

Managing grief

A guide for education professionals and parents supporting bereaved pupils

The news that someone has died may come as a huge shock to a young person and they may struggle to manage overwhelming feelings of grief. It will be particularly difficult during the current pandemic where it may not be possible for young people to attend a funeral. Feelings of isolation may intensify as visiting extended family members and spending time with close friends are also restricted.

Making contact with the family/carers

If a family in your school community is bereaved, contact with a member of staff from school may be welcome. As well as passing on supportive thoughts and messages, it can be an opportunity to clarify their wishes and offer support. This could be by helping a pupil and their family/carers tell other people in their school community their news, if they wish to do so.

Saying goodbye

Even with physical distancing, it is possible for a family to involve their children in some way, perhaps by contributing to a funeral with drawings, letters, music or poetry. Maybe they could help to plan a memorial event for the future, or send pictures, messages or film clips to share within their extended family or close friends. Taking part in an event at home such as lighting a candle or sharing memories of the person who died may help them feel connected to others who are grieving, as well as to the person who died.

Support

Remind a young person that they have people who care. As well as their immediate family/carers, school plays an important role in their lives. Supportive adults in school may be able to provide a little stability and normality, even while working remotely.

Having fun

Young people naturally oscillate between feeling very sad and getting on with things. It is therefore important to allow them time to have fun while also being there for them if and when they need to talk or express their feelings.

Memories

A scrapbook or memory box containing special items which remind them of the person who has died can help a young person remember. This could include photographs, drawings or stories about things they shared with the person, or images of special or favourite food, places, and sports etc.

This could be done electronically, by creating a gallery of pictures and photographs with messages or as a film montage. For young people, making a playlist of music that is significant to them, or organising an online fundraiser, can also be positive ways to remember someone.

Feelings

Adults may want to try and distract a bereaved young person, but it is important to acknowledge their feelings and allow them time and space to grieve. When the young person feels ready to focus on something else, they may find it helpful to choose from a 'tool kit' or list of things which they enjoy doing such as listening to or playing music, watching TV or films, gaming, art, writing, reading, or sport.

Recognise that anger is a common emotion when grieving, so encourage safe ways to manage this. Ideas could include: punching a pillow, crushing cans or boxes, ripping paper, writing messages and tearing them up, intense exercise such as running, skipping or press-ups, or putting a tennis ball in a sock which can be 'bounced' or 'kicked' indoors while being held. Calming routines such as focused steady breathing, listening to music, using a stress ball or other tactile object, drawing, colouring or keeping a journal may also be helpful.

Resources and support

Child Bereavement UK's free national Helpline provides confidential support and information for professionals and families. We can respond to emails and Live Chat via our website. Our website also provides a range of resources for schools and families:

Helpline: 0800 02 888 40

Live Chat via [childbereavementuk.org](https://www.childbereavementuk.org)

Email support@childbereavementuk.org

9am-5pm, Monday-Friday (except Bank Holidays).