

SUPPORTING A BEREAVED CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON. A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

Supporting a bereaved child

Whether sudden or expected, few life events have a greater impact on families than the death of a family member. The ways in which families make sense of, and cope with their grief vary greatly. Everyone's bereavement journey will be unique. But grief is normal – and necessary – and needs to be expressed.

Although supporting a bereaved child can seem daunting, there are simple, straightforward and practical ways, which can make a real difference.

With support and information, young people can be helped to understand what has happened and can slowly learn to live with their loss.

For parents and carers

At a time when you are experiencing your own grief at the death of a partner, child, other family member or friend, it can seem overwhelming to offer support to your child or children.

Within these pages we hope to give you some information and some guidance on the responses and needs of children and young people when someone important in their life has died.

Some important reminders

- Remember that 'super parents' don't exist. Just do what you can, when you can. Be gentle on yourself.
- There is more than one way to support your children. Choose the things that you feel most comfortable with.
- Accept that some things just can't be 'made better' in a short space of time.
- Talk to children using words they understand and ask questions to check they have understood you.
- Give information a bit at a time if your children are younger. Pieces of the 'jigsaw puzzle' can be put together over time to make the complete picture.
- Show children how you are feeling: it helps them to know that it's OK to show their feelings too.
- Encourage children to ask questions and keep answering them – even if it's for the 100th time.
- Answer questions honestly and simply; and be willing to say 'I don't know'.
- Try to find ways in which children can be involved.
- Keep talking about the person who has died.
- Trust yourself and your instincts – you haven't forgotten how to parent your child.
- Look after yourself too.

Children and grief

Children's experience of a death in the family, and their reactions to it, may be different from yours as an adult. Try not to assume you know what they are feeling – ask them what they are feeling and accept what they tell you.

Initial reactions may range from great distress to what may seem to be unconcern. They may find it impossible to speak, they may be unable to stop crying or they may ask: 'Can I ride my bike now?' All of these – and more – are normal reactions and do not mean that the child is uncaring or reacting excessively.

Younger children experience grief differently to adults. Adults could be said to wade with difficulty through rivers of grief, and may become stuck in the middle of a wide sea of grieving. For children, their grieving can seem more like leaping in and out of puddles. One minute, they may be sobbing, the next they are asking: 'What's for tea?' It does not mean they care any the less about what has happened.

It happened to us

Everyone will experience their bereavement in their own individual way.

Here are some personal experiences of bereavement, told in each individual's words. Several are detailed stories about what happened, while others are shorter 'snapshots in time'. All the people involved have given their permission for their stories to be shared.

Phil

Veronica Harding died suddenly in May 1999, leaving a husband, Phil, and four children. This is Phil's story.

Veronica and I celebrated our 20th wedding anniversary on 21st April 1999. We planned to take a long weekend away in Derbyshire to celebrate properly – a hotel somewhere and an idle couple of days to enjoy the scenery and perhaps capture a little romance away from everyday things. On 13th May we decided to have a Chinese take-away and we opened a bottle of wine together. A quiet evening is fairly rare when you have four children – Lynda (18), Alison (16), Michael (4) and Joanna (17 months) – so this was great, as Michael and Jo seemed to behave particularly well that evening.

We had no idea that Veronica was ill, but the following morning she died suddenly from hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, a heart condition that causes enlargement of part of the heart muscle. My world fell apart when Veronica died and the person I loved most in the world was gone.

Lynda, the eldest, was at Hull University studying chemistry and about to take her end-of-year exams and the other three were all at home. Lynda was fetched by my brother-in-law, Ray, and we had to begin to come to terms with what had happened.

As I write this in February 2000, it is still only nine months since Veronica died, although if it were not for the calendar telling me that the first winter has not yet passed I would have thought it nearer two or three years. My sense of time is completely haywire.

There are times, and this is one of them, when I feel a dreadful sense of loneliness – something akin to being lost in the dark, like a small boy who is afraid to go upstairs after sunset by himself.

Not everything is bad. The children and I have become closer as we have learned to pull together and we have had tremendous support from friends and family. My parents and in-laws have given much help, particularly with looking after Jo and the others. I'm not much good with an iron but I can juggle large numbers of clothes pegs in one hand while hanging out the washing with the other. I can cook and enjoy creating various burnt offerings for the family and friends.

Winston's Wish has been a ray of daylight in a gloomy tunnel. We don't feel quite so isolated now, but much more positive. In an odd way, being in touch with others who know and understand this has relieved some of the tension.

Linda passed her exams, Alison became engaged and I know Vron would approve. Me? I don't really know but I think it is time to begin picking up the pieces and learning to look forward, not back.

Phil wrote this for our newsletter in spring 2000. None of us could have imagined that the family had another tragedy to face all too soon. In June 2002, Michael, aged 7, died suddenly of heart failure.

Our support was offered again to Phil, Joanna, Linda and Alison as they struggled to rebuild their lives after this second bereavement.

John and Jane

John and Jane Foster share this story of the death of their daughter Isabelle

Izzy, the second of our four children, entered and left this world fighting for breath. She needed oxygen on the day of her birth and she died during an uncontrollable asthma attack on January 22 1995.

We had got used to Izzy's asthma and to setting up a nebuliser to stop an attack. The fact that her condition could be fatal was something we skipped over, if we knew or considered it at all.

Izzy was usually in hospital one week in four getting over an attack. Despite this, she managed to keep up with her work and her peers, and had a small circle of close friends who looked after her at school. They also looked up to her, as an example of getting on with life.

The Sunday she died, Izzy was on her way to Birmingham Children's Hospital for a 'detox' – the steroids she took were threatening to damage her bones and sight, so she had to have her asthma managed without them in hospital periodically. On the way, her asthma became acute and several doses of the nebuliser had no effect. I think she lost consciousness as we left the M5 so she was unaware of her dad, John, (a taxi driver) flying through red lights at high speed while her mum, Jane, (a staff nurse) did all she could to revive our daughter

One of her last requests was that I should carry her into the hospital. I staggered up some steps and laid her on the floor of the reception area – we had no time to find the A&E department. Doctors and nurses arrived from nowhere and we waited for an eternity before our paediatrician came in and said starkly 'she's dead'.

Numbness set in. We spent days until the funeral in a 'shop closed' state. We tackled one major job together per day (like seeing the undertaker or the vicar or arranging funeral flowers) and spent the rest of the time being miserable, together or individually. When her school heard, everyone came to a standstill in grief and disbelief.

