

Supporting Children and Young People Through Bereavement During COVID-19 Pandemic

Guidance for Professionals, Parents and Carers

How might supporting children and young people experiencing bereavement during COVID-19 pandemic be different?

Supporting a bereaved child or young person can be difficult at any time. Social distancing and self-isolation measures as a result of COVID-19 mean this is likely to be more challenging during this period. Access to support networks and coping mechanisms will be greatly reduced and normal routines which would usually provide reassurance are no longer in place. Families may not have been able to visit ill relatives and loved ones before they died, and they may not be able to attend their funerals. Additionally, children and young people may not be able to meet with their wider support network when grieving.

All children and young people experiencing bereavement during this time will struggle to access support networks and coping mechanisms, not just those experiencing bereavement due to COVID-19.

How might bereaved Children and Young People manage their grief?

It is normal for a bereaved child or young person to be worried about their own health or that of other family members and this is likely to be heightened during the current COVID-19 Crisis. Behaviours you may observe might include:

- Loss of interest in daily activities and events
- Becoming persistently aggressive
- Inability to sleep, loss of appetite, prolonged fear of being alone
- Acting like a much younger child for an extended period
- Denying that the family member has died/nothing has happened
- Imitating the dead person excessively
- Repeated statements about wanting to join the dead person; threatening suicide
- Withdrawal from friends (including phone calls and social media)
- Feeling worthless and putting themselves down
- Undertaking self-harming behaviour
- Becoming involved with anti-social acts
- Sharp drop in school performance or refusal to attend school (where the CYP is expected to attend school e.g. child of keyworker)
- Worrying about losing another relative to COVID-19
- Worrying more about catching COVID-19 themselves and questioning their own mortality.

How might you support a bereaved child or young person during this time?

- Let your genuine concern and caring show, reassure the child or young person that key adults are there for them.

- Recognise that reactions to loss are different in individuals. Allow them to express as much unhappiness as they are feeling and are willing to share and remind them that these are 'normal' feelings.
- Recognise that young people may feel guilty about what has happened. Provide reassurance- they are not to blame.
- Acknowledge their worries and be available to listen or to help. Allow them to talk about their loss as much and as often as they want to.
- Recognise that you cannot take the grief away, or 'make things better'.
- Provide clear, honest information at a level appropriate to their age or stage of development; it is okay say you do not know, if that is the case. If someone has died from COVID-19, talk about this with your child. Find out what they know and correct any misinformation, reassuring them that as children it is very unlikely that they would die from COVID-19.
- As a parent/carer it is likely that you are also grieving for the person who has passed away. It is important to acknowledge this. Find someone you can talk to, to support you.
- Look after yourself (e.g. exercise, mindfulness, engaging in an enjoyable past time).

Specific activities

Take time to talk about what has happened and build memories of the loved one who has died. Talk about the special, endearing qualities of who or what they have lost. You could look at photos together or create a memory box.

Children may benefit from opportunities to speak with the wider family/support network via phone calls and video chats. It can be comforting to hear the voices of friends and family, and seeing people's faces can be very reassuring.

Where might you be able to access additional support for a bereaved child or young person during this time?

Many children will have questions and worries about the virus, but those who have experienced the death of someone important or who have an ill family member might be particularly worried. The following links have some tips about supporting bereaved children with worries and concerns about the virus.

- Child Bereavement UK have made a short film about [supporting bereaved children during the outbreak](#)
- Winston's Wish have produced [guidance on talking to bereaved children about coronavirus](#)
- Cruse Bereavement Care have produced some [tips about talking to children](#) among their wider resources about [grief and coronavirus](#).
- Some specific guidance is also available from [Nelson's Journey](#).

Other bereavement and additional support services available to access during COVID-19:

- [Grief Encounter](#) has a helpline available.
- Looking after your own mental health and wellbeing is particularly important during this time. The Mental Health Foundation have some [useful tips](#).
- Winston's Wish has advice on [how to say goodbye when a funeral is not possible](#).

School or college staff may be able to offer additional support so it will important to let them know. It may be comforting for child or young person to speak to familiar members of staff after so much time away from school.

For further support and advice please contact Warwickshire Educational Psychology Service – 01926 742921.