



# HOPE BEYOND THE HEADLINES

**SUPPORTING A CHILD BEREAVED THROUGH MURDER OR MANSLAUGHTER**

**WINSTON'S  
WISH** 

Giving hope to grieving children

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Government figures suggest that a child is bereaved through murder or manslaughter every single day. These children and young people are often the 'hidden victims' left to exist, survive, grieve and despair 'behind the headlines'.

## Coping with a double blow

A death through murder or manslaughter delivers a double blow to families – not only do they have to cope with a sudden, unexpected death, they also have to deal with the way their relative has died. A family may feel very alone in their grief but, sadly, more people are bereaved through murder or manslaughter than most of us realise.

There are around 800 such deaths in England and Wales each year. Many of these will be of parents or siblings of children who are left overwhelmed and bewildered by what has happened. Government figures suggest that a child is bereaved through murder or manslaughter every single day. These children and young people are often the 'hidden victims' left to exist, survive, grieve and despair 'behind the headlines' – behind the sensationalism and media frenzy, behind the police investigations, inquests, court hearings, trials and appeals, and behind the trauma, shock and outrage of what has happened. These are ordinary children in extraordinary circumstances.

**Beyond the headlines** lies a future with **hope** for those children who receive timely and appropriate support. Information, advice and practical ideas in this booklet can be used to guide and complement the efforts of parents, carers, teachers, professionals and other agencies supporting a child or young person.

**Winston's Wish is a national childhood bereavement charity, supporting children, young people and their families – as well as the professionals supporting them – after the death of a parent or sibling. Founded in 1992, Winston's Wish was the first childhood bereavement charity to be established in the UK. This book is the result of the charity's experience supporting families bereaved in all ways, including those through violence.**

The challenge for families and professionals is to try and help children feel involved, and understand enough to reach a time when they remember the person's life more than the way they died.

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“We couldn’t talk about dad, even the good stuff. Mum cried and I ended up drinking to take the pain away. And then I just got angry.” Jaz

## Why does bereavement by murder or manslaughter differ from other types of bereavement?

### Pressures and pain

The death of someone important can cause great grief and sadness, whatever the cause of death. However, families bereaved through murder or manslaughter also have to face additional pressures and pain. You may often find yourself facing agonising questions and intrusive public scrutiny at a time when you are feeling confused and vulnerable. Both adults and children may find that it can take them a long time to trust others again.

Children do not simply ‘bounce back’ unaffected. They need the right support at the right times if they are to develop into confident and resilient adults in spite of – and, yes, even because of – their life experiences.

### Grief with the volume turned up

If you have been bereaved through violence, you will probably go through the shock and deep sadness felt by people bereaved in other ways. At the same time, you may also have to cope with extra emotions such as fear, anger, vengeance, blame, guilt and confusion. You may find yourself plagued by thoughts of ‘what if’ and ‘if only’.

At the same time as experiencing your own grief, you

will be supporting your children and having to deal with representatives of the police and media. Others who have been bereaved through violence have described it as “grief with the volume turned up”.

### Impact on families

Families often strive to protect each other after a death. It can be tempting to shield children from what has happened and from details of the death. Equally, children will try to protect an adult who has been devastated by this event. Sometimes, this can mean that individuals within families become isolated with their own feelings and thoughts – often with the best intentions of all around them. As an individual or family you may feel alone in your grief and powerless to put in place the support you need to negotiate the path ahead. You also face the struggle of still being loving, accepting, supportive and playful with the children in your care when your own grief is still raw and complicated.

There will be differences for all members of the family depending on who dies. The death of a parent, or a brother or sister, or a partner or child will have a different impact on children and adults depending on what the relationship was.



It goes without saying that there will also be an impact depending not only on who the victim is, but also on who killed them. It is shattering enough when a stranger kills a child's parent or sibling but it is doubly so if they are killed by another family member or close acquaintance.

Under these circumstances, families may find it really hard to communicate as the pathways of love, sympathy and understanding become twisted and unclear.

### Secondary losses

Family circumstances following a death may mean that a child has to face a series of changes that can feel to them like a series of extra losses. It may be necessary, for example, for the child to have to move house, or move to a new area, involving a change of school and normal routine. Even moving from a familiar bedroom can be difficult alongside other changes. The child might lose not only the person who has died, but also contact with some members of the family, their friends at school and out-of-school activities, and even the family pet.

It may also be the case that, either now or in the future, a child needs to adjust to new family members; the new partner of a parent they may not have lived with recently, or new step-siblings.

### A note on language

In this booklet we use the words 'murder' and 'manslaughter' although we recognise that these terms have legal differences. Sometimes we also use the expressions 'died by violence' or 'killed'. A dictionary definition for such deaths is 'had their life taken from them by another'.



“They said I’d soon settle in at their house. I might have if I’d tried. I just wanted everything back to how it was when she was alive.” Curtis



**“It felt as if someone came and took our lives and tore them to pieces.”** Sarah

## Feelings and thoughts

### Numbness, shock and disbelief

**“The day after, I was walking around as if nothing had happened. It couldn’t be real, could it? Surely I would wake up and find it was a dream?”** Louise

A death by murder or manslaughter is almost always sudden and unexpected. Even if a person’s life has been threatened before, the death will still come as a shock and it can be a long time before you can believe it is really true. This can be particularly so for children who may struggle to understand that the person has died. However, the numbness at the beginning can protect you from feelings which may seem overpowering and may help you get through the early days when there is too much to cope with.

### Anger and vengeance

**“I hate that she died like this and I hate the person who killed her so much that I want to kill them too.”** Joe

Anger is a common reaction for anyone who has been bereaved but is particularly true when someone has been

murdered. You may feel angry with the person for being in the situation which led to their murder, leaving you alone to cope without them. You will almost certainly feel enormous anger towards the person who took their life. This anger may be particularly fierce or complicated if it is someone known to the family. Equally, if it is a stranger, the fury towards them may feel absolutely overwhelming.

If the perpetrator remains unknown, then the anger has no focus and can feel even more painful. Also, if the family feels that justice has not been served, this can make the angry feelings even worse.

You may also be angry with people who you feel should have prevented this crime happening – the police, politicians and other members of the community.

Most people who have had someone close to them murdered experience a desire for vengeance towards the perpetrator. This may be fleeting and may be replaced with acceptance or even forgiveness. Or it may last, causing great internal conflict and also conflict with other family members who may be in different places emotionally.

## Fear and lack of security

**“We spent days without letting each other out of our sight, even for a moment. I still worry when the boys are away from me.”** Tamara

Any violent death robs those affected of their sense of security. If such a thing can happen to someone you know, especially if there is no obvious reason, it is extremely hard to feel safe. Parents may feel particularly anxious for their children. Children may lose their normal sense of safety and security and seek the sort of reassurance that they needed when they were much younger.

The world suddenly becomes a dangerous place, and if the murderer is not yet known, or has been released from custody, all members of the family may feel anxious and frightened.

This fear may be long-lasting and require a lot of sensitive understanding and reassurance.

## Shame and even relief

**“He was always in trouble and we never knew what to expect. But I never thought this would happen.”** Mike

Sometimes, the particular circumstances of a violent death can cause extra difficulties for those left behind. It's hard enough to face the person's death, but the family may also feel a sense of shame over what has happened or over the way the person who has died is described by the media.

It may be, for example, that a child was unaware of a parent's or sibling's way of life and discovering this as well as dealing with the death can be overwhelming. For them, the person has changed, but there is now no opportunity to confront them or discuss their choices.

It is also true that not everyone who dies is a saint. It may be that there has been some previous violence or other problems that have stopped now that the person has died. Some people feel a sense of relief that a threat has been removed... and then feel guilty for thinking in that way.

It is important to emphasise that all these feelings – and any others that you and your children may be experiencing – are normal and natural responses and need to be expressed in safe ways.



**“When she first left home, it was a relief that the fights had stopped. But we always hoped things would turn out OK for her. She didn't deserve to die like this.”** Rick





“No-one would tell me about what happened so I looked it up on the internet.” Aaron

## Experiences

### Trying to make sense of it

**“I felt like I was at the end of a long tunnel and people were trying to talk to me but I couldn’t take in anything they were saying. I just wanted it all to stop and for our lives to go on as before.” Ally**

The shock and trauma shatters the everyday lives of those left behind and can divide families and their communities forever. Attempts to accept, make sense of and grieve such deaths are often hindered by the police investigation, legal process, judicial system and the high probability of media coverage.

For children, the experience is also often made worse by lack of understanding and age-appropriate information. This happens on top of the understandable – but unhelpful – ‘conspiracy of silence’ that occurs in families desperate to protect each other from the painful reality and consequences of what has happened.

Any sudden death leaves many questions unanswered. Following a murder, these questions multiply and the search for answers can become a major part of your life.

Some of the questions in your family might be:

- Why did this happen to us?
- Could it have been prevented?
- Was there a ‘reason’ behind this death or was it a random event?
- What will happen to the children?
- How can I bring them up on my own?

Many questions will be directed towards the person responsible for the death, and part of the challenge of living after such a death is to realise that some questions can never, or will never, be answered.

## Being in the public eye

Sadly, the death of a family member by murder means that you will have little chance of grieving in private. As well as the funeral, families also have to face an inquest, which can be very stressful. The full inquest may not be held until months later. Then, if the perpetrator has been found, you have to face the ordeal of a trial: this too may be months or even years into the future. These delays can be difficult for families; you may feel that you can't begin to grieve properly until the inquest or the trial has taken place. It can also be painful to have your family member discussed by strangers or referred to in newspapers; it can feel as if they are 'not yours' any more.

Children may find it particularly difficult when their loved one becomes 'public property' in this way and when things may be said or written about them which do not seem to be true or which are hurtful. It can be hard knowing, for example, that other people know details of how the person died and what they looked like.

## Living through a lens

If the death becomes of interest to the media, you may find your family has to face intrusion from photographers and journalists at a time when you most want privacy. You may experience the shock of seeing your relative's face on television, without warning, months or even years after their death.

Although it is extremely difficult for anyone, let alone a child, to understand the degree of public interest that can arise, it may help to explain that people are so interested in all the details of the death because they know that it was wrong and they want to help make sure that nothing like this happens to anyone else's relative. If the case is unsolved, the media can play a helpful role in engaging public interest to find those responsible.