I don't know how many hours I spent just staring at Isabel's smiling photo, aching with loss. I now know why people used to draw the curtains after someone had died – in your grief you are no longer part of this world and nothing out there has meaning.

I don't know if Izzy foresaw her death. She once said to Jane, while listening to the Queen song The show must go on, that we should play it at her funeral, so we did, I think everyone cried at the song because we all remembered how she had refused to let her condition get her down or limit her enjoyment of life, and now the song contained her message for us – that Izzy's smile lived on and that we must continue with life.

This we tried to do but, feeling that we needed outside help, we contacted Winston's Wish. Oliver and Alice attended Camp Winston and we attended the parents' group and shed as many quiet tears as our children. Abigail, our eldest, was too old for the children's camp and too young for the adult sessions. She got rather tangled up in her emotions and managed to become ensnared in 'exam phobia', writing pages of brilliant wrong answers and not doing as well as predicted with her A levels. She has recently got a very good degree result. Oliver 'punished' himself for Isabel's death by being disruptive at school and not working for a year and needed further help from Winston's Wish to understand his feelings. Alice, Izzy's favourite, looks like turning out to be the fun-loving, peace-making, vegetarian member of the family that Izzy was grooming her to be.

So the show goes on – we just wish that the gentle ringleader was still here to watch it.

Marion

My mum died when I was 13. The first time I cried was several months later. I was at a friend's house after school. She wasn't feeling well and her mum brought her a glass of milk. Suddenly I realised that my mum was never going to do that again.

Janie

My mum died very suddenly when I was 14. I don't remember seeing dad cry – he wasn't a man who showed his feelings. And we quickly realised that mum had become a taboo subject. Dad never mentioned her – perhaps that was his way of coping – but for us it was very hard.

Greg

After my brother died last year when I was 6, I am scared that someone else will die in my family. I drew a picture of my mum going to work, and I am sad because I am not with her and I don't know if she will die or not.

Georgia

Last night I dreamed that my mum came to meet me from school: she hugged me and gave me the softest blanket ever to wrap round because she thought I was cold. I kept some of that softness and warmth when I woke up.

Parent

The girls got so much from the weekend – realising they weren't the only ones and that it was OK to feel all sorts of emotions. We still talk about the weekend and I find it a great way to open up a conversation about their dad, which used to be such a hard thing to do. For me, I felt their lives were ruined and as a mum I found that devastating. The weekend taught me that life is different but not ruined and knowing that has had the biggest impact on me. Just knowing we are under your 'umbrella' is such a help.

Chris

Chris was 4 when his grandfather died of lung cancer. Five years on, Chris' mother asked him to think of things he remembered about his grandfather. Without prompts, he recalled the following memories, in this order:

- grandad smoked
- he was a good builder
- he didn't eat enough vegetables
- he lived near the beach where his white hair blew in the wind
- we played character stories together.

Dawn

Winston's Wish helped us grieve as a family and we still know we can phone them if we ever have a bad day. They managed to focus our thoughts towards positive things and their little coping strategies were crucial to me.

Gemma and Mandy

Gemma and her older sister Mandy were two of 14 children who attended a pilot group in September 1992. In June 2003 the sisters chose to make contact with Winston's Wish again, perhaps simply to touch base some 12 years after their mother's death from cancer. Now in their early 20s they arrived with two carrier bags full of photos, workbooks and letters. They remembered with tears and joy a journey in their lives that has left them with a respect for their own capacity to be resilient and a knowledge that they have successfully continued a bond, which appears to have a genuine chance to be everlasting. After their visit each wrote a letter.

Gemma

I was 9 years old when mum was diagnosed with cancer in October 1990. During her stay in hospital Mandy (my sister, aged 11 at the time) and I were introduced to someone from Winston's Wish. We talked about mum's illness, our hopes and fears and ultimately mum's death. These meetings were so important to me as I began to realise that I wasn't the only person going through something like this and that it's OK to cry and to show your feelings and emotions. In a way, I was being prepared for the worst. The worst came on May 9th 1991 at 2.42pm when mum died from cancer ...

Just before mum died I rushed in to see her. I gave her a huge hug, deep down wishing that I could never let go as I knew this would be the last time to do so. I sat there for what seemed an eternity, talking to her about my school trip and helping her to drink some fluids. As I left her room to go downstairs I gave her a hug and kiss which are still very memorable to me as this was my very last time with mum.

Both Mandy and I continued our sessions; although we attended them separately. I was given a book that was

designed to help children cope with grief, which I worked through. I drew pictures of my thoughts, feelings and favourite memories of mum. It was a nice way of extracting all my feelings that I could have so easily bottled up inside of me. We talked endlessly about mum too, which meant she was still alive in my thoughts.

My sister and I were one of the first people to actually take part in a Winston's Wish group. I remember we attended the group along with several other children who had lost a family member. This was such a good day for me as I realised that I was not alone, there were other people and other children who had been through the same as me ... I still remember the boy I sat next to, he must not have been much older than me, and he told us about the experience of losing his dad. I was not alone and that was such a relief.

Now 12 years on, there is never a day that goes past where I don't think of mum. I feel her spirit is with me, guiding me through life. I talk to her in my subconscious all the time and I believe that I am able to do this as a result of my involvement with Winston's Wish. They encouraged me to remember mum and to keep her spirit alive.

At home, I have many photos of mum and one is kept beside my bed. I look at this every night before I go to sleep; it's my way of saying 'Goodnight Mum'. There are still times when I get upset and wish she was here, however, I now realise that she has gone to a better place and is no longer in pain. It's particularly hard when I see people around my age with their mums. I do get jealous, wishing I still had my mum, but I am proud to have spent the time that I did with her and remember that even though she isn't with me in body, she will always and forever be with me in memory.

Mandy

The day of Mum's death, I still remember as clearly as though it was yesterday. I was able to have a cuddle with mum, which I knew deep down would be my last one, and say goodbye in our own way. This is a memory, which will stay with me forever.

The visits after mum's death involved a lot of talking about how I felt, where I thought mum had gone, and my memories of mum – again helping me to understand more about death and bereavement, and that it was OK to cry. One of the first bits of 'work' was to write a biography of mum's life and I was encouraged to include lots of photos – which I did. This I still have today as a nice memento of my mum's life.

