

Information sheet for families affected by bereavement

Supporting the death of someone you love is like being parachuted into a strange land where you have no map and don't know the language. Navigating your own way, let alone helping a child find a way through this land of pain and loss is very hard work.

Surviving this experience is something you and the children you care for will carry with you into the rest of your lives. Even if you are feeling crushed by your own grief, you are one of the best people to help your child.

Bereaved children need to be acknowledged, listened to and supported. Here are some ideas to help you at this difficult time;

- Answer your child's questions simply and factually. Use language such as "death" and "dead" not "gone to a better place" or "gone to sleep".
- Help your child to understand that the person is not going to come back. Explain the cause of death in a simple way and make sure the child knows it was not his/her fault. Sometimes you may be asked the same questions over and over; be patient with this, it is the child's way of making sure that the facts have not changed.
- Give the child the opportunity to take part in the mourning process. Explain what will happen at the funeral and help them to decide whether or not they want to attend. If they don't, they may like to put flowers or write a note to the person.
- Give your child plenty of love, affection and reassurance, so s/he knows that they are still loved in the middle of the sadness and grief.
- Keep to school routine and let the child continue to see friends, go to clubs etc. Keeping routine and consistency helps a child feel more secure.
- Give the child a chance to be quiet and alone from time to time.
- Let them talk at their own pace, in their own time. Allow them the chance to express their feelings openly, and give reassurance that many different feelings are common to people who have been bereaved, including sadness and anger.
- Help the child to remember the person who has died. Creating a memory box with photos and special mementoes can be helpful.
- Let them know that there are adults around who can listen and help.
- Children jump from sadness to joy quickly – if they are happy, let them be happy! This does not mean they do not care.
- Be honest and show your own grief; it's ok to cry! But try not to overwhelm the child.
- Look after yourself – grief is tiring.
- Be aware of changes such as clingy, aggressive or moody behaviour; these are all expressions of grief.
- Don't feel like you have to have all the answers or get it right all the time – doing your best is good enough.
- Keep in contact with school and let them know how you can be helped.
- Take one day at a time.

Charities who can offer support, advice and guidance:

Winston's Wish (www.winstonswish.org.uk) Tel: 0845 2030405

Cruse Bereavement Care (www.cruse.org.uk) Tel: 0808 808 1677/ 01685 876020

Eye to Eye Youth Counselling Service 01443 202940/204551

Merthyr Tydfil School Counselling Service 01685 724616

The Almond Tree Counselling Service 01443 411914