

The Impact of Bereavement on Children and Young People

What is bereavement?

Bereavement is a common, sad, deeply upsetting, traumatic experience and it usually happens when someone close to a person has died. Bereavement can have a traumatic effect on a person's life. Grief is the acute pain that accompanies loss. Feelings of sadness and loss can also accompany other losses, for example ill health or the end of an important relationship. Bereavement is a particularly vulnerable time, especially for children and young people.

What can be the effects on children or young people who experience bereavement?

Bereavement can have particularly traumatic effects on children and young people. These include not doing well with their schoolwork, low confidence, being at greater risk of dying young, including a greater risk of dying by suicide.

Behaviour can change, which might include clinginess, aggression, regression, being distant, anger, sleep problems and lack of concentration.

Being bereaved when you are a child is also strongly related to teenage pregnancy, substance misuse, low participation in education, employment and training, relationship problems with friends and mental health difficulties including anxiety and depression in adulthood.

Grief and the future:

Grief can have a long-lasting and traumatic impact on children and young people. It might be revisited throughout their lives, particularly at key times, for example, starting a new school, going to university, starting a job, getting married or having their own children. It is important to reassure children and young people that it is okay to get on with their lives when they are ready and that there should not feel any guilt about doing things that make them happy and help them cope.

Top Tips:

- Be prepared to adapt your conversation to each child or young person. Be led by what they want to know.
- Don't be afraid to tell the child or young person if you don't know the answer to questions they ask.
- Reassure children that it is ok to talk about the death or current situation.
- Talking to family friends, the GP or a professional councillor, or contacting a specialist bereavement organisation
- Consider peer support where people who have been through similar experiences can help
- Support the child or young person to search and download free wellbeing, mental health and relaxation Apps from the internet.

- Children may have questions; let them know that it is okay and that they can ask when they are ready.
- Celebrate the life of the deceased person.
- Let the child know that you are there to talk if they want to
- Understand that unrealistic thinking can be a natural response to a loss.
- Let children and young people know that they will eventually come to terms with the loss, in their own time and in their own way.
- Remember that the grieving process differs from person to person and therefore the impact of the trauma can be difficult to identify.

List of Support Services available:

Wigan Council Bereavement Support Services: provides a range of bereavement information and guidance

Papyrus: provides confidential support and advice to young people struggling with thoughts of suicide, and anyone worried about a young person

Place to Be: provides emotional and therapeutic services in primary and secondary schools, building children's resilience through talking, creative work and play.

Lullaby Trust: offers confidential support bereavement support to anyone affected by the sudden and unexpected death of a baby or young child

Cruse Bereavement Care: offers support, advice and information to children, young people and adults when someone dies and to enhance society's care of bereaved people.

Dying Matters: to help people talk more openly about dying, death and bereavement, and to make plans for the end of life.

Winston's Wish supports bereaved children, young people, their families, and the professionals who support them

Child Bereavement UK provides bereavement support and guidance to parents, children, young people and professionals