**"We tried to help the children see that the newspapers and TV needed to talk about their cousin's death again and again – because it was so wrong and the community leaders wanted knives to be handed in. We helped them to make a scrapbook of the cuttings and they keep it in their memory box."** Emma and Gavin (parents)



**"I didn't even recognise the person in the headlines. They used an old photo from five years ago, and used his full name; but he'd always been known as Mac. It felt as if they were talking about someone else and that really hurt."** Shirley



**“When I told my friends how mum died I expected them not to know what to say but in fact they were really kind and it helped me to know that they knew.” Sam**

## Role of the police

**“Our family liaison officer, Terry, was an absolute rock. I’m not sure he ever went off duty because he always seemed to be there when we needed help.” Keith**

It can come as a surprise that, in the middle of so much public interest, there is very little professional support on offer. If someone dies through cancer or other expected death, there are many professionals who can support their families, through the health and social services, and voluntary agencies. However, if someone dies through violence – such as suicide, murder or manslaughter – the only professional the family is likely to meet is the police family liaison officer assigned to the case. While they offer emotional support wherever possible, their main role is to investigate the circumstances of the death.

However, police family liaison officers (FLOs) can become real supporters to bereaved families. They are very experienced in advising families and helping them to find a path through the uncertainty of an unfamiliar situation. Your family liaison officer will give you honest information and will let you know what they can and can’t tell you, and the reasons why.

They know the importance of involving children in what’s going on and will encourage family members to find ways of telling children the truth and keeping them informed. Family liaison officers will also keep you updated and help you negotiate with other professionals and with the media.

The police may need to remove items belonging to the victim and to others connected with the person who has died. They will almost certainly need to speak to family members – but will use specially trained officers to talk to children. Although their intention is to find out what happened, you may feel as if you are under suspicion or have done something wrong.

## Talking about it

**“It is amazing how often you need to explain that they have died – each time I dread the next bit when you are asked how they died. Even when I feel strong enough to explain what happened I need to be sure that the person listening can take it. There’s often a painful silence and I end up trying to comfort them because they feel so tongue-tied.” Sue**

Death is still a difficult issue for many people to discuss and a death by murder or manslaughter is one of the hardest things to explain or talk about. You may bump into someone you haven't seen for a long time at the supermarket and be asked how your partner is. A new teacher at your child's school might ask if your partner will be coming to see the school play. An acquaintance might ask "How did your son get on with his exams?" More likely, acquaintances might know about the murder from the media and be curious for more details.

Thinking in advance about some answers to unexpected questions can make them easier to deal with. You and the children may want to practice saying them out loud. For example:

**I'm sorry to say that he was killed a few months ago.  
We're still struggling to accept it.**

**Anne was murdered by her partner in July. I'd rather not say any more about that now, but thanks so much for asking.**

**Callum was stabbed last month. He was in the wrong place at the wrong time.**

## Saying goodbye

Many children who are bereaved suddenly find it helpful to see the body of the person who has died before the funeral as a way of beginning to say goodbye. This may be complicated when the death has been through violence: the police may not allow access to the body, or the body may be very altered. There may need to be some creative thinking with the funeral directors to make it possible to view the body. For example, some children have been able to hold a parent's hand – even if the rest of the body is covered – and found this comforting. Sometimes, however, for reasons linked to the investigation, it is not permitted to even touch the person's body. In these cases, it can be helpful to have some of the personal belongings of the person who died, such as their jewellery or wallet or other personal items.

**"We helped Millie to buy two soft toys that were exactly the same – one was buried with her mum's body and she keeps the other one to feel close to her." Kelly and Lee (carers)**

## The funeral and other memorials

The funeral is an important and often daunting event for any bereaved family. When the death has been through

murder or manslaughter, the funeral may be delayed. This can be very difficult for the family or compromise your cultural customs and beliefs. You may feel the need to mark the death in some other way before the actual funeral. Some people hold a small ceremony in a special place or put flowers near the site of the death.

When the time comes for the funeral, you may then be able to see it as something positive you can do for the person who died. This can then become an opportunity to celebrate their life and achievements and so help to remember positive feelings about them rather than just concentrating on the way they died.

But in many cases the funeral comes too soon to be thought of as any kind of tribute and, instead, is overshadowed by strong feelings over the way in which the death happened. If this is so, it may help to plan a memorial service at a later date.

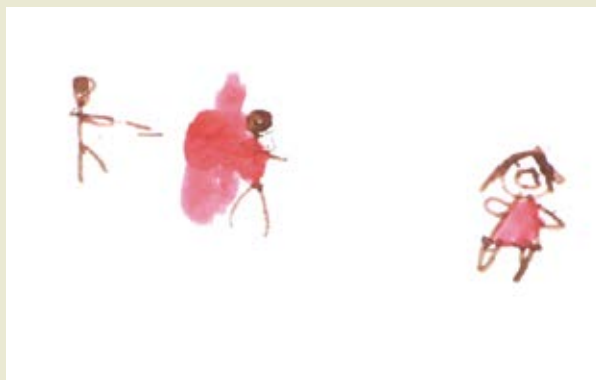
In any case, it will be important to involve the children in decisions about the funeral or memorial service, and to explore creative ways for them to contribute. There are some ideas on the Winston's Wish website at [www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org) or call the Winston's Wish helpline on 08088 020 021.

# Explaining murder or manslaughter to children and young people

## Never too young to know

Many adults still find it difficult to talk about death with children and it can be tempting to shield them from pain. However, it is really important that children have a clear understanding (as far as their age allows) that the person has died. Even young children need an explanation about what has happened to someone who is important to them. The worst has already happened – nothing you can say can make it any worse.

It is also a natural reaction to want to spare the children from learning how the death happened, by making up another explanation. However, the police



For young children, drawing or other creative ways of communicating can help them to understand what happened and express their thoughts and feelings.

and media will be involved and the story will quickly become public knowledge. Media interest, police visits and overheard conversations can all lead to children finding out the truth by accident or, indeed, hearing something that is not true. You will probably prefer that the children hear the news accurately and calmly from you rather than from rumour or from another child in the playground.

You will of course want to protect your children and to let them know they can trust you. If at all possible, a parent or carer is generally the best person to tell their children this difficult news. It will also give you a chance to reassure them that they are safe. If you are just not able to do this, then be with the children when someone else tells them.

It may be that the child witnessed the death. In this situation, it is particularly important to talk clearly about what happened to acknowledge the truth of what they saw and heard. It is also necessary to reassure the child that the death was not their fault and there was nothing they could have done to prevent it.

## Be honest and consistent

It can help even very young children to have a simple story that they can use to re-tell and slowly make sense of what has happened. Use words they understand.

Always ask them what they think about what you have said to make sure that they have actually understood. For younger children, information in small chunks may be easier to understand.

Events surrounding murder can often become very confused. Facts may be changed to become more comfortable to live with – or to make them easier to explain. It may be, for example, that children have been previously unaware of a parent's activities which have since become public knowledge. It may seem like the worst possible time to talk about this but giving the children an honest explanation will help them make sense of what they are hearing and what is happening.

**I haven't told you before but your dad was using drugs and selling them to other people. That's why we were arguing a lot and that's probably why he was killed.**

Young children may not need to know the exact details of how the person was murdered when it first happens. It will be possible to return to this as the child's understanding develops and they seek more information.

**Now you are a little older, I'd like to tell you some more about how your Auntie Becs died. I told you that she was killed by the man who was her boyfriend. Can I now tell you what happened on that day and how she died?**



## Finding the right words

Our experience shows that there may be stages involved in telling a child that someone has died as a result of violence. These stages may happen in the space of minutes, hours, days, weeks, months or even years. The pace between the stages is often led by the child's needs and their ability to understand. This, in turn, is affected by their age and developmental understanding. The pace will also be affected by the situation, for example the possibility of your child finding out what has happened from other sources or from older members of the family. As we mentioned earlier, we recommend that a child is told by a parent, carer or close relative – or, at least, that they are present when someone else, for example the police family liaison officer, explains.

The stages may be:

1. **Explaining that the person has died.**
2. **Giving simple details about the death.**
3. **Saying that the person died as a result of murder or manslaughter.**
4. **Providing a more detailed description of how the person died.**
5. **Explaining the process that will be followed – and what will happen next.**
6. **Talking about the person who committed the crime – or, if not known, what is being done to find them.**

This all takes time. It needs to be handled with care, giving children the chance to say how they are feeling. You may want to ask your child if they would like to know more details and then be guided by their response. If a child says they do not want to

hear more just now, they need to know that they can come back to you for more information. Then again, you may decide that your child cannot handle any more information at the moment. It is important then to let them know that you will tell them more another time – and then to do this.

If a child asks a question about what has happened, they are usually ready to hear the answer. However, supportive adults may need to anticipate the questions and anxieties a child may have in their head and take responsibility for initiating these conversations. The practical activities section later in this booklet includes some ideas that may help (see pages 24 to 37).

A child may not ask a question, or talk about the person, or express an emotion because they are concerned about upsetting you or other family members. Without these opportunities, however, their anxieties and emotions may come out in other ways, for example in behaviour, withdrawal or risk-taking.

*Now I've had some time to think, I want to tell you some more about how your sister died. Would that be OK?*





*Jack died on the  
playing fields  
near school.*

### **STAGE 1 – Explaining that the person has died**

This is the stage when you explain gently and simply that someone has died.

**I have something really sad to tell you. Dad died today.**

It is best to say 'died' rather than to use words such as 'gone to sleep', 'passed away' or 'lost' as these can be confusing to young children. Younger children may also not understand that death is permanent – that the person can't come back to life.

The very sudden nature of a death by murder or manslaughter can make the death hard to believe. One minute they were here, the next they were dead. You may need to explain several times to younger children that the person has died. This can be tiring and upsetting for you but younger children especially will need this repetition.

### **STAGE 2 – Giving simple details about the death**

This is an opportunity to explain in general how or where the person died. This allows you to tell part of the story honestly but without giving some of the details which you may feel could be too much at this time for younger children. However, it is important to check out with the child what they understand and to find out if they want more information. As mentioned, if a child asks a question, we believe they are usually ready and able to hear the answer. If they are not given information, they tend to fill in gaps themselves, often making 2 plus 2 add up to 17, which can lead to greater confusion and distress.

You can start by telling the story of how the person died with simple details.