I do sincerely believe that being part of Winston's Wish has helped me to come to terms with the death of my mum. As a child it is a difficult thing to comprehend that you are never going to see this someone special ever again – but when all your questions, worries and fears are explained to you, it makes it that little bit easier. Realising you are not the only person to have lost your mum, and that you are not 'weird' was so important (in my opinion!). The encouragement I was given to talk about the person I have lost and to treasure my memories is the most important thing I learnt from all of those sessions.

I still have many happy, sad, good and bad memories of my mum, all of which I treasure. At home I have many photographs of her around the house. I am proud to wear various bits of her jewellery, including her wedding and engagement rings, and I take it as the biggest compliment when people tell me how much I look like her. My mum may be gone, but she is definitely not forgotten!

A Day on the Winston's Wish Helpline

Here at Winston's Wish, we speak to thousands of people every year who have experienced the death of someone important. Every story is unique. Every journey of bereavement is a personal one.

What follows is an account of one day on the Winston's Wish Helpline; this account has been compiled from calls received on the helpline although details have been changed and some elements of the stories created to illustrate the types of calls we receive. What has not been artificially created however is the range of calls we receive in any one day, nor the truth and intensity of the interactions between the Winston's Wish helpline team and the person who needs us at that time.

Brendan and Kat are answering the helpline phone on this day: this is what happens during their shifts. Some calls last 10 minutes; some last over an hour; most calls last around 30 minutes. We receive around 15 calls a day.

9.15 Brendan is answering the helpline phone this morning. He's also one of the most generous tea makers in the office – so he's making a quick round for the fundraisers and the other practitioners before he settles into the dedicated helpline room to take the first call of the day. We always promise to keep his caffeine level topped up in

return – a drink and a friendly smile from a colleague can be very supportive when taking a demanding call.

9.30 The Helpline is now open. Brendan checks the answering machine for any messages left overnight. While the majority of calls come in during our opening hours of 9.30am to 5pm, people sometimes leave a message. This morning, there's a message from a head teacher asking for a call back during mid-morning break time. Brendan makes a note and checks for other messages left by colleagues. However, the phone rings ... and it continues to do so with only short gaps between calls for the rest of the day.

9.35 Brendan answers the phone to a grandmother, Florence, who is concerned for her 6-year-old grandson, Matt. His mother died four months ago of breast cancer and Matt is now living with his father and his paternal grandparents over 300 miles away from Florence and his 'old' home. His father, and his father's family, believe in the 'stiff upper lip' school of coping and have decreed that his mother will not be mentioned in the hope that Matt will 'get over' her death quickly. Florence has different beliefs about expressing emotions and wonders how she can support Matt from a distance.

Brendan explores ways she can keep in contact with her grandson and how she can play a vital role in helping preserve memories of his mother (her daughter). Brendan suggests that she begins to write down some stories about his mother as a child, being naughty, favourite subject at school, meeting dad, telling granny about being pregnant with Matt and so on. With some old photos from gran's drawer, this will form a life book of his mum that will be treasured as Matt grows up.

Brendan also suggests activities that might help Matt that Florence could try – even from a distance – and suggests a couple of books Florence could post for Matt to read. He also explores with Florence her own feelings about her daughter's death and how she might find gentle ways to engage her son-in-law so they can both help Matt establish an appropriate 'continuing bond' with his mum.

10.15 Angela rings the Helpline for ideas on how to celebrate the tenth birthday of her surviving twin son, James. His twin died of leukaemia about nine months ago. Angela feels that James is entitled to have fun at his party but knows that it will be extremely difficult as it's the first birthday he has not shared with David.

Brendan encourages Angela to talk about how hard this birthday will be for her too. Brendan then shares some ideas on how to celebrate David's life in a fun way – recognising that the friends at the party, as well as the family, will be grieving for their friend. Among the ideas is to make jars of memories – using coloured salt swirled together to represent each child's memories of David. They could decorate biscuits with icing faces to represent how each one is feeling right now and the children could write a birthday message to David to tie to a helium-filled balloon released at the end of the party. He agrees that his birthday will always be a hard time for James; that's how it is when someone dies. There's no magic wand to make everything better. The best that can be hoped is to find a way to move forward into the future, with the precious memories of the past. Brendan says he will post activity sheets about the ideas they discussed.

11.00 Almost missed the time to call the head teacher! Mr Lloyd is very concerned about a 14-year-old pupil in Year 8, Sean, whose work has recently deteriorated and who is beginning to get into trouble for his angry outbursts at children and staff. Sean says it's because his brother died two years ago and he hates the world. Mr Lloyd and his staff want to be supportive but wonder sometimes if he is using the bereavement as an excuse.

Brendan discovers that the brother was a star student, two years older than Sean, who was knocked off his bike and killed when they were out riding together. It strikes Brendan that Sean is now the age his 'golden' brother was when he died, and he recognises that Sean may feel he should not be alive when his brother is dead. Brendan checks that Sean's mum is aware of the head contacting Winston's Wish and suggests calling her to see if we can offer her support. We may also be able to make contact with Sean's teachers.

11.15 The next call comes from Jane, a friend of someone whose husband died last week. She is glad to talk to Brendan about ways she can support her friend's children. The funeral is in two days and Jane is wondering how the two children will cope.

Brendan explores whether the children will be attending and if Jane feels she could take on the role of supporting them during the ceremony to allow her friend to grieve freely. They discuss some suggestions for ways in which the children (aged 17 and 6) can be involved, for example, by choosing one of their father's favourite pieces of music or writing a poem for him. Jane decides to order two memory boxes from us in which each child can keep mementos of their father – such as old photos, shells from a special holiday, his aftershave, tickets to see a film, birthday cards and anything else.

11.45 Andrew calls about his daughter Kate, aged 13. They always used to be 'best friends' but since her mother's death a few months ago Kate has changed totally and is now very 'stroppy' according to Andrew. Andrew is

exhausted and is really struggling after his partner's long illness and recent death.

He said he is at his wit's end. He feels Kate can't love him or her mother because she doesn't ever want to talk about her and slams out of the room at the slightest provocation. Andrew's voice shakes throughout the call – he is afraid that Kate will begin to 'get into trouble' with drugs or drink.

