



How to access Emergency Services Child Bereavement Support

Eligibility for Emergency Services Child Bereavement Support

Winston's Wish is funded to provide this programme to surviving family members of:

- members of the English ambulance, fire, coastguard and police services; and
- any volunteers under their direct control in air ambulance and search and rescue, who are killed whilst on duty, as a direct consequence of their service.

Bereavement support can be offered to children and young people up to age 25 affected by the death. The death must have occurred whilst on duty, that is on active service and as a direct consequence of their duties (i.e. not by natural causes or suicide).

Even if the bereavement occurred some time ago, Winston's Wish can offer the full programme of funded support as long as the circumstances of the bereavement fit these eligibility criteria.

If these eligibility criteria don't apply to your situation, we may still be able to help. The Winston's Wish [Helpline](#) is available for guidance and support to families anywhere following any kind of bereavement, so we can always help that way. We also offer a range of helpful [publications and resources](#) in our [online shop](#), which may be suitable to your circumstances.

Furthermore, we may be able to take a referral for face-to-face support with our practitioners if you live near one of our regional bases in Gloucestershire, West Sussex or Greater Manchester. We also have good relationships with other charities in the child bereavement sector and can signpost to those closest to you.

Getting support

The way to access guidance or bereavement support is via the Winston's Wish telephone [Helpline](#). If the Helpline is engaged or you are calling outside of opening hours, please leave a message on the answerphone including your contact details and we will call you back. We take calls from a wide range of people, whether from the bereaved family, or perhaps a friend or professional calling on behalf of a family. You could ask your service's charity to call on your behalf if you prefer.

Whoever calls will be able to discuss the circumstances and how the family is coping, with people with wide knowledge and expertise and who have up-to-date experience of supporting bereaved children and their families. They will collect some background details and if appropriate may either take a referral for support over the phone straight away, or arrange to get further advice from our team of bereavement support practitioners and call you back.

We are able to work with children from as young as three years old and have expertise in supporting children and young people at all ages. We welcome young people aged 18-25 as part of family meetings involving younger siblings and parents/carers to talk about the person who has died. However, if you are in this age group and would prefer individual support, Winston's Wish practitioners can offer 1:1 sessions by telephone or face-to-face. Our support focuses on enabling communication within a family, remembering the person who has died, understanding what happened to them, understanding your support network and developing coping strategies.

Experiences and feelings

When someone dies while on duty at work, the family has to deal with two things: not only the sudden death, but also the way their loved one has died. As a 'service' family they will have been aware of possible risks, but the event of the death is still devastating.

There may be media interest in a death on duty, as well as investigations, inquests and possible court hearings. It is hard for a family to grieve privately when there is intense public scrutiny and interest. Children and young people can often feel lost 'behind the headlines'.

Traumatic deaths may make it difficult to view the body of the person who has died, something that is often a valuable way for anyone to realise the finality of a death and say goodbye. There may also be delays to funerals and memorials if there is a delay in releasing the body to the family. Furthermore, it can be tempting to shield children from details of the death, and children may try to protect an adult. This can mean that individuals within families become isolated in their own feelings instead of communicating.

The results of inquiries and inquests may suggest that lessons could be learned or procedures changed as a result of the circumstances of the death. This can be very difficult if it appears that the death was due to operational problems or it is suggested that the death could have been prevented. Feelings of anger and blame may be magnified.

Winston's Wish understands the strong communities and friendships that all involved in the Emergency Services rely on, both the personnel and their families. They may live a very 'service-centred' life, and secondary to the bereavement may be the loss of a way of life, essential support networks and possibly accommodation in a particular place.

Talking about the death

The biggest concern that parents / carers might have is how to tell their children that someone has died while on duty. For further information and some helpful suggestions about how these conversations could be approached please see [Talking about death](#) or contact our [Helpline](#).