**Daddy died on the corner outside the pub.**

**Mum died in the kitchen.**

**We don't know exactly what happened, the police are trying to find out. They think granddad was killed when someone tried to break into his house.**

### **STAGE 3 – Saying that the person died as a result of murder or manslaughter**

This is the stage when you need to explain that the person was killed. There are many explanations because people and their situations are so different.

It is really important – although extremely difficult – to separate the idea of a ‘bad event’ from the idea of a ‘bad person’. Children can be extremely frightened at the idea of a Bad Man or Bad Woman who kills people. This nightmare figure can loom very large over a child’s life. If at all possible, talk of a person who did a very Bad Thing. Of course, this is difficult when you are feeling angry and vengeful towards the person who killed but it will make it easier for children if you can try this approach.

Here are some ideas of what you might say; you will need to adapt one to fit your situation.

#### **General explanation**

**I have something I need to explain about how your brother died. People die for lots of different reasons – like through illnesses or in accidents. Occasionally – and it really is very rare – one person does a terrible thing and kills someone else. This is what happened to your brother. Another man argued with him and killed him with a knife.**

#### **If the perpetrator is a stranger**

**It seems as if your cousin didn’t know the woman who killed him. So it is difficult to understand why she would do that. We may not understand until the trial and maybe not even then.**

**Sometimes people do terrible things and no-one can really understand what must be going on in their minds to make them act in that way. Sadly, your sister came across a man like this who killed her. It could have been anyone but it was your sister.**

#### **If the perpetrator is someone known**

**The police believe that your mother was killed by the man she had been seeing recently. There seems to have been an argument and he lost his temper and used his strength to kill her.**

#### **If the perpetrator is a close relative**

**You know that mum and dad were not getting on. I know you saw mum sometimes when dad had hit her. This time dad lost it and killed her.**

#### **If the perpetrator is unknown**

**We know that your uncle was stabbed to death. What we don’t know is who did it. The police are going to do all they can to find out who did this. They will make sure that we are safe while they find out.**

#### **If the child’s life was threatened**

**We think that dad was so upset that he might not be able to see you both as much after mum and he had separated that he felt it would be better if everyone died. It is terrible that he felt that way and I find it difficult to understand how he could think of hurting you when he cared about you so much. You must have been very frightened. It’s not your fault. It is so sad that he wasn’t stopped before he had killed your mum.**



“Telling him how his sister died was so hard. But we felt we owed it to him to hear it from us.” Earl

#### STAGE 4 – Providing a more detailed description of how the person died

This is the point when you need to explain what actually happened. This is probably the stage that people worry about the most but, if said gently, simply and factually, it can help a child piece everything together. While it is tempting to protect children from details, this will also involve protecting them from all media coverage, all overheard conversations and all playground chatter, which is clearly not possible. It is best if they learn what happened from people they trust. Talking about how someone died will open up more questions, although not always straight away. See this as a good thing – one question asked out loud is one less question inside the child’s head. It also shows that they trust you to tell them the truth.

Children will be concerned that the person who died was in pain before they died; there may be a strong argument, for younger children, in saying that the death was quick and painless. With older children who know more details, it is important to maintain their trust by being honest.

**The police know that she didn’t die until a few hours after she’d been stabbed. The doctors believe that the shock will have stopped her from feeling too much pain.**

Here are some simple explanations of how someone may have died.

#### Stabbing

**He was stabbed with a knife in his chest. He lost a lot of blood which made his heart and brain stop working. He was taken to hospital but there was nothing they could do to save him.**

#### Strangling

**She was squeezed tightly round the neck so that she could not breathe and that made her die.**

#### Shooting

**He was shot with a gun. The police think they didn’t mean to kill him but he was in the wrong place at the wrong time.**

**Dad shot mum in the heart and then he shot himself in the head – both of them died immediately.**

### Smothering

**She had a pillow held over her face until she could not breathe and so she died.**

### Assault

**You know I agreed to tell you after the trial exactly what happened. Your grandpa was attacked by a group of people who punched and kicked him until he couldn't breathe any more and was too badly hurt to live.**

### Fire

**She could not get out because of the fire and the smoke made it impossible for her to breathe so she died.**

### Terrorism

**It seems as if some people deliberately placed that bomb where people would be killed – and sadly many people died, including dad. The blast caused such severe injuries that he died before anyone could help him.**

### Other situations

The previous explanations can be adapted to fit other situations.

It is important to check what your child has understood.

They should feel informed without feeling too frightened.

Remember to take your time, explain in language that the children understand, and tell them when you don't know something. Give them choices about how they would like you to share information with them as it becomes known to you (for example from the police, during the inquest, after the trial).

**That's a really good question. I don't know the answer and maybe we'll never know. If I find out more, would you like me to tell you?**

If you would like any guidance on how to explain to a child what happened, please call the Winston's Wish helpline on 08088 020 021.

*Grandpa was attacked  
by a group of people who  
punched and kicked him until  
he couldn't breathe any  
more and was too  
badly hurt to live.*





## STAGE 5 – Explaining the process that will be followed

This will depend, of course, on what has already happened. It will be helpful to the children to have some understanding of what will be happening and when (for example, when the family might be able to hold the funeral). The police family liaison officer will be able to talk to you about the stages of the investigation, including the likely timings. It may seem surprising and frustrating how long the process can take. Do your best to keep lines of communication open with your liaison officer.

Following a murder or manslaughter, the usual process involves the following steps.

- Someone who knew the person who died is asked to **identify the body**, if this is possible. This would be a separate process from the opportunity to view the body at a funeral home before a funeral.
- A **post-mortem** examination of the body (sometimes called an autopsy) shows for certain how the person died. Occasionally, more than one post-mortem may be conducted. It may be distressing to children (and adults) to think of the body of their loved one being further examined by strangers but it is a necessary part of the criminal investigation.
- There will be a close scientific study (sometimes called **forensic study**) of the place where they died to check for and possibly remove any evidence that

may help prove who killed the person and how. This can seem especially intrusive when the location is the children's own home.

- **Interviews** are held with anyone who knew the person who died. This may include the children, particularly if they have witnessed any actions that led to the death. Specialist officers will usually do this questioning.
- An **inquest** – a legal enquiry into a death – will be held by a coroner to establish the basic facts about the death. If someone has already been charged with murder or manslaughter, the coroner will open the inquest, and then adjourn it until the criminal proceedings are over. When the inquest has finished, there will be a written report; this can help people to feel that everything has been done to bring out the truth about the death.
- **Registering the death** can take place after the inquest has been held or adjourned.
- The **funeral** may have to be delayed while investigations continue. There may be difficulties if the family would like a cremation and additional complications if there are religious or cultural practices to be followed. Children may benefit from a short ceremony so they can say 'goodbye' to the person who has died (see page 9) if the funeral will be delayed for a long time.

- The continuing **police investigation** may or may not lead to an arrest and charge. This will continue to attract media interest and although the police will intend to inform you before informing the media, this does not always happen in practice. An arrest can be a great relief or may be the cause of an upsurge of strong feelings.
- **Trial, verdict and sentence** (if appropriate) will follow – with all the media interest that goes with it. This is likely to be a time when everyone's feelings, including the children's, become heightened and you are plunged back into those early days after the murder. The extent of the emotion will be influenced by whether or not you feel the outcome is just.
- There is the possibility of an **appeal** against the verdict.
- Some people may find that they are only able to grieve properly after they know the outcome of the trial. This may be the time for a **memorial service** to mark the life of the person who died.
- A future date when the perpetrator may be **released** may see a resurgence of strong feelings, particularly in children who are likely to be young adults by then. You may have contact with the Probation Service when the perpetrator moves from one prison to another or when they are about to be released.

## STAGE 6 – Talking about the person who committed the crime

One of the most difficult topics will be to talk about the person who committed the crime. As discussed earlier, if at all possible it will be helpful to children to separate the idea of bad people and bad actions. You can use your strongest language for what happened – if that helps you.

If the person is not known to the family, it is reasonable to discuss why they might have done this. While there is never an excuse for violence, you may want to talk to children about the negative effects of drink or drugs, or the effects of having an unstable personality.

Children may need to know, and be reassured to learn, that someone has been charged and is in police custody.

If the person has still not been found, it is important to make sure that the child has a sense of safety and security in the world. It is not helpful for children to feel that ‘they could be out there anywhere’; they will feel more safe and secure if they know that the police will continue to search until the perpetrator is found and punished.

## When the perpetrator is known

It is always more complicated when the perpetrator is a family member; in those cases the tangle of emotions and reactions can be overwhelming. If, for example, a child’s father kills a child’s mother, the child in effect suddenly and shockingly loses both parents. They may be very confused by the fact that they have loved both parents – and love for the killer doesn’t suddenly cease. The very person who could best comfort them after the death of one parent is the very person they may not be allowed to see.

**“One part of me still loves dad when I think about the good times and the other part hates him for what he did to mum. He’s still my dad but I don’t know what to think about him.” Josie**

Equally, they may feel as devastated by the actions of one parent as by the death of the other and have to struggle with an even more complex range of emotions. They may find themselves expected to visit the parent in prison or maintain contact in some other way. They need many opportunities to express these difficult feelings, rather than keeping them bottled up inside. They may need to be reassured that it is reasonable to keep caring about the living parent as well as the dead parent – without in any way accepting or condoning what has happened.

**“I know she was defending herself against dad and I’m glad there won’t be any more fights. But I still miss dad. And I still love mum and worry about her in prison. But I can’t talk to her about what happened.” Matt**

Children may also have feelings they find very hard to express – for example, they may feel guilt (however unjustified) – “Could I have stopped it happening?” Or they may be afraid of their own anger – “If I can’t control my anger now, am I going to be just like him when I get older?”

It can complicate things a lot if a child ends up being looked after by the relatives of either the victim or the killer – this can happen because they are the closest and most caring relatives to the child. These carers may continue to feel loyal to their relative and, therefore, the child may get a distorted version of what happened, especially at the time of the trial. This means it is really important that all members of the family try to communicate and work together in the best interests of the children.



**“I felt weary having to explain over and over again what had happened. Eventually he found a way of understanding and now he rarely talks about the man who killed his brother. His questions are more about his brother as a person.” Jim**

### **A ‘can of worms’?**

There is no set way to tell a child something as difficult as the fact that someone they know has been killed. Breaking this up into the six smaller steps described earlier may help you feel more in control and you can pace the stages to suit your child. With an older child you may travel through all six stages in the space of a single conversation; with a much younger child it might be years before you discuss what actually happened.