Brendan listens to Andrew, encouraging him to share the pain. Sometimes, a caller needs our presence and our attentive listening more than our ideas, guidance and information. When it seems right, he helps Andrew consider how he and his daughter are grieving separately and differently; maybe there's also a place for them to communicate how they are feeling to each other. He offers some very simple ideas (notes stuck to the fridge saying 'I love you and I know you're hurting', for example) as a beginning but he feels this family might benefit from attending a residential weekend. After ascertaining that Andrew and Kate live locally, Brendan tells Andrew that he will ask a colleague to arrange a home assessment to discuss how we can best support them.

12.30 It's been a busy morning with no time to sip the tea we at last remembered to make him!

A hospice in Blackpool calls to order some of the publications which Winston's Wish produces. They ask for our book for children about cancer, The Secret C and the booklet As Big as it Gets written for adults supporting a child when someone in the family is seriously or terminally ill. The hospice has a mother with young children as an in-patient.

Brendan takes the order and after a brief assessment discusses how they might use the publications with this family.

13.15 Kat takes over, tidies up the booklets and directories of information, waters the plant and reads the messages. Kat and Brendan are part of a team of experienced practitioners who take turns answering the Helpline while also supporting families through our other services. Their direct experience with bereaved young people gives a unique depth and breadth to the guidance and support they are able to offer callers throughout the UK over the phone.

13.20 Kat's first call is from a health visitor concerned about a 7-year-old girl she sees when visiting the family. The little girl won't go to bed at night and becomes very distressed and hysterical if the family tries to make her do so – she ends up falling asleep exhausted on the sofa. Her grandmother died recently and the health visitor wonders if there may be a connection.

Kat enquires what the child has been told about her grandmother's death and learns that 'her mother simply told her that granny died in her sleep'. Kat explores how confusing these words could be to a child: 'If you can die in your sleep, there's no way I'm going to risk going to bed'. The health visitor immediately grasps the point and plans a visit to explain to the little girl that her grandmother died because she was ill and elderly. Kat also offers to describe on another occasion some other ideas that may help if the little girl is still afraid of sleeping. They agree that it might be helpful for the child to complete an activity book to consolidate both her understanding and her need to commemorate the relationship with her grandmother properly.

14.00 Janet calls. Her two children, Ben (10) and Anna (8), came to one of our residential weekends last year after the death of their father. The children had responded well to the weekend and had seemed more settled afterwards. Recently, though, Ben is having trouble with stomach pains; he says he's worried about passing the entrance exam to secondary school.

Kat remembers Ben and Anna from the residential group the previous spring; she's glad Janet took up the offer to ring as part of an on-going support network. In exploring together what may have changed for Ben, Kat learns that the school for which Ben is sitting the exam is his father's old school. She wonders if Ben feels pressure to follow in his father's footsteps, even to take his father's place in the family. Janet had seen the chance as a positive way for Ben to keep a sense of contact with his father but she says she will make it really clear to Ben that he does not have to replace his father in any way.

15.00 Kat notices a new e-mail that has come in to the central enquiry address for Winston's Wish and forwards it to the colleague who responds to e-mail questions asked through our website. We regularly receive e-mails, often from young people using their preferred way of finding information and asking the questions they find impossible to ask when face-to-face with someone. The questions can range from: 'I'm 16 and I've just learnt that my mum killed herself when I was 7. I was always told she'd had a car accident. She must have really hated me, mustn't she?' to the heart-breakingly simple: 'Why my friend?'

15.15 The manager of a nursery calls for advice. At 'news time' today, a 3-year-old who attends the nursery full-time had said: 'My news is that my daddy died on Friday'. The manager was looking for advice, both on how to

support the child and also on how to handle questions from interested playfellows. She added that the staff had also been at a loss when the young boy had then asked one of them if his dad would be picking him up at the end of the day as he often did. Later, the child's mother told the nursery that her ex-partner had killed himself.

Kat explains about children's growing understanding of death and dying, and how this child will neither understand the permanence of death nor even properly what death is. Finding out that the nursery is in Oxfordshire, she suggests that they contact SeeSaw, their local service. Finally, Kat agrees to send out a booklet which gives guidelines when supporting a child bereaved by suicide. She sends it by first class post so it will arrive the next day.

15.25 A neighbour of a woman with three children whose husband has just died suddenly of a brain haemorrhage rings to ask if there's a service like Winston's Wish in their part of UK.

Kat checks our information but finds that as yet there is no similar service within 50 miles. She gives the number for the Childhood Bereavement Network, a co-ordinating body which brings together individuals and organisations providing services to bereaved children, in case there is a local individual with experience of bereavement support. She also arranges to send the neighbour some information about the Helpline and the other services we provide for all families.

16.15 Kat's last call today is from a young mother, Emma, with a 5-month-old baby girl. Her husband was diagnosed with cancer on the very day they discovered she was pregnant. Despite great efforts on everyone's part for him to survive long enough to see his baby born, he died just three weeks before her birth. Emma feels she went straight from the funeral to the delivery suite – everything in-between is a blur. She is worried about being a bad mother since she finds herself crying desperately while she is feeding the baby and, in particular, she wonders how she can ever make her husband seem like a real daddy to Alexandra when she will have no memories of him.

This is a demanding call and Kat gives Emma every ounce of her attention. After listening carefully, and checking whether anyone is supporting her, Kat explains a little about how children remember things. Kat suggests that as Emma grows up she talks about Mark a lot, that his picture is around the house, and that as Alexandra develops she tells her stories that help her to understand how excited Mark felt about the arrival of Alexandra.

For example, she could say something along the lines of: 'When daddy knew we were going to have a little baby to love, he hugged the doctor and almost kissed the woman in the bread shop he was so excited!! He had some funny ideas of names for you – would you like to have been called Rainbow? – but we chose your beautiful name together'. Kat has several other ideas but feels that, for now, it will be best to encourage Emma to ring us whenever she wants to or needs to. This may be over many years, when we can hopefully offer on-going support and some suggestions for creating and preserving memories.

16.55 The last call had been very poignant and Kat is glad that Sarah pops in to check how she is feeling as her shift nears the end. Informal support among colleagues counts for a lot when you are working with and supporting those affected by grief and loss. Sarah and another colleague Edward will be answering the Helpline tomorrow and Kat told her to expect the call from the mother whose friend had called Brendan earlier.

