are. Reinforce that when someone dies they cannot be brought back. Stories that talk of monsters coming back to life are just that – stories, fiction, make-believe, and children need to know that this cannot happen when a person dies in real life.

64

- Explore the language of death, grief and loss – look at condolence cards, death announcements in newspapers etc. Make a list of the different words and phrases that are used and think about whether we feel these are the best words to use. If euphemisms are used in the cards, make it clear to the children what these really mean and come up with your own simpler and clearer phrases.

### SCIENCE

- When learning about the life cycles of animals, insects and plants etc. look at and discuss what they each look like and how they behave when they are alive and also when they are dead.
- Build on the PE lessons (mentioned on page 64) by learning how our bodies work, what they look and feel like when they are working well, what happens when they are not working so well and include when we are ill and need help from doctors, nurses and hospitals etc. Sensitively reference that sometimes ill health or an accident can mean that a person's body is 'so badly damaged' to a point that even though the doctors and nurses do all that they can to help, they are sometimes unable to make the person better and they sadly die.

### HISTORY

- When different historical figures are covered in history lessons, you can also talk about how and when they died so that children realise that these 'big names in history' do not have super powers that allow them to go on living forever; they are humans just like us.

As well as having planned lessons that cover life, death and grief, school staff can also make the most of any incidental learning opportunities that arise.

When a child comes into school and says they have a new baby cousin.

When a student tells us that their favourite character in a TV show has been killed.

When there is a natural disaster in the news.

### Key things that a bereaved child needs:

- To know that they are safe and that there are people who care for them
- To have their questions answered
- Security, affection and reassurance
- Opportunities to talk in their own time
- Opportunities to be left alone
- To be given the opportunity/a way to say 'goodbye'
- To be given help to understand about the death
- Help to manage this immense change in their life
- Ways to remember the person
- Continued support and awareness: in the days, weeks, months and years that follow a death

### SHARING INFORMATION

There is no time limit to grief – we do not get over a loss, instead we learn to live with it.

It is important for schools to remember that a bereaved child doesn't stop being a bereaved child at the end of an academic year. Make sure the relevant details of the child's bereavement are passed on to their next teacher and support team, which needs to be the case at the end of each and every year.

65