Conversations like these will be difficult and upsetting for everyone but afterwards you’ll probably feel relieved that you were able to be honest and give your child a solid foundation of trust in you. Sometimes adults feel they shouldn’t get upset in front of children but, in fact, this can be really helpful to show children that it is OK to cry and have a range of difficult emotions.

Families sometimes talk of their reluctance to ‘open a can of worms’ and risk ‘re-traumatising’ children by

talking in detail about the death. In our experience, it is better for children to release the ‘worms’, in a safe and steady way. This can help children feel in control of all the wriggling emotions, questions and anxieties that can otherwise eat away at them. It is often reassuring for adults to know that they can help children in this way. You might not have all the information, but you can tell the child that you will share information with them once you know the facts, even if it is upsetting or hard to hear.

Remember that the worst thing has already happened. Being truthful and honest will not make it worse. In fact, it is quite the opposite – it will help a child to begin to express their emotions safely and allow them to remember the person’s life, not just their death.

**“Being honest and open about their dad has made it easier for us to focus on the memories that will help us all to move forward so we are not trapped in a painful past.”**

Shelley

## Making opportunities to talk

It can be difficult to find the opportunities to talk with your children; this can be particularly true if the death occurred some time ago. You could use opportunities provided by news events, stories, TV programmes or a further family death to talk more about the person who died. Try to visit the grave, garden of remembrance or other special place and talk about the person who died.

It can be even more difficult to talk about someone the children may not have known well or about someone who was challenging to live with. However, children still need to know what has happened in order to begin to understand how they are feeling and what has happened to their family.

Try to keep in contact with friends and family; it is easy to lose contact, especially if the death involved other family members. Children will, however, appreciate different perspectives on the person who has died from those who knew them.

Children may raise the subject when you are least expecting it or at the least convenient time, but try to stay calm and take time to listen to what they are saying and asking. You may pick up that they want to talk by being alert to the way they express emotions or how they behave.

## Real memories

Sometimes, the person who died – although closely related to the child – has been almost a stranger. This can lead to complicated feelings of regret and loss.

In addition, if the child was very young when the person died, they will have few, if any, memories of their own. Supportive adults can help paint a real picture of the person by sharing their own stories and memories.

Not everyone who dies is loved by everyone all the time. Sometimes we can be fond of someone but hate their moods. Some people can behave in ways that are frightening, unkind or disloyal. Whether we loved a person or disliked them, we will grieve over their death. Similarly, family members react to a death in different ways; each will remember a different relationship with the person who died. If you had a difficult relationship, your grief is likely to be more complicated. Other people might think “They didn’t get on so she’ll soon get over it”. But grief doesn’t work that way. It is important that you and the children have the chance to remember the person who died honestly, not trying to make them perfect if they weren’t, but not forgetting the good bits either. You may find the ‘memory stones’ activity on page 26 helpful.



“They can surprise me by suddenly remembering something I think they’ve forgotten. Kieran remembered a walk to collect conkers when their dad came too.” *Lena*

# The role of schools

## Getting back to school

School plays a familiar, routine part in children's lives. After any death, many children want to get back to school because it gives them a sense of stability. Some will also see school as a place to forget what has happened for a few hours. Others will feel too anxious, confused and upset to concentrate or join in with activities. Some will not want to go to school at all. This may be because they don't want to miss something important at home or because they want to be around if they are needed. Others may worry that they'll get upset and embarrassed in front of their friends. It is important that the school and all the teachers who come into contact with the child know what is happening so that they can understand when the child is struggling and be prepared to offer support – without being asked for it.

Circumstances may mean that a child has to move to a new school in a new area. In this case, it is really important for the new school to know what has happened to the child, as well as knowing more about their life before the murder.

Also, as children change schools, for example from infants to primary or from primary to secondary school, it is important to keep teachers informed of what the child has experienced. This helps them to be sensitive to situations that may arise some years after the death. Schools have a responsibility to be aware of and respond accordingly to a student's situation.

## Talking with the school

Talking with the school will give you a chance to agree with them how to handle the fact that someone important to your child has died, how to describe the nature of the death to the rest of the school, and how best they can offer support, both to your child and also to any other children affected by this or other losses.

You may want to consider the following:

- the age of your child and how much they understand about what has happened
- the likelihood of other children (or adults) at school knowing more than your child does
- the way your child would like to describe what has happened
- helpful ways for peers and adults to offer support.

If, for example, your child knows that the death has been through murder, but does not want to discuss this, you can prepare with them something along the lines of:

**Yes, my dad died. It's terrible and sad but I'd rather you didn't ask me any more about it right now. Maybe ask me again in a while.**

Or they may want to correct what they feel is a false impression given by the media, by saying something like:

**Yes, my sister was murdered. But she wasn't anything like you've read in the papers. She was a special sister.**

Children and young people will still appreciate kind words from peers and teachers such as:

**Really sorry to hear about your dad.**

A teacher can be a great help in preparing a class or year group for the child's return to school and in offering their support (not waiting for the child to ask for this).



You may feel it is hard to talk to teachers about the death. But the more that teachers know about what has happened, and what is happening at home, the more they can help. Some head teachers will really understand the journey you are all on and will know what is required to make school a positive part of that journey. Some, however, will not. As a first step, you could ask them to read this booklet and then arrange to have a conversation along these lines:

**As you know, our family is in a really tough place right now. You have probably heard that Sam's father was killed. It's been a great shock and we are still all over the place. I wanted to come in and see you so you can give Sam the support he will need at school. He would really appreciate being able to... [talk to a named teacher; take five minutes out when he feels overwhelmed; walk around the playground when it gets too much; or...] Would that be OK?**

### Supporting teachers

If you do have an understanding head teacher then consider yourself lucky – but don't expect it. Teachers are not immune to their own personal experiences which may leave them feeling awkward and unable to respond in a way you would find helpful. It doesn't necessarily mean they don't care; it may

just mean that they feel uncomfortable responding to a child's emotional needs or, indeed, that they are just struggling to balance the demands of a busy school life. If so, perhaps there is another teacher who could help.

Persevere with communication as the school really does need to understand the on-going pressures that your children will be facing.

At Winston's Wish we regularly receive calls to our helpline from teachers who are keen to do the right thing but want to check out their approach. This might be when planning activities around Father's Day or Mother's Day or when balancing understanding a child's situation with the impact of their disruptive behaviour. Your child's teacher may like to have our helpline number (08088 020 021) and to note that there are resources for schools on the Winston's Wish website ([www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org)).

**"Emma told me that when she was in her tutor group at her new school, she decided to explain that her dad had died. I asked her 'Did you say any more?' 'Yes, I said that he was shot by a stranger in the street. Everyone went quiet and said nothing.' I asked 'What did your teacher say?' Emma replied 'Mrs Brooks said "Oh..." and then looked at the floor and then asked us if we'd finished the essay.'" Hannah**



**"He became very angry and distracted in class. Someone was talking about Jack the Ripper but I had no idea his mother had died many years ago – nor how. He never told us and I never thought to ask."**

Neela, a teacher



## Looking ahead

### Moving on

'Moving on' and facing the future with hope does not mean forgetting. There is no such thing as 'getting over' the death of someone important.

If the death was violent, memories of how someone died can simply wipe out good memories for a long time. Feelings about the death often have to be faced and worked through before other, more positive memories can return. To move on, we need to be able to handle all sorts of memories: the ordinary, the difficult and the precious.

**"I tortured myself with 'if only's. If only she hadn't worked late. If only I'd gone to collect her. If only the police had caught him earlier. Of course I still have regrets for all we lost but I've finally managed to leave the 'if only's' behind."** Sanjeev

On pages 24 to 33 you will find many ideas to encourage children to remember the life of the person rather than their death.

**"Now we can look at his photo and think about him as a person. He will always be part of our family – regardless of how he died."**  
Clare

### Facing the future

Murder is so shocking and disturbing that it can shake everyone's confidence in the ways of the world and it can be hard to look to the future with any optimism. For children, a belief in the future is very important. Try to plan small events they can look forward to. Praise and encourage children's achievements whenever you can as a way of helping them to believe in themselves.

A secure, consistent home life with support from good friends will also help. Don't be afraid to ask for help and don't be afraid to accept it. It may be helpful for you and your children to meet others who have been through the same experience.

**"It was so hard to ask for help but that's what we needed."** Diane

**"We were four sides of a square when she was alive. Then we were a triangle. Now Nat says we are more like a pyramid and she is the focus point, still holding us together."** Simon

## Looking after yourself

You may get all the help and support you need from your family and friends. But complicated feelings may make you want to turn to those outside your immediate circle. You may find it helpful to ask others to read this booklet to give them some idea of what you are trying to deal with.

If, up till now, you have been the one who has had to cope, holding things together for the family – it can be hard to give up the coping role and acknowledge your own need for support.

Above all, be kind to yourself and give yourself time. It is hard to cope with any death, but the extra pain associated with murder or manslaughter probably means the healing will take longer. Letting go and moving forward does not mean forgetting.

Winston's Wish has supported hundreds of families who have somehow managed to piece their lives together again after a violent death. All of them would have thought this impossible in the early weeks and months after the death, but they have found a balance between remembering the person who died and continuing to live their lives.

## Practical ways to support children

The activities on the following pages are designed to encourage children to remember the life of the person rather than their death.