17.00 The Helpline closes for the night. Any night-time callers can leave a message that will be responded to first thing in the morning. It's been a fairly typical day. We receive more calls from mothers than from other relatives; the person who has died is most frequently the father of the child under concern. The most frequently mentioned causes of death are cancer, suicide, heart problems and road traffic accidents. Professionals concerned about a child or children make up around 23% of our callers.

With two children experiencing the death of a parent every hour in the UK (around 20,000 children under 18 every year) and many more experiencing the death of a brother or sister, a grandparent or best friend, the Helpline is providing a vital, accessible and appreciated service.

Please give our number to anyone who is caring for a bereaved child: 08452 03 04 05.

The line is open from Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm and Wednesday evenings from 7pm – 9.30pm. Calls are charged at the local rate.

How age can affect understanding

Our understanding about death and dying increases with age. Broadly speaking, it follows this sort of pattern over the years from 3 or 4 to around 10:

- The hamster's not moving but he'll play with me tomorrow.
- The hamster won't ever play again.
- Old people die and we can never play with them again.
- Grandpa may die one day in the future.
- Mummy and daddy will die when they're old.
- I will die when I'm old.
- Not only old people die. Mummy and daddy could die tomorrow if something happened.
- I could die tomorrow.
- I can kill myself.

Under 5 or 6, a child may not be able to understand that death is permanent nor that it happens to every living thing. A 4-year-old may be able to tell others confidently that 'my daddy's dead' and may even be able to explain how 'he was hit by a car and he died'. However, the next sentence may be: 'I hope he'll be back before my birthday' or 'He's picking me up tonight'.

Slightly older children may still have this hope and belief that the death will not be permanent but are beginning to understand 'forever'. Children bereaved when they are 5 to 8 years old may feel that they can in some way reverse what has happened ('Dad will come back if I'm very good and eat my broccoli').

They may also feel – as may older children and young people – that they in some way caused the death. ('I was angry with him and shouted at him when he left for work because he wouldn't fix my bike. I refused to give him a hug. And then he never came home again. It's all my fault.') It is so common for a young person to feel they may have contributed to the death that it's worth saying something like: 'You do know, don't you, that nothing you said or didn't say and nothing you did or didn't do made this happen?'

When first told of the death, younger children may be mainly concerned with the 'when' and 'where' of the death. Slightly older ones may also want to know the 'how' and older children and young people will also explore the 'why'.

Younger children will express their concerns about their own future; don't be surprised if a child asks you: 'What will happen to me? Who will meet me after school? Will I still go to Cubs?' Whatever reassurance is possible about continuing everyday activities and arrangements will be appreciated, or clear explanations given about alternative arrangements. 'At the moment, we're working all this out. What I do know is that we will still be living in this house at least until Christmas and that granny Jane will meet you from school on the days I can't. You can still have Bethany to tea whenever you want.'

As children begin to understand more about death and dying, a death in the family may make them anxious about the health and safety of surviving members of the family. Don't be surprised if the children become more clingy or more reluctant to see you leave. They may feel that they need to stick close to protect you from the mysterious occurrence that made their dad disappear or at least to be with you if it happens again. Older children may feel very responsible for you and younger siblings and feel the need to keep a close eye on your safety.

By the age of 10, children will usually have all of the bits of the jigsaw puzzle of understanding. They will even understand that they are able to cause their own death. They will appreciate clear and detailed information – beyond 'when', 'where' and 'how' the death happened, they will be interested in 'why'.

Talking about death

Talking to your child about the death of someone close may be the hardest thing you have ever done or will ever do.

Yet to keep talking about the person who has died – offering information, recalling and stimulating memories, and sharing feelings – is one of the most important things you can do to help your child as they journey through grief. Children never want to forget the person who has died.

When children ask difficult questions, there is no automatic need to give a long explanation. Beginning by asking:

'What do you think?', and building on their answer, will aid their understanding.

Younger children may be confused by some of the everyday expressions that people use when someone dies, so it is best to keep language simple and direct. Saying that someone has 'died' or is 'dead' gives a child unique words for a unique event and helps them begin to understand that what has happened is so important that it needs a whole new range of words to describe it.

Consider that you are young and you are told that: 'We've lost your mother'. Wouldn't you wonder why no-one was out looking everywhere they could think of for her? Wouldn't you be afraid that no-one would come looking for you if you became lost?

Suppose you are told that: 'Granny has gone to sleep' or 'passed away in her sleep'. Wouldn't you be very scared of going to bed at night and do all you could to keep yourself and your parents awake at all costs?

Even the language we use with the very best intentions of giving appropriate and accurate descriptions can confuse a child. Take a moment to think about it from their point of view. Here are some examples of misunderstandings that children have shared with us:

- 'Someone attacked daddy in his heart but I couldn't see the cuts.' (*His father had a heart attack.*)
- 'They told me my baby sister was born dead. But how could she be both? (*Her sister was stillborn.*)
- 'If he passed his HIV on, why did he still have it?'

The language surrounding funeral rites can also confuse. Children who are asked if they want to see their mother's body have asked: 'Why not her head too?' Similarly, when people talk of burying or cremating someone's body, children can wonder what happens to all the other bits.

'She was beside herself when I suggested she came with me to see the new headstone on her mum's grave. It was only later that she told me she'd thought it would be her mum's head changed into stone. Logical really because we talk of her body being in the grave.'

Children who have always been told to avoid fire and flames may be alarmed at the idea that their relative's body is to be burnt.

Families try to convey their beliefs about life after death to their children. Some families may believe in a heaven or other place beyond this world. Some may believe that the person who has died is a star, or an angel, or is 'all around us'. Some may believe that the dead person will be reborn in some form. Some may believe that death is an ending.

While it is your choice about how you talk about what happens after death, please consider the following thoughts that children have shared with us. They worry whether they will be seen when they are being naughty or want to be private. They wonder why their parents don't ring or write from heaven. They struggle to understand how grandad can become a planet.

'Mummy said daddy had gone to heaven. But she won't take me to see him. Granny lives in Cornwall so I don't see why we can't go and visit him: you go through heaven to get there.'

'Gran says mum can see me all the time. So she must have seen me hide the sweets. She won't love me any more because I said I hadn't.'

It may be best to say something like: 'People have all sorts of beliefs about what happens after someone dies. We know that they can't come back and visit us or ring on the phone. Being dead isn't like being in another country. These are some of the things that people believe ... and I believe this ... I wonder what you believe? You may change what you believe as you grow older'.

