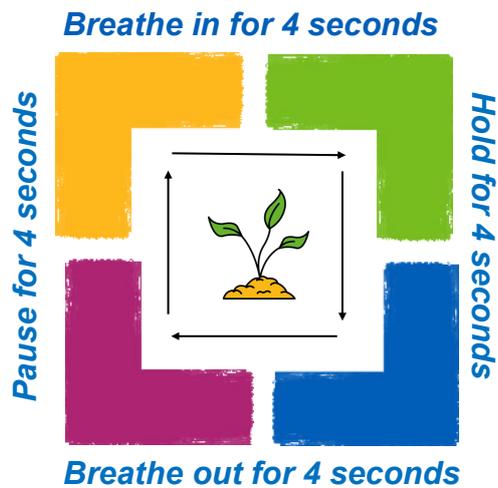


Managing grief

A guide for parents and carers



With **all of us** in mind.

What is grief?

All the different feelings we have when someone passes away are called grief. There is no right or wrong way for someone to feel.



How do children understand loss?

Death and loss are experienced differently based on a child's development and age.

0 - 6 months

A baby will not understand loss, but this does not mean that they do not feel loss. A baby will feel distressed at the absence of their primary caregiver.

6 months - 2 years

An infant can picture their primary caregiver and will actively seek them out for comfort. They will experience loss with bursts of anger, upset or withdrawal, and won't be easily soothed by others.

2 - 5 years

A young child may have some ideas of death but will not understand that death is permanent. If someone in their life passes away, they will still expect to see them again in the future.

5 - 10 years

By around age seven, a child will understand that death is permanent and that the person won't return. Children of this age can have lots of questions around death and can worry that people they are close to will die.

10 - 18 years

Young people now understand that death can happen for lots of reasons, and that it will happen to everyone. Young people will notice that death isn't always fair and that people can die before they become old. Young people will react to the unfairness of death, can show concern for others and understand experiencing loss can have long term impacts.

How do children process loss?

Generally adults are more able to process grief compared to children. This is because adults have a broader understanding of death and are better equipped to cope with change.

For children the death of someone close, particularly a parent or carer can come as a **double loss**. The loss of:

1. The person
2. The life they are used to and their daily routines



Sometimes children can experience grief in waves, where they can move between happily engaging with life, to showing signs of grief. Signs of grief in children can include becoming:

Emotional (crying, feeling upset, sad, anxious, nervous, scared, worried, angry), **physical** (loss of appetite or weight, hyper active, under active, sleep difficulties, aches and pains, **behavioural** (aggressive, violent, withdrawn, running away, hiding).

It's important that children can **maintain their daily routines** as much as possible after someone dies, as this helps them to feel more in control as they know what to expect.

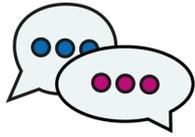
Emotions of grief

There is no normal response to loss, everyone reacts differently. You can use these emoticons to help your child understand how they feel.



It's important to remember that feelings do change over time, though it can take a while to accept loss and adapt to life without someone.

Talking to children about grief



Grief can make us feel alone. It's important adults support young people to talk about loss so they can better understand and cope with what has happened.

Safe space

Sometimes children avoid talking about loss because they don't know what to say, or become anxious they will upset or worry others if they do.

1. **Find a quiet time to talk**, where you're less likely to be interrupted.
2. **Start a conversation** with your child about the person they have lost.
3. **Share how you feel**, ask them how they feel. If they aren't sure, or can't express how they feel, talk to them about the different ways a person might feel when someone dies. Listen, tell them how they feel is okay and that you care about how they are feeling.
4. **Share your memories** of the person who has passed, ask them for theirs.
5. Invite your child to **ask questions** - is there anything they want to know about them or about what happened?
6. If the conversation feels hard or heavy, do something **fun together** to help lift the mood and bring you together.



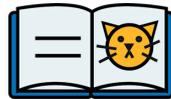
Helping children to remember



Moving on from grief isn't about forgetting - it's about **accepting what has happened**. There's lots of ways you can encourage your child to remember the person they have lost.

Make a scrapbook

Sit down as a family, each share your memories of the person you've lost. Write all the memories down and put them with photos in a scrapbook.



Plant a tree

Plant a tree in memory of the person lost. Make some decorations to hang from the branches, hang memories or write messages to the person lost.



Celebrate their birthday

Continue to celebrate their birthday, do something they enjoyed, eat their favourite cake, watch their favourite film, donate to a charity they cared about, talk about them, visit their grave or the place their ashes were scattered.



Memory box

Give your child a box to decorate and fill with photographs, gifts and objects that remind them of the person lost. If possible, let your child choose an object that belonged to the person lost to keep safe in this box.



Support

Problems are always harder to manage alone.



Where the bereavement has occurred in the family, **involve other members of the family** in the activities and discussions you have with your child around loss.

Involve your child or family in **a local bereavement group** to help them to meet other people and families in similar situations to them.

Encourage your child to talk about how they feel, if they are struggling to talk to you, suggest they get in touch with a bereavement service or with **Childline**. They are confidential, open 24 hours a day and are free to contact.

Ask school for help. Letting your child's teachers know they are struggling helps them to support your child better at school. Some schools have a counsellor your child could access.

Ask your GP for help. If you are worried about the way your child is coping with loss, or don't see any improvements in mood after allowing some grieving time to pass, you can make an appointment with your GP.



Resources...

For parents/carers:

Wakefield CAMHS

Call: 01977 735865

9am-5pm

Young Minds - Helping your child with grief

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-guide-to-support-a-z/parents-guide-to-support-grief-and-loss/>

For families:

Grief Encounter

www.griefencounter.org.uk
Free phone: 0808 802 0111

Hope Again

www.hopeagain.org.uk
Free phone: 0808 808 1677

Star Bereavement

<https://starwakefield.org.uk/>
Phone: 01924 787384

For children:

Childline

www.childline.org.uk

A free service (email, online 1-2-1 counsellor chat or phone) for help with any problems or worries for under 19 year-olds)

When someone dies

www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/feelings-emotions/when-someone-dies/

Calm Zone

www.childline.org.uk/toolbox/calm-zone/

Young Minds

www.youngminds.org.uk

Make a self-soothe box

<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/how-to-make-a-self-soothe-box/>



www.southwestyorkshire.nhs.uk/camhs-wakefield