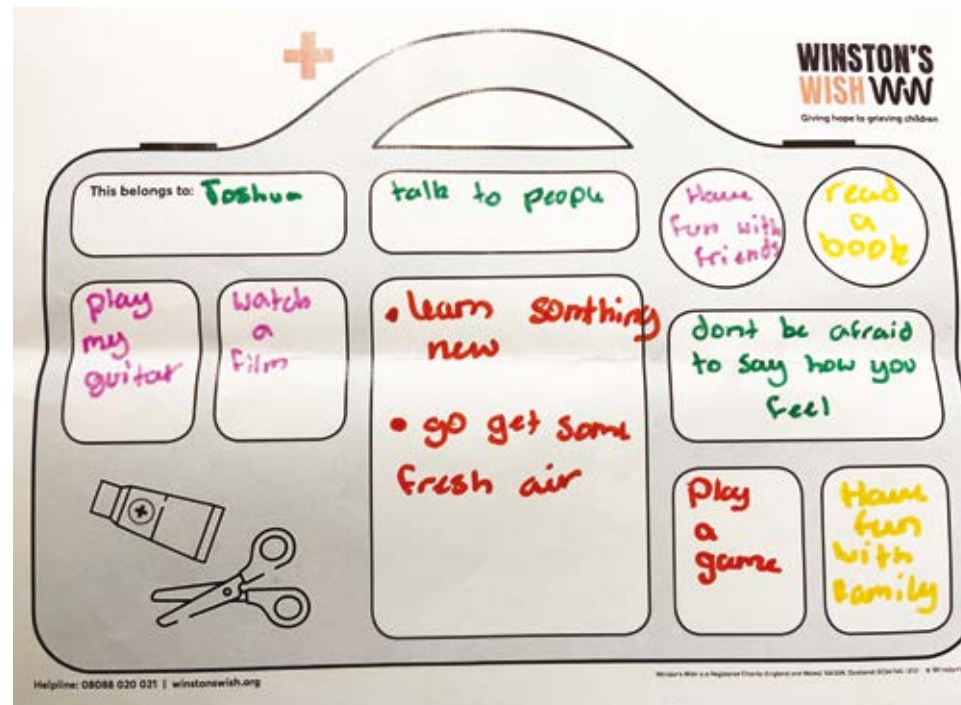


"I don't dream about him dying any more. I can live with his life and I can live with his death. I can go forward." Maria

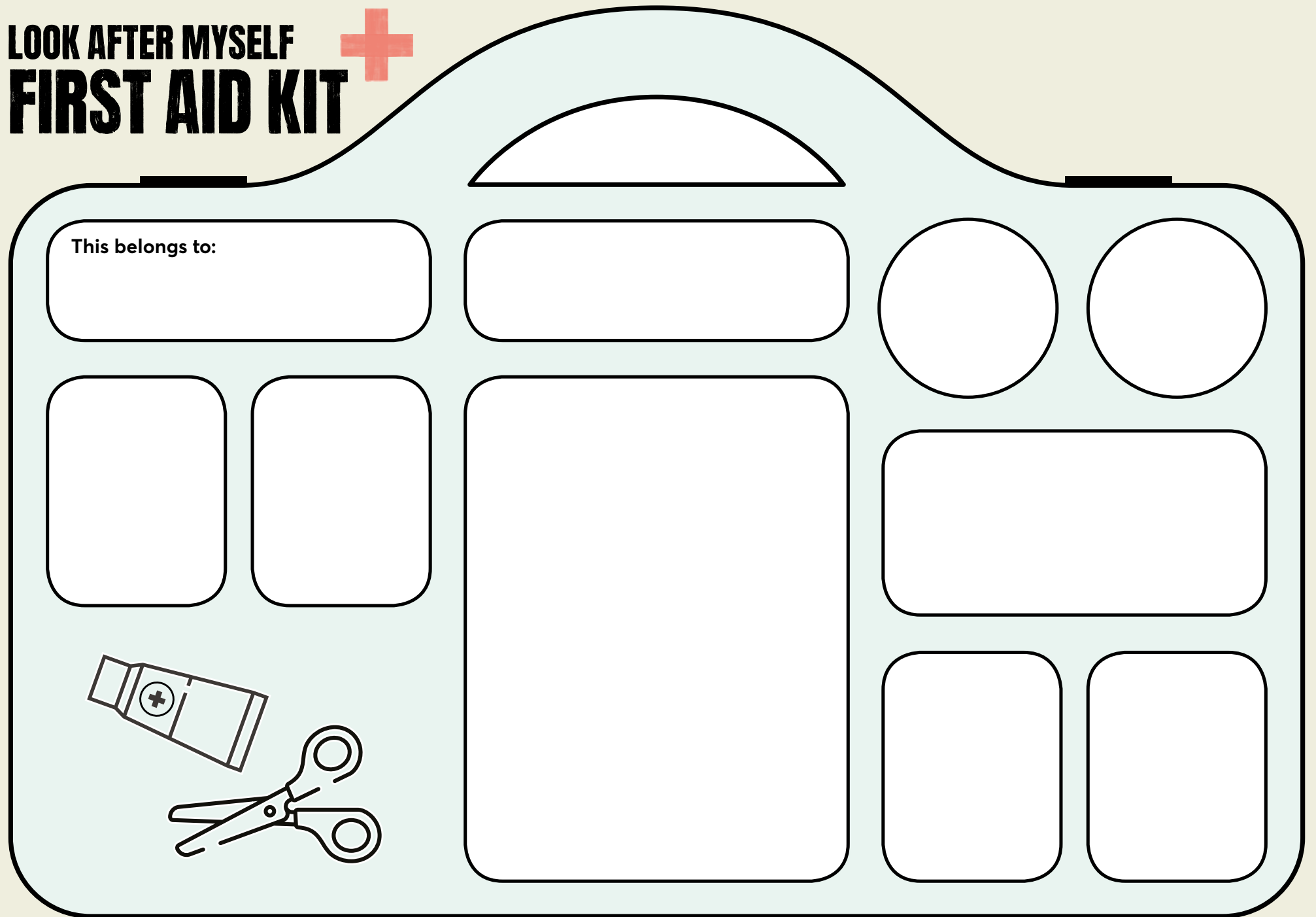
## Help with feelings: Look After Myself First Aid Kit

Children may need some guidance on what can help when everything feels just a bit too much. Most of us are familiar with First Aid boxes: inside there are boxes and spaces for plasters and creams and bandages – the things that can help soothe the hurts, pains and bumps that can be seen on the **outside**.

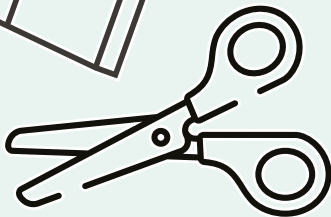
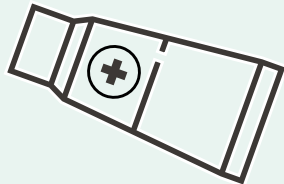
A **Look After Myself First Aid Kit** helps when the hurts, pains and bumps are on the **inside**; a kit that reminds us of what we need when we are feeling overwhelmed, on difficult days or when things build to bursting point.



# LOOK AFTER MYSELF FIRST AID KIT



This belongs to:





# Remembering good times, accepting tough times too: memory stones

A simple bag of three stones may be a useful way to have a really meaningful conversation with your children and help them to find a way of coping with all sorts of memories. Sometimes it can be hard to find a balance between the difficult memories which are often associated with a death by murder or manslaughter and happier, more positive memories. The three different stones can be used to convey a message in a special and safe way.

The **smooth pebble** feels ordinary and fairly comfortable to hold in your hand. It is there to represent ordinary, everyday memories of the person who died.

**He always rang the doorbell when he came home from work even though he had a key.**

**She always sang along with the adverts when they came on the TV.**

The **rough rock** feels sharp and painful to hold. It is there to represent the memories of difficult and hard times and also memories of the way that the person died.

**I remember some of the rows we had; we said some hurtful things to each other.**

**When I close my eyes I can still see the picture in my head of how she must have looked.**

Finally, the **gemstone** looks and feels precious, shiny and polished. It is there to bring back memories of the really special times spent with the person who died.

**I'll never forget that day on the beach when he tried to catch the frisbee in his mouth and got a face full of sand. He couldn't stop laughing.**

**I remember making a birthday cake in the shape of a car with her; it didn't really look like a car but we thought it was brilliant.**

The first two stones can usually be found in a garden or park. Gemstones can be found at craft or gift shops. Encourage your children to hold each stone in turn and give examples of memories and events that they could attach to the different stones. You can also share your own.

The secret is to try to find a way to hold the three stones in your hand – the rough alongside the precious and the ordinary – and to hold these three types of memories together in a way that they all find their place. The rough becomes no more important than the other two and in time can be described in ways that hurt less.

Using this simple bag of stones can help break the conspiracy of silence that sometimes creeps in when tough stuff happens in families. When having a difficult day, the stones can also be a useful way to start a conversation, for example:

**Does the rough rock feel particularly sharp today?**



# Memory stones

## YOU'LL NEED:

- A smooth ordinary pebble
- A rough sharp rock
- A shiny gemstone
- Somewhere to keep these stones

## WHAT TO DO:

In every relationship we have, there are ordinary, difficult and special moments. Ordinary moments and memories may be that the person liked two sugars in their coffee, or always walked you to school. There will also be some feelings and memories that are difficult to think about – for example, when you first heard that someone had died – and these can hurt and feel painful. The special memories could be the holidays you have been on, watching films together or buying sweets on a Friday. This activity will help you to balance all these ordinary, difficult, and special moments and memories.

**Step 1:** Find somewhere to keep your stones. This could be a small bag or box.

**Step 2:** You will need three stones. One needs to be ordinary, smooth and round, like a pebble. The second needs to be a rough stone with sharp jagged edges. The third needs to be special, like a gemstone.

**Step 3:** Spend time holding each stone. First hold the ordinary smooth pebble. Think of some everyday thoughts or memories you have of the person who has died. Now hold the rough stone. Are there some memories or thoughts which are hard to think about and feel painful? Maybe there are things that you wish were different. Finally, hold the gemstone. Think of the special moments and times that you have shared together.

**Step 4:** Keep the stones together to remind you that different thoughts and memories can be held alongside one another. Maybe you can think of someone you would be able to share these memories with.

smooth pebble

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-----  
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rough rock

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shiny gemstone

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**MOST RELATIONSHIPS HAVE GOOD TIMES AND BAD TIMES. USE THESE STONES TO REPRESENT ALL YOUR DIFFERENT MEMORIES AND THOUGHTS. THINK MOST ABOUT THE ONES THAT HELP YOU TO FEEL CLOSE TO THE PERSON WHO HAS DIED.**




## Treasuring memories: memory box

Children and young people need help to build and hold on to positive memories. Sometimes it can help to keep special things connected with the person who died in a safe place, like a box, which children can add to whenever they want and can show to other people if they want to. You can use a shoe box or a biscuit tin or buy memory boxes specially made by Winston's Wish.