Time passes

You will come across many beliefs about grief. Only you will find out what is true for you and for your children – and they may be different things.

You will probably be told that 'time heals' or that 'the first year is the worst'. Some families find this is true – but others find that the second year can be even harder. Or the fourth.

It can be when family and friends ask less about how you are coping or when the invitations fall away or when people assume you are 'over it' that the loneliness and the yearning hit hardest.

Children and young people tell us that, after a while, their friends stop talking about the person who has died, that teachers no longer ask how they're doing and that sometimes even their own families stop communicating, assuming that it's 'for the best' if the person fades from memory. Yet these young people passionately want to keep talking about the person who has died – they just need some help to do so.

We often hear from families who say something like: 'He never talks about his dad, I think he's forgotten him'. Children and young people need your help to keep talking about the person who has died. They need your 'permission' that it is OK to do so, and this is best demonstrated by you talking about them regularly and naturally.

Young people want to preserve their memories and maintain a 'continuing bond' with the person who has died for as long as they choose.

Feelings, thoughts and behaviour

Children and young people can experience a huge range of feelings and thoughts after the death of someone close. You may feel that your children are reacting in unexpected or surprising ways. You may feel that some reactions are inappropriate. Each child and young person will have a unique response to this unique event – and every reaction is natural.

Some people expect – or maybe that should be 'hope' – that grief will follow a pattern of responses from disbelief and shock through to acceptance. Bereaved young people will tell you that grief is nowhere near as organised or straightforward. Grief feels chaotic. Grief follows no rules. Think about yourself and how it has felt for you.

So the following list just begins to describe some common responses to the death of someone important. You may also want to take a look at the 'feelings' area of the pages for young people to see some of the feelings young people have shared with us. And you may like to look at our 'This may help' section for some practical ideas.

Common responses include:

- Sadness, not necessarily shown in crying. ('Don't they realise people cry on the inside too?')
- Guilt. ('If only I hadn't refused to tidy my room.')
- Anger, at others and/or at the person who has died. ('I hate him for riding so fast on his motorbike; he can't have loved us.')
- Disbelief. ('If I don't think about it, she'll come back.')
- Confusion. ('I don't understand anything any more; it's all jumbled up.')
- Fear. ('No-one's safe; they say everyone dies.')
- Rage, often expressed in physical violence to objects. ('I want to smash up the whole ***** world.')
- Anxiety and a desire to control events and people. ('What's going to happen next?')
- Despair. ('There's no point in anything any more.')
- Feeling 'frozen'. ('I can't feel anything at all.')
- Avoiding the subject. ('I'm leaving if you mention Tim again.')
- Wanting to keep busy at all costs. ('I can't talk ... I'm off to football.')
- Yearning. ('If I could just see her for a second.')
- Powerlessness. ('What can I do?')
- Worthlessness. ('It should have been me who died.')

The death of a parent

Leading researchers agree that the death of a parent is one of the hardest losses a child has to face. Young people's responses to the death of a parent will vary according to:

- their age
- the cause and nature of the death (for example, whether sudden or expected, whether by suicide or violence)
- the family circumstances (for example, whether parents lived together, whether major life changes will now be necessary)
- any previous experience of death or trauma within the family
- their own resilience and the support and care they receive.

The death of a parent may cause a child or young person to feel some or all of the following:

- deep sadness, that may or may not be expressed in conventional ways such as crying
- a hollow, achy pain inside that is hard to put into words and may be described as hunger or boredom or fear
- loneliness and a sense of having been abandoned
- anxiety about the safety and well-being of the rest of the family, especially the surviving parent and including themselves
- that they have to become more responsible – 'man of the house now'
- that there's no point in anything any more, including school work
- anger and even rage at what has happened
- blame or guilt for things said or unsaid, done or undone
- relief – if the family situation and dynamics had been difficult, for example
- physical symptoms (for example, ones that may echo their dead] parent's symptoms)
- and many others.

The death of a brother or sister

Young people's responses to the death of a brother or sister will vary according to:

- their age
- the age of their brother or sister
- their position within the family
- how long they had known each other (for example, a stillborn baby or an older teenager)
- the cause and nature of the death (for example, whether sudden or expected, whether by suicide or violence)
- the family circumstances (for example, their parents' ability to support them while grieving themselves)
- any previous experience of death or trauma within the family
- their own resilience and the support and care they receive.

The death of a brother or sister may cause a child or young person to feel some or all of the following:

- deep sadness, that may or may not be expressed in conventional ways such as crying
- a hollow, achy pain inside that is hard to put into words and may be described as hunger or boredom or fear
- loneliness and a sense of having been abandoned
- anxiety about the safety and well-being of the rest of the family, especially other siblings and themselves
- a feeling of responsibility – working hard, helping out
- a sense of identification with, for example, an older sibling and a commitment to live up to their memory and planned future
- a feeling that there's no point in anything any more, including school work
- anger and even rage at what has happened
- blame or guilt for things said or unsaid, done or undone
- relief – if the family situation and dynamics had been difficult, for example, or if the sibling had caused family strife
- resentment at parents' absorption in their own grief
- disquiet at reaching and passing sibling's age
- and many others.

The death of a grandparent, other relative or friend

Young people's responses to the death of someone close will vary according to:

- their age
- the age of the person who died

- the nature of their relationship (for example, a grandfather who picked them up from school every day or an aunt who lived in Australia and just sent birthday cards)
- the cause and nature of the death (for example, whether sudden or expected, whether by suicide or violence)
- the family circumstances (for example, their parents' ability to support them while grieving themselves)
- any previous experience of death or trauma within the family or wider community (for example, the third child from school to die this year)
- their own resilience and the support and care they receive.

The death of a grandparent, other relative or friend may cause a child or young person to feel some or all of the following:

- deep sadness, that may or may not be expressed in conventional ways such as crying
- a hollow, achy pain inside that is hard to put into words and may be described as hunger or boredom or fear
- loneliness and a sense of having been abandoned (for example, they were the only school friend who played at lunchtime)
- anxiety about the safety and well-being of the rest of the family including themselves
- a feeling of responsibility – working hard, helping out
- a feeling that there's no point in anything any more, including school work
- anger and even rage at what has happened
- blame or guilt for things said or unsaid, done or undone
- relief – if the family situation and dynamics had been difficult, (for example, if gran lived with the family and needed a great deal of care)
- the loss of a trusted supporter (for example, an uncle who always had time to listen)
- and many others.

