

Loss and Bereavement

How might children react?

Children often show feelings with behaviours rather than words.

They pick up on tension, distress and anxiety from adults, and may mirror this in their own behaviour.

Children under 6 do not understand that death is permanent.

They cannot handle strong emotions for long periods, and may jump in and out of grief ('puddle jumping').

They may regress and behave like a younger child, being quiet and tearful, or having angry outbursts.

Adolescents may want to forget or deny the death. They may feel 'what's the point?' with school or friends.

What might help?

Be available. Provide extra time and space for activities or just be beside them to listen. Take your cue from the child.

Maintain routines as much as possible. This enables children to feel safe and that not everything has changed.

Be truthful. Children need clear and honest information. **Use correct language** such as 'died' and 'funeral'. In our desire to protect them we can confuse them.

Help them to create a **'first aid kit'** of go-to activities that can help them to feel a little more relaxed, e.g. blowing bubbles, going for a run or listening to music.

Support children to **understand and 'own' their feelings**. They need to know that, however they are feeling, it's okay.

Older young people may **share feelings with peers**. It's still important for them to have adults around that they trust.

They may not have been able to **say goodbye**. Creating memory boxes, making worry dolls, salt jars or writing letters to loved ones can help.

Remember that you can make a difference.

Short Term Advice for Schools

Look after yourself. Work in a team and let someone else step in when you are struggling. Remember that 'you have to put your own oxygen mask on first' before you can help others.

Acknowledge for the children how strange and difficult the situation is. Don't try to "normalise" it.

Be open. Keep a close connection with families. Provide support and a listening ear.

Longer Term Advice for Schools

Set aside a quiet room with support on hand. The room should be available for children and staff as needed.

Consider compiling condolences for bereaved children from their peers, collecting messages to send, or compiling an electronic book of condolence to email to the family.

Make sure that you have a bereavement policy or charter in place. This helps staff to be prepared and ready to support when the need arises.

When schools reopen, expect the adjustment period to take a long time. In the same way that it will take pupils a long time to adjust to being back at school, the changes we have all been through will take a long time to process.

Charter for bereaved children

Winston's Wish has supported many thousands of bereaved children in the last 20 years. This 'charter' is based on our conversations with them. If we live in a society that genuinely wants to enable children and young people to rebuild their lives after a death, then we need to respect their rights to:

B	Bereavement support Bereaved children need to receive support from their family, from their school and from important people around them.
E	Express feelings and thoughts Bereaved children should be helped to find appropriate ways to express all their feelings and thoughts associated with grief, such as sadness, anxiety, confusion, anger and guilt.
R	Remember the person who has died Bereaved children have the right to remember the person who has died for the rest of their lives, sharing special as well as difficult memories.
E	Education and information Bereaved children need and are entitled to receive answers to their questions and information that clearly explains what has happened, why it has happened and what will be happening.
A	Appropriate responses from schools and colleges Bereaved children need understanding and support from their teachers and fellow students without having to ask for it.
V	Views in important decisions Bereaved children should be given the choice about their involvement in important decisions that have an impact on their lives such as planning the funeral and remembering anniversaries.
E	Emotional wellbeing Bereaved children should receive support which includes their parents) or carers, and wider family.
M	Meet others Bereaved children benefit from the opportunity to meet other children who have had similar experiences.
E	Established routines Bereaved children should, wherever possible, be able to continue activities and interests so that parts of their lives can still feel 'normal'.
N	Not to blame Bereaved children should be helped to understand that they are not responsible, and not to blame, for the death.
T	Tell the story Bereaved children are helped by being encouraged to tell the story of what has happened in a variety of ways. These stories need to be heard by those important people in their lives.

Helpline: 08088 020 021
winstonswish.org



Further help, support and useful links:

Winston's Wish : winstonswish.org Child Bereavement UK: www.childbereavementuk.org

The Guardian article <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/may/12/its-ok-for-teachers-to-cry-how-to-handle-bereavement-in-school>

office@emotionallogiccentre.org.uk www.babcockldp.co.uk/emotional-logic (Emotional Logic approach)

Balloons Exeter 01392 826065 Families in Grief (FIG) North Devon 01237 479027

Children and Families in Grief (CFG) South Devon 01803 393917