Depending on the age of the child or young person, this may be an activity they prefer to do alone or one they would prefer to do with an adult – a parent, grandparent or family friend. Those close to the child could add labels that prompt stories attached to the objects; these stories will mean a lot to children in the future. All sorts of things can be collected that trigger memories of

the person who died including tickets from places visited together, jewellery, cards, feathers found on a special walk, shells from a beach holiday, a pressed flower from the funeral, certificates and so on. A bottle of aftershave or perfume that someone used can be included and the child encouraged to spray it on a soft toy or even themselves. Our sense of smell is one of the most powerful ways to access memories so this can evoke strong feelings of connection with the person who died. A CD of the person's favourite songs can bring back memories. A child may also appreciate looking through press cuttings or even transcripts of the inquest or trial.

Children who were very young when the person died, or who had lived apart from them, will need to 'borrow' memories from others who knew that person well so that they can grow up with a real sense of who the person was.



*This is dad's aftershave. You like a drop or two on your pillow when you're missing him most.*

*You picked up this shell when you and your sister crept out and walked on the beach at midnight. Do you remember the toast and hot chocolate we had afterwards?*

*The story about dad getting stuck on the roof with Midge.*

# Memory box

## YOU'LL NEED:

A box with a lid  
Some things to remind you of the person who died

## YOU COULD ALSO USE:

Tape  
Glue  
Pens  
Things to personalise the outside of your box

## WHAT TO DO:

In a memory box you can keep and treasure all kinds of things that remind you of the person who died. You can customise it to make it more personal, and fill it with photos, letters and objects that remind you of your experiences together.

**Step 1:** Find a box. It can be any type of box – it just has to be big enough for everything you want to keep in it.

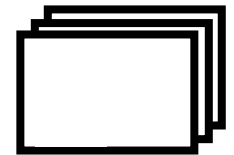
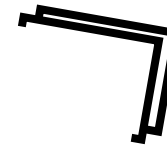
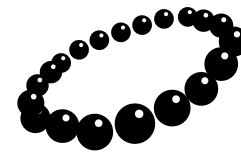
**Step 2:** Decorate the box. You could use wrapping paper, pictures cut out of magazines, photos, stickers, shells or paints... be creative!

**Step 3:** Once the box is decorated, start filling it. You can put anything you want in it (as long as it will fit!) Check with other people in your family that it is OK with them for you to have things like photos and objects that belonged to the person. Below are a few ideas of some things that you could include – but don't stop there – there's loads more.

## Ideas for things to put in your memory box

Photos	Jewellery
CD of music	Items of clothing
Perfume or aftershave	Shells, cones, feathers
Cards	Certificates from schools, clubs, activities
Letters	Press cuttings and other documents
Postcards from holidays	

## Here are some ideas for things to put in your memory box:



THINK CAREFULLY ABOUT WHAT YOU PUT IN. MAKE SURE THERE ARE STORIES AND MEMORIES ATTACHED TO EACH ITEM. FOR EXAMPLE, AN OLD CINEMA TICKET MIGHT REMIND YOU OF YOUR FIRST TRIP TO THE CINEMA TOGETHER.







## Understanding what's happening: telling the story

Telling their story of what has happened in the family by drawing or writing it out on a 'film reel' is a creative way to understand the child's world, while also feeding in accurate information. In this way, you can find out what a child knows (or believes is real) before telling them more information. This activity often works best with someone outside the

immediate family setting it up and prompting, with the children drawing or writing their words on the reel. Other adults can then come and listen, and respond to the children's experience of the death. Many parents find it moving and helpful to witness the depth and understanding revealed.

**In this film reel, a boy tells the story of his brother's murder.**

"From hearing them tell the story of the death and the effect on the family through the film reel, I realised that the children had reserves of strength and character that were amazing. Overnight it seemed to allow them to become more self-sufficient, have greater self-confidence and show me that we were in this together. I am so proud of them, and now they know that too!"  
Ingrid





# Telling your story

## YOU'LL NEED:

Sheets of paper  
Scissors  
Coloured pens/pencils  
Sticky tape

## YOU COULD ALSO USE:

Photos  
Glue

## WHAT TO DO:

When someone important dies as a result of murder or manslaughter, you are likely to feel upset, confused, maybe frightened or angry. What happened might go round and round in your head, popping into your imagination at all sorts of moments, often when you don't want it to. This activity helps you think about life before the murder or manslaughter and then helps you show the journey of what happened in your family as you understand it. Doing this will help you to take some control over when you think about it or when you 'view your story'. It may also help you to ask questions to fill in any gaps.

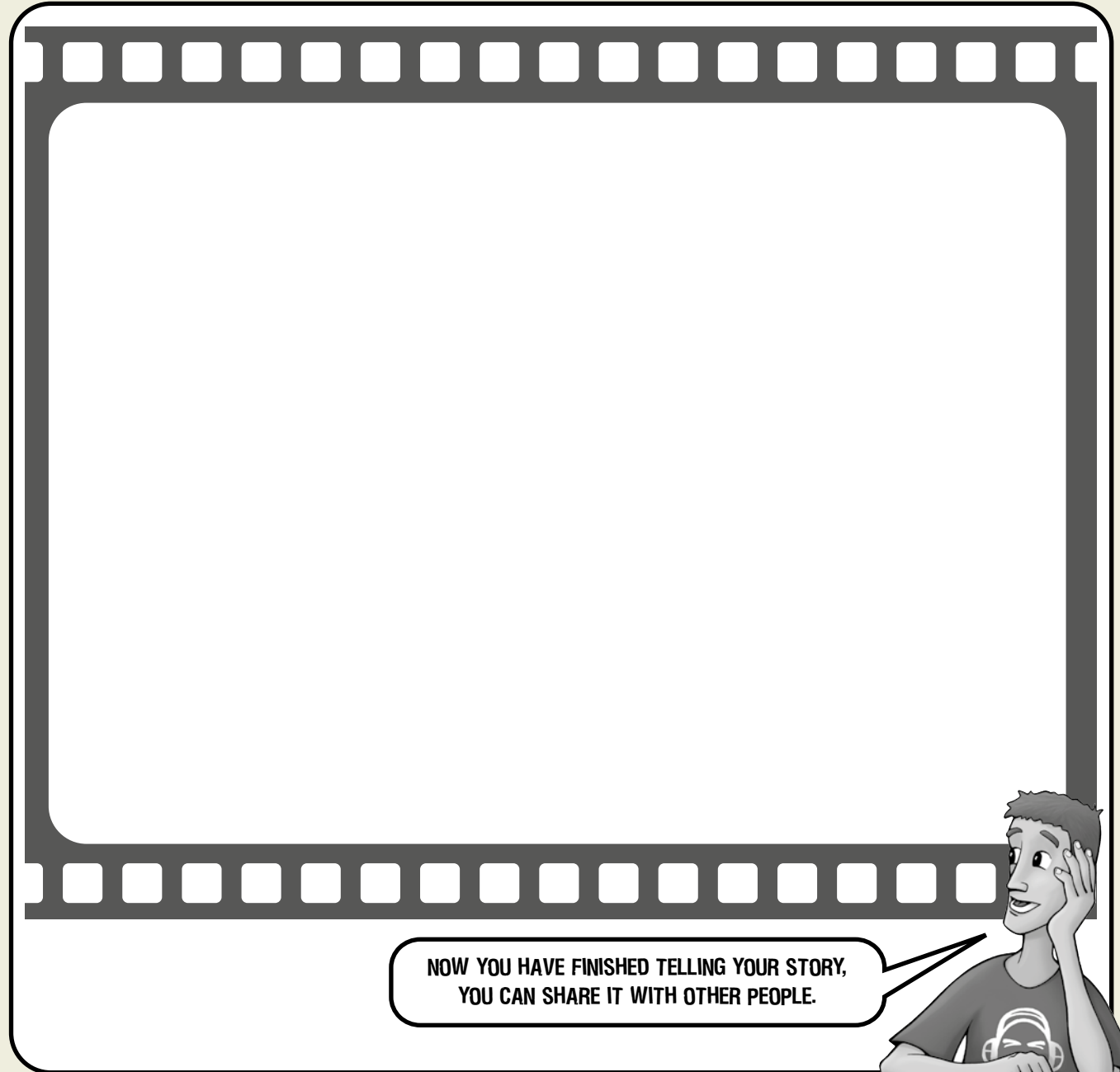
**Step 1:** Get some coloured pens and pencils and make a film reel. (You may need to copy this sheet a few times.) Stick the sheets together to form a long reel. Decide what you might include on this film reel. Think of it as a movie of how your life has changed since mum or dad, or your brother or sister died. Include all the important things that have happened to you.

**Step 2:** In the first frames write about or draw pictures of family life before the death, next show what happened when the person died and then what happened immediately afterwards.

You may want to include pictures or words. Include as much information as is comfortable, but make sure that you have a full story on your film reel. You may need to ask other people questions to get a full picture. Give equal space to each section of your story. Don't focus too much on one scene, or ignore another part.

**Step 3:** Use the last frames to show details of how life is now, who is important to you, what has changed and what the future might be.

**Step 4:** Roll up your film reel and keep it in a safe place. You could think of it like a DVD that you have 'ejected'. You can now choose to press 'play' and 'stop' on your story when you want to, without having it playing all the time in your head. You could also use the film reel to help you tell your story to other people.



NOW YOU HAVE FINISHED TELLING YOUR STORY,  
YOU CAN SHARE IT WITH OTHER PEOPLE.

## Expressing emotions: feelings jar

Bereavement through murder or manslaughter brings a whole range of complicated feelings, on top of the ones that follow any death. Some adults feel that as long as it is not given a name, or discussed, children will go on with their lives as though nothing has happened. Children need to understand that fear, love, anger, sadness – and a whole lot more – are all appropriate feelings when a person they care about has been killed. The media coverage of the death, both the facts and possible inaccuracies, may increase the difficult feelings experienced, particularly for older children.

This is a way to help families express and share their feelings.

Between you choose five feelings that feel important: for example anger, love, fear, sadness and hope. Give each feeling a colour. Then ask for examples of what thoughts or situations trigger these feelings. Here are some examples of colours, feelings and thoughts from Emma, aged 14, whose dad was killed.

The idea of a jar with layers of coloured salt can also be used to represent memories. Different colours stand for different memories of the person who has died. Red may be dad's favourite colour; blue may be the colour of the sea where you used to go on holiday; yellow may be the colour you think of when you remember how dad died; green may be the colour that reminds you of dad mowing the lawn; and pink may be the joke tie you gave dad for his birthday.



**Anger** "My dad would never have hurt a fly. It makes me so angry that he was killed in a fight when it was nothing to do with him. I hate it that people say he was drunk. When people joke about 'doing someone over' as if it was all a game I want to shout at them to grow up."