Different causes of death

There's no hierarchy of death. No means or cause of death is better or worse than another for a grieving child. They are all overwhelming.

If a death is expected (for example, through cancer or other illness), the family may have had time to prepare for the loss, to begin to adjust to the future without the person, to make sure that photographs have been taken, letters to open in the future have been written, goodbyes said. It is very likely that the family will have received help – and will continue to receive help – from a hospice-based service or other support service (such as Macmillan nurses).

However, the family may also have suffered through a prolonged period of stress in which the children felt unable to undertake normal activities or to rebel or have fun; a period when the family focused on the person who was dying in a way that the children found very hard.

If a death is sudden (for example, through a heart attack or road accident) there is no chance for goodbyes and no chance for preparations or adjustment. The last conversations linger in the memory. There is no professional whose role it is to support these bereaved families (although police family liaison officers and hospital-based bereavement services make valuable contributions). However, for some people, a sudden death may be seen more positively (for example, of a frail grandmother).

If a death is through suicide, there are particular difficulties for the families left behind. It has been estimated that for every suicide, six people will experience intense grief – and many more will be deeply affected. Those bereaved through suicide face especially intense feelings and thoughts, ask themselves more agonising questions and face more public scrutiny. For both children and adults, it can take a long time to dare to trust others again.

Funerals and other memorials

Families, and individuals within families, can have very different views on whether children should see the body after death or attend the funeral.

From our conversations with bereaved children and young people, we know that they value the chance to choose

but, to make an informed choice, they need information on what is involved.

However, if it will not be possible or appropriate for your children to attend the funeral, for whatever reason, there are other positive ways in which they can be involved. Or, if the funeral happened a while ago, and your children have regrets that they did not attend, it is never too late to have a memorial or other ceremony that includes them in saying 'goodbye'.

Probably the biggest factor that will affect a younger child's attendance at a funeral is if they feel their presence is welcome there. If there is going to be tension (as opposed to sadness) they will pick this up and feel more distressed by the atmosphere than by what is happening. It's your family. You know them best.

It is, however, worth saying that we have spoken to many, many children who did not attend the funeral of someone close and later regretted it.

Call the Helpline (**08452 03 04 05**) if you would like to talk about your children attending a funeral or viewing the body.

Why it can help to see the body and attend the funeral

Families will have different cultural and religious beliefs about seeing the person who has died and attending the funeral, but it can help a child to:

- begin to say goodbye
- begin to accept the reality and finality of the death
- begin to understand what has happened
- be less scared.

Seeing the body

If you are prepared to let your child make the choice of whether to see the person after they have died, some things may help them decide:

- Tell them that they can change their minds – at any time.
- Check that they are happy with the choice they've made – but not too often, because children want to please and may say what they think you want them to say.
- Give them clear and detailed information about what will happen. ('Aunt Sue and me and you will drive to the Chapel of Rest on the High Street just past the video shop. There's a little room with a few chairs where we can sit and wait. You'll have the chance to change your mind. Then Mr Collins, the undertaker, will come in. He's quite tall and has wispy ginger hair and always wears a suit. Aunt Sue will go in to see dad first.')
- Let them know, quite clearly and in detail, what to expect, ideally from you or someone else who has already seen the body. ('Your dad is lying in the box called a coffin on a table with his head to the left and his feet to the right. You can see all of him because the lid isn't there. There's a window high up in the wall behind him and you can see a tree through it. Your dad's wearing his old football shirt. There's a rather nice smell from a vase of flowers on the table near your dad's head. He doesn't look quite like Jim as I think of him, partly because he's not jumping up and offering you a drink, and partly because he's got his eyes closed and he's not talking. Partly, I think, because the bit I think of as "Jim" isn't there. It's just his body. So don't be surprised if it doesn't seem to be your dear dad. His skin's cold too. You can touch him. I kissed his forehead which was what I wanted to do but it seemed strange that his skin was cold.')
- Give them choices about what they do when they enter the room – they can wait by the door, stroke a head or hand, and leave when they want to.
- Children and young people often appreciate taking something with a special meaning to leave with body, for example, a card they have made, or a shell from a favourite holiday or a picture.

Attending the funeral

If you are prepared to let your child make the choice of whether to attend the funeral, some things may help them decide:

- Talk to them about what is involved.
- Let them know that they can change their minds – at any time.
- Check that they are happy with the choice they've made – but not too often, because children want to please and may say what they think you want them to say.
- Have someone with whom the child feels secure to act as their supporter for the funeral. This may be an aunt or uncle or one of your best friends. This allows you to be fully present at the funeral for your own sake.
- Give them clear and detailed information about what will happen; this will involve explanations about the difference between, for example, burials and cremations. If it fits with your own beliefs, it will help if the child has had some preparation about the difference between the body of the person and the part that made them who they were. Some people call this a soul, or a spirit, or love, or 'what was special about daddy' or 'what we will remember about daddy'.
- Reassure them that it is all of the body of the person who has died that is being buried or cremated. Some younger children are confused and wonder what happens to the head, arms and legs.
- Give reassurance that the person who has died can no longer feel anything, so they will not feel the flames nor will they be scared at being buried.
- Offer clear and detailed explanations of what to expect from people at the funeral. Some children can be shocked that people seem to have a party after someone has died; others are upset when people say: 'How lovely to see you'. Explain that this doesn't mean that these people are happy that the person has died – they're just the sort of things that adults say. Equally, seeing adults in deep distress may alarm children but preparation beforehand will help them understand that this is a reasonable response to the huge thing that has happened.
- Prepare them for some of the things that adults may say to them. For example, boys may be told that they are the 'man of the house now' and will appreciate reassurance that they are not.
- Create opportunities to be involved. This may be in the planning of the funeral service. It may be through saying or reading or writing something about the person who has died. It may be through choosing a particular piece of music. They may wish for something special to be put in the coffin, for example, a picture or something linked to a memory.
- Give plenty of reassurance that they can still be involved and participate in saying 'goodbye' even if they choose not to attend and that they won't be criticised if they don't go to the funeral.

Alternative 'goodbyes'

It is never too late to hold a memorial or other ceremony for an important person. You could consider linking this to an important date – for example the date of their death, or of the funeral or of their birthday. Children and young people who did not attend the funeral may appreciate some of the following ideas; they can also be used for marking the anniversary of the person's death:

- Visit the grave (if there is one – or other special place, for example where the ashes were scattered).
- Visit a place with special memories (for example, the place where you had your best holiday ever).
- Create a special place of their own choosing (for example, in the garden of a new house).
- Visit a place that you went to regularly (for example, the park or the swimming pool) – an everyday rather than a once-in-a-lifetime place.

Some of these ideas may make the occasion special:

- Hold a small ceremony with specially chosen music, poems and tributes.
- Bring a picnic of the dead person's favourite food to share.
- Prepare something to leave in the 'special place' – flowers, a laminated poem, a toy.
- Release helium-filled balloons to which messages are attached on labels. You could say: 'If you came back for five minutes, I would ...' or 'I remember when ...' or 'My wish for the future is ...'
- Light a candle and share special memories with each other.

- Start a collection of memories from family and friends of the person who has died. ('I remember the day Jim got stuck on the school roof after climbing up to get his ball.')

When more help may be needed

Most children and their families will be able to cope with the death of a close family member, especially if families can talk about what is happening, about their thoughts and feelings, and about the person who has died.

Community-based local bereavement services for young people can offer support, and help children and families begin to rebuild their lives following a death in the family.

Many people worry about their children and they sometimes feel they should seek professional help immediately after the death. Children and young people will have a range of reactions that may cause concern. These may include: not talking about the person who has died, deep sadness, rage, disturbed sleep, nightmares, lack of appetite or over-eating, lack of interest in previous enthusiasms, not wanting to attend school or see friends.

Most of these changes will disappear gradually. However, if they persist or become severe (for example, a child almost stops sleeping or a teenager considers suicide as a way of rejoining the person who has died), it may be best to seek help. You could start by talking to your family doctor.

The Winston's Wish Helpline (**08452 03 04 05**) is here to offer support, guidance and information to anyone caring for a bereaved child. We can talk with you about how your child is reacting and offer suggestions for further support if this seems appropriate.

This may help

The following are some examples of activities that may

- support a bereaved child or young person and their family
- preserve a continuing link with the person who has died
- involve children and young people in the mourning process
- help bereaved children and their families take steps along their unique bereavement journeys

• Making a Memory Box

Bereaved children will benefit from collecting into a special box items that remind them of the person who has died and times shared with them. Examples could be:- cards received, perfume or aftershave, shells from a beach holiday, tickets from an outing, an item of clothing or jewellery, flowers from the funeral, photographs..... Every time the child turns over the items in the box, they are turning over the memories of the person in their mind and thus keeping fresh their memories. You can find specially designed memory boxes and information sheets in our Shop.

• Making a Memory Book

This is a paper-based version of a memory box. A scrapbook can contain pictures, drawings, tickets, postcards, letters, and certificates – all-important keepsakes connected with the person who has died.

• Family Record

A family record can help a child or young person gain a sense of where they and the person who has died fits into the family. A family tree can be put together. Family photographs, documents, certificates and mementoes can be included. It can be particularly powerful to include stories about the person's life, which can be contributed by family members and friends; this is often a welcome way for them to be involved. For example, what was the funniest thing the person ever did? What was their best subject at school? What was the bravest thing they ever did? If you are going to include videos or sound tapes of the person who has died – please consider making a copy – just to be on the safe side.

• Telling the story

It is important that children and young people gain a clear understanding of what happened to the person who died. Younger children may appreciate using dolls, model figures or puppets to tell the story. Older children may prefer to use paper and pens. It can help them tell what happened if they break the story into 5 or so pieces: -

- what was life like before they died ? (some idea of the family before the death)
- what happened just before they died ? (earlier in the day, the day before...)

- how did they die ? what happened?
- what happened immediately afterwards
- what is life like now?

Listening to them tell what happened gives a chance gently to correct any misunderstandings, to provide additional information and to answer any questions.

• **Sleeping difficulties**

Bereaved children can have difficulties sleeping; both in getting to sleep through worrying and grieving, and in experiencing nightmares or disturbing dreams.

For worrying, try South American worry dolls. (you can buy these in 'Oxfam' or similar shops or make your own). 5 or 6 tiny doll-like figures are held within a tiny cloth bag with a drawstring. South American children are encouraged at bedtime to whisper one big worry to each doll. The dolls are then placed under the pillow and the dolls take over the task of worrying for the night.

For bad dreams and nightmares, try the American Indian legend of the 'Dreamcatcher'. (You can buy these from some 'Oxfam' or similar shops or make your own). The legend tells how all the dreams of the world flow over our heads as we sleep. Our dreams are caught by the Dreamcatcher's web; the bad dreams stick to the strands of the web and the good dreams filter softly down the feathers to the sleeper beneath. Some Dreamcatchers have beads woven onto the web – these represent 'heroes' and a child can choose their own heroes to help hold back the bad dreams (for example, one could be Dad, another could be a football star, another could be the family dog etc).

• **Anxiety on parting**

Bereaved children can become very concerned about being apart from their parent(s) or carers after a death. They may worry that other people will also die or in some way disappear from their lives.

• **Handprints**

Place your hand and your child's hand on a piece of paper, with one or more fingers touching. Draw around the hands. Do another sheet so that each of you has a copy. Then each person keeps their copy safe – for a child, it could be tucked into a school bag, or a coat pocket. Whenever they feel the need to be close to you, they place their hand over their handprint and 'feel' your hand alongside, supporting and encouraging them.

• **Later today..**

When parting, mention something that will happen after school (or wherever the child is spending the day). For example, 'remind me to buy potatoes when I collect you'; 'let's feed the ducks on the way home tonight'; 'we must water the plants this afternoon'. Having a glimpse of the future that includes both of you can be comforting.

The following activities can be found on the website (www.winstonswish.org)

• **Calendar of memories**

Mark important dates connected with the person who has died on a calendar which you can then share with other people

• **Memory shapes**

Make your own coloured shape of memories

• **Feelings, feelings**

Compare your feelings with our feelings grid

• **Remember**

Add a star to our skyscape of memories

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 response from schools and colleges

Bereaved children need understanding and support from their teachers and fellow students without having to ask for it.

V

Voice 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

Everyone involved

Bereaved children should receive support which includes their parents(s) 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, whenever 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