**Love** "I loved my dad and his big cuddles. We would always go to the club together on a Sunday and play darts. I will always love him."

**Fear** "I don't feel safe any more when I am out and see a group of people that I don't know. I find it hard to go out in the dark."

**Sadness** "I feel sad when I think dad won't be here when I get my first job. Who will give me away when I get married?"

**Hope** "I hope they catch the people who did it so that they can't hurt any other family."

# Feelings jar

## YOU'LL NEED:

A small clean jar with a screw-top lid  
Packet of table salt

Coloured chalks or pastels  
Cotton wool ball  
Five pieces of A4 paper and one small piece of paper

## WHAT TO DO:

Each different colour in your feelings jar will represent a thought or feeling that you have had since someone in your family died. Whether happy or sad, they are important feelings to you.

**Step 1:** Think about five feelings you have.

**Step 2:** Begin by thinking of one thought that goes with each of the five feelings. Write these down on the small piece of paper.

**Step 3:** Decide on a colour for each feeling and mark that colour next to the feeling on your paper.

**Step 4:** Fill a small jar right up to the brim with salt, making sure it is jammed full. This gives you the exact amount of salt needed. Then tip the salt out of the jar into five piles on the five pieces of paper. Each of these piles will represent a feeling, so you could make them equal in size, or if some feelings are more significant, put more salt in that pile.

**Step 5:** Pick a coloured chalk or pastel and start to rub it into one pile of salt. As you rub it in, the salt will begin to turn that colour. Keep rubbing in a circular motion until it is the colour you want – the longer you rub, the stronger the colour.

**Step 6:** Once you have coloured all five piles of salt, carefully tip them into the jar. You can do this in straight layers, or diagonal ones, in thin strips or large ones – it is up to you. Once you have finished, tap the jar gently to settle the contents and add more salt if necessary. Then put a cotton wool ball on top and screw the lid back on tightly. The cotton wool ball stops the colours from mixing up as it forms a good seal.

**Step 7:** Share your jar with someone you feel safe with; tell them what the colours mean to you.

**Step 8:** Decide where you will keep your jar to remind you of all your different feelings.

write your name here

colour the square

Feelings jar		
write your name here		
Colour	Feeling	Thought
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

write a thought here when you have this feeling

write your feelings in this column

DRAGGING A COCKTAIL STICK UP THE INSIDE OF THE JAR CREATES A GOOD EFFECT. EXPERIMENT AND SEE WHAT YOU COME UP WITH.



## Coping with separation

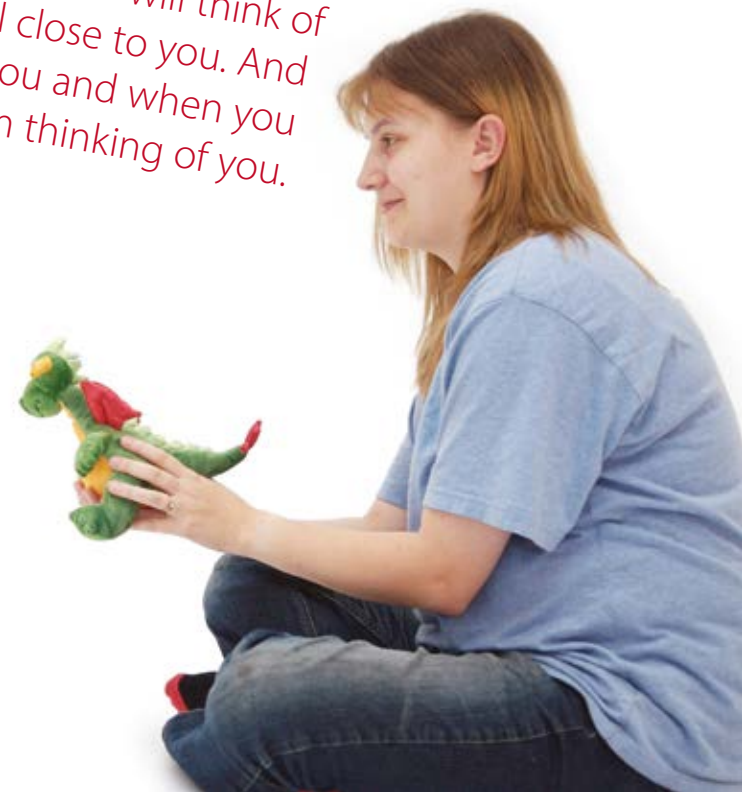
After a death, and particularly after a murder in the family, a child can become very anxious about the well-being of their parent(s) or carer(s). They may find it very difficult to be apart, being afraid that something will happen when they are not there.

One idea to respond to this 'separation anxiety' is to create a physical link between the child and the parent or carer. For example, you could give them two matching soft toys – one '**Big**' and one '**Small**', for example two cats, two dragons, two teddies, two rabbits. What matters is a difference in size, so, for an older child, 'Big' need not be large and 'Small' can be really tiny!

The idea is that the big one is the parental figure and stays with the child. Similarly the small one, representing the child, travels with the parent or carer. It becomes a reminder of the continuing, caring presence – even when they are not together. It is a similar concept to a teddy or security blanket given to a baby.

For younger children there is a book that can accompany this activity: *No Matter What* (see opposite) which talks about the characters 'Large' and 'Small'.

*While you're at school, I will take 'Small' with me to work. Every time I look at him I will think of you. 'Small' helps me feel close to you. And 'Big' can go to school with you and when you look at him you'll know I'm thinking of you.*

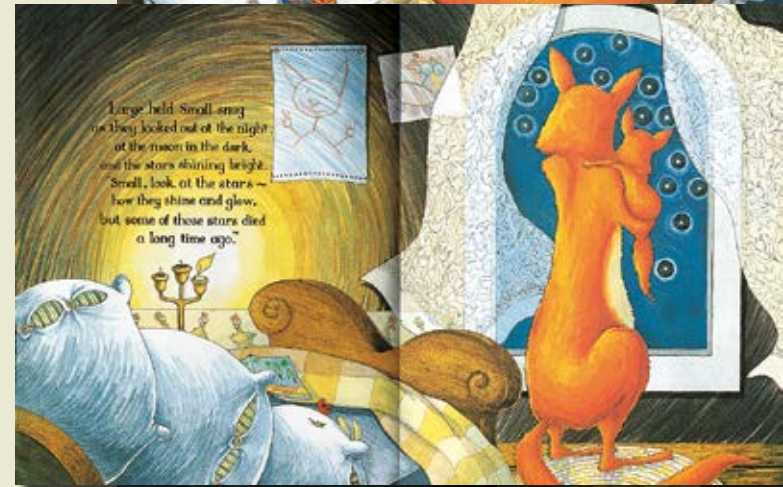
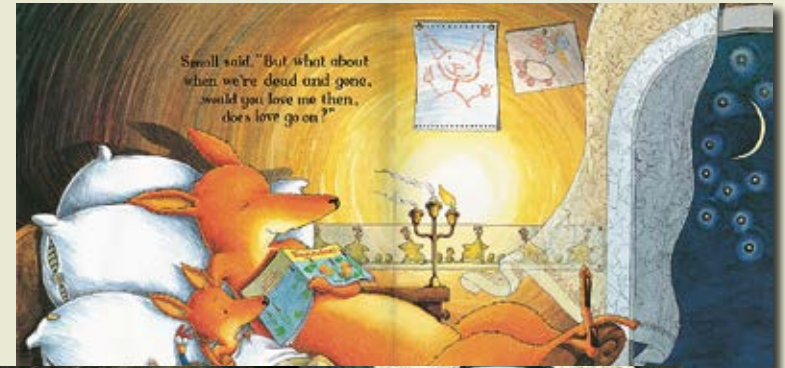




There are other ways to maintain connections when apart. For example, you could sew a kiss or other symbol discreetly inside a school jumper (for the child) and inside a pocket (for the parent) that can be pressed when a bit of comfort is required. Or everyone in the family can have a special coin, token or key ring or mobile phone 'charm' that symbolises the links between parents and children even when apart.

After any death, and particularly a violent one, it is very normal for children and parents to worry when they are apart. Lots of reassurance works well, and giving them the confidence that together you will get through this.

The beautifully illustrated book *No Matter What* by Debi Gliori (1999) tells the story of 'Large' (a parental figure) and 'Small', the inquisitive child who is wondering just how grumpy he can be before 'Large' will stop loving him. The book gently confirms that 'Large' will always love 'Small' – 'no matter what'. This allows 'Small' to ask perhaps the biggest question of all.



Reproduced with permission Debi Gliori. 1999. *No Matter What*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc



# Night-time worries

After a death by murder or manslaughter, many children find it difficult to get to sleep; others find they are frequently woken by nightmares. This is normal and is particularly likely in a child who clams up by day and says they are OK, when in fact they may be holding on to a lot of concerns. A regular and secure bedtime routine will certainly help as well as some of the following ideas.

## Snuggle blanket

Young children – and older ones too – can feel more secure wrapped up in a cosy ‘snuggle blanket’.

For the younger ones, accompanied by a regular bedtime story, the blanket becomes a subtle way to reinforce security and love. For older ones, it can be their private comfort.

## Worry dolls

Some children are helped by ‘worry dolls’ – a small bag of tiny people who carry a child’s worries during the night to help the child sleep and feel less burdened by

their worries. These can be found in some Oxfam or gift shops, bought online or you could make your own. The child lays each worry doll on his or her pillow. They then pick them up, one at a time, and whisper a worry.

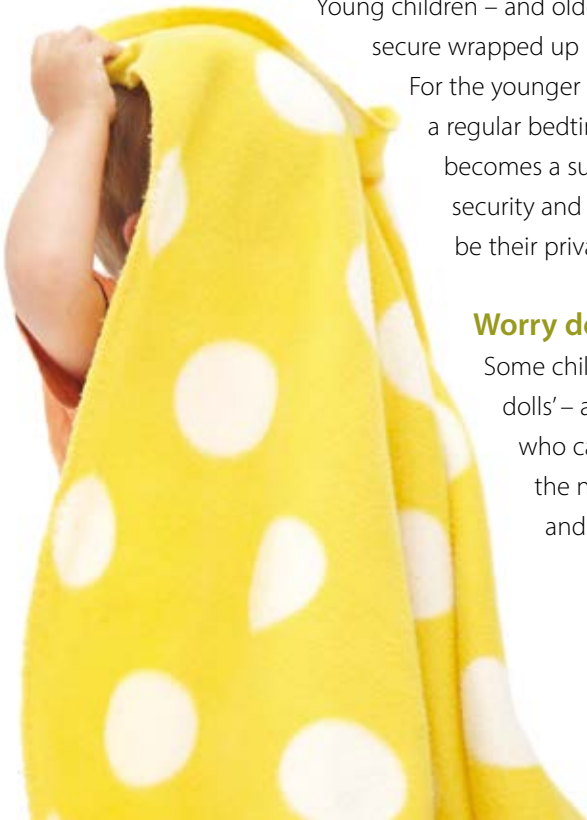
**When I go to sleep I worry that someone will hurt me or mum.**

Then, one by one, they are placed back in the drawstring bag and placed under the pillow. The idea is that the worry dolls carry the child’s worries through the night and work out ways for the child to feel stronger. Their use helps the child to put aside the concerns that prevent them from sleeping. Most importantly, it also helps adults to understand and talk about things that may be troubling a child. Some children make worry fairies or superheroes using peg dolls.

## Storybooks

There are some books in the reading list (see pages 38 and 39) that may make it easier to talk about worries and fears.

*I am really worried  
that the police won't  
find the person who  
killed my dad.*



## Dreamcatchers

The dreamcatcher is a Native American concept to protect the child while he or she sleeps. Folklore says that all the dreams and thoughts of the world flow over our head as we sleep. Bad dreams and thoughts are caught up in the web and only good dreams and thoughts filter down to the sleeping child through the feathers. Dreamcatchers can be bought online, in some gift shops, or you can make your own.

Hang the dreamcatcher above the child's bed and tell them the story, explaining how the web will capture the bad dreams. Help them believe that this may help with any nightmares or intrusive thoughts.

Beads woven into the web stand for 'heroes' or 'heroines' (real or imaginary) who can help keep the bad dreams away. Extra beads can be added for extra 'strength'. One child added beads representing Superman, Dr Who, David Beckham and his pet dog to his dreamcatcher as he felt he could trust these 'heroes' to overpower his feelings of helplessness and fear.

**"It catches all my scary nightmares and I can sleep in my own bed now." Joe**



## Useful reading

Here is a selection of books for adults and children. There are more suggestions on our website ([www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org)).

### Books for adults



#### **A Child's Grief: Supporting a Child when Someone in their Family has Died**

Julie Stokes and Diana Crossley

Winston's Wish, 2008

ISBN 978-0-9559539-0-3

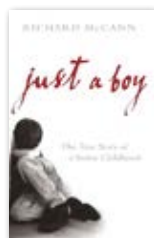
This booklet aims to help families cope with the death of a family member and provides a range of ideas for families about how to support their children.



#### **Advice for Bereaved Families and Friends Following Murder or Manslaughter**

Home Office, 2003

This pack is provided to bereaved families by the police. Contact your family liaison officer to obtain a copy.



#### **Just a Boy – The True Story of a Stolen Childhood**

Richard McCann

Ebury Press, 2005

ISBN 0091898226

When Richard McCann was five, his mother became the first victim of Peter Sutcliffe (the 'Yorkshire Ripper'). The book describes his attempts to make sense of a childhood overshadowed by the death.



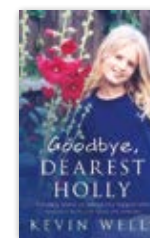
#### **The Lost Night – A Daughter's Search for the Truth of her Father's Murder**

Rachel Howard

Dutton Books, 2005

ISBN 0525948627

Rachel Howard's father was murdered by an unknown person. In the book, she describes her search to understand what happened, and how it has affected her life.



#### **Goodbye Dearest Holly**

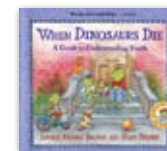
Kevin Wells

Hodder Paperbacks, 2005

ISBN 0-340897910

Kevin Wells' book about his daughter, Holly, who was murdered with a school friend, is about a father's love, a family's loss and the reaction of the nation to the girls' deaths.

### Books for children



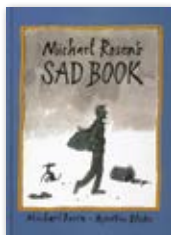
#### **When Dinosaurs Die – A Guide to Understanding Death**

Laurie Krasny Brown and Mark Brown

Little, Brown and Company, 2004

ISBN 0316119555

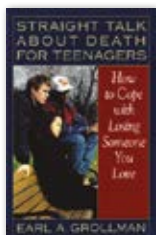
The authors give a wonderfully straightforward and simple explanation of death and how it affects those left behind. Suitable for four to ten-year-olds.



### Michael Rosen's Sad Book

Michael Rosen  
Illustrated by Quentin Blake  
Walker Books Ltd, 2004  
ISBN 978-0744598988

Michael Rosen describes how 'sad' feels through talking about his reactions following the death of his son. The use of illustrations and the powerful simplicity of the text makes the book suitable for all ages from five to adult.



### Straight Talk about Death for Teenagers – How to Cope with Losing Someone You Love

Earl A Grollman  
Beacon Press, 1993  
ISBN 0-8070-2501-1

This book lives up to its title. It talks about young people's response to grief in a straightforward way.

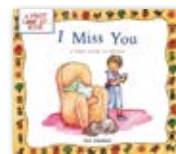


### The Huge Bag of Worries

Virginia Ironside  
Hodder Wayland, 1998  
ISBN 0-750026391

This book relates the simple story of a girl who finds she is carrying an ever-growing 'bag of worries'. Eventually she receives help to share the

worries with others. This book is a very useful starter to conversations with children under 11 about anxieties and concerns.



### I Miss You

Pat Thomas  
Barron's, 2001  
ISBN 0-7641-1764-5

A beautifully simple book for younger children, talking about feelings after someone important has died.

### Workbooks



### Out of the Blue: Making Memories Last when Someone has Died

Julie Stokes and Paul Oxley  
Illustrated by Neil Norris

A Winston's Wish publication  
Hawthorn Press, 2006  
ISBN 978-1-903458-71-6

This is an activity book created to help teenagers remember the person who has died and to help them express their thoughts and feelings. It shows teenagers that remembering is important and necessary – and that it can be fun too.



### Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine: Your Activity Book when Someone has Died

Diana Crossley  
Illustrated by Kate Sheppard  
A Winston's Wish publication  
Hawthorn Press, 2000

ISBN 978-1-86989058-2

This activity book offers practical and sensitive support for children under 11 and is designed to be completed by a child working with a caring adult.



### After a Murder – A Workbook for Grieving Kids

The Dougy Center, 2002  
ISBN 1890534072

This helpful workbook for children bereaved through murder or manslaughter contains activities that help to make sense of what has happened. You can get it directly from the Dougy Center, an American charity (see [www.dougy.org](http://www.dougy.org)).



“Sometimes he just goes inside himself and I don’t know what to say to him.” Karen

## Sources of information and support

### Winston’s Wish

Giving hope to grieving children.  
Helpline: 08088 020 021 – open Monday to Friday, 8am to 8pm  
E-mail: [ask@winstonswish.org](mailto:ask@winstonswish.org)  
[www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org)

### The Compassionate Friends

Support for bereaved parents who have experienced the death of a child of any age and from any circumstance.  
Phone: 0345 123 2304  
E-mail: [info@tcf.org.uk](mailto:info@tcf.org.uk)  
[www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk)

### Samaritans

Confidential emotional support for anyone in a crisis – 24 hours a day.  
Phone: 116123  
E-mail: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)  
[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

### Victim Support

Help for people affected by crime.  
Victim Supportline: 080 81 689111  
Victim Support Homicide: 0300 303 1984  
E-mail: [supportline@victimsupport.org.uk](mailto:supportline@victimsupport.org.uk)  
[www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)

### SAMM – Support After Murder or Manslaughter

Offers emotional support to those bereaved through murder and manslaughter.  
Phone: 0121 472 2912  
[www.samm.org.uk](http://www.samm.org.uk)

### Murdered Abroad

Offers emotional support to those bereaved through homicide abroad.  
Phone: 0845 123 2384  
[www.murdered-abroad.org.uk](http://www.murdered-abroad.org.uk)

### PETAL Support Group (People Experiencing Trauma and Loss)

Service for Scotland, offering practical and emotional support, advocacy, group support and counselling for the families and friends of those who have died by murder or suicide.  
Phone: 01698 324502  
[www.petalsupport.com](http://www.petalsupport.com)

### ASSIST Trauma Care

Assistance, support and self-help in surviving trauma, including bereavement by homicide.  
[www.assisttraumacare.org.uk](http://www.assisttraumacare.org.uk)



## Winston's Wish

Winston's Wish is a national childhood bereavement charity, supporting children, young people and their families – as well as the professionals supporting them – after the death of a parent or sibling.

Founded in 1992, Winston's Wish was the first childhood bereavement charity to be established in the UK, and today continues to lead the way in providing professional guidance, information and practical support to bereaved children, their families and professionals, through its Freephone National Helpline, online support, face-to-face support, publications and training.

Winston's Wish offers a specialist service for those bereaved through murder or manslaughter.



Explaining to a child or young person that someone has died by murder or manslaughter is one of the most difficult situations that a parent or carer might ever face.

This book from Winston's Wish, offers practical advice for families in the immediate days and weeks when violence has been the cause of death. It aims to give parents and professionals the confidence to involve and support children and young people.

Written by Di Stubbs, Danny Nugus and Kate Gardner. Edited by Portfolio, [www.portfoliopublishing.com](http://www.portfoliopublishing.com). Designed by Heidi Baker. Photographs by [wholepicture.co.uk](http://wholepicture.co.uk) (pages 26, 28, 34-37); and Venture (inside back cover)

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## WE CANNOT SUPPORT BEREAVED CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES WITHOUT YOUR SUPPORT.

### BY PHONE:

To make a donation by phone using your card please call our fundraising team on **01242 515 157**

### BY POST:

Please download our donation form from our website and send alongside a cheque to the address below. Cheques made payable to 'Winston's Wish'. Kindly post to: **Conway House, 31-33 Worcester Street, Gloucester GL1 3AJ**



**Helpline: 08088 020 021 [winstonswish.org](http://winstonswish.org)**

Conway House, 31-33 Worcester Street, Gloucester GL1 3AJ | Tel: 01242 515 157

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