
Understanding Bereavement and Loss



**a booklet for
parents / carers**

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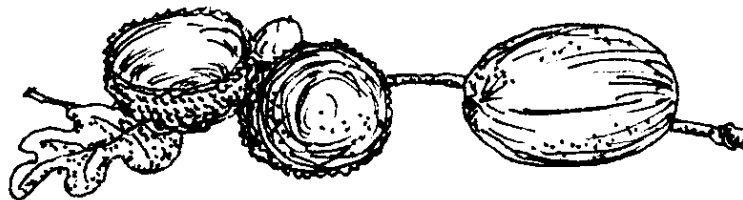
Sue Posada - Stockport Council Educational Psychologist

Bereavement and Loss: a booklet for parents/carers

Introduction

This booklet has been written to help parents / carers understand loss and bereavement and to enable them to support their children when dealing with this difficult subject.

As well as offering understanding and reassurance in dealing with different aspects of this complicated subject - such as taboos surrounding death in our society and the feelings that grief brings with it - it is hoped that you will find it a source of practical help too. There is a list of books as well as organisations to help at the back of this booklet.



What is loss?

Loss . . . is losing someone or something you really loved and treasured or were strongly attached to, and brings with it great sadness. Life is full of all sorts of losses, some bigger than others . We lose control of the safe world around us and unexpected things happen affecting us enormously. Everyone learns this gradually and often painfully. Young people and children don't expect loss and very often are not prepared for it. Death is one loss and is always shocking no matter how expected it is or how long it has been coming. Death can make children or young people feel different from their friends, it interferes with their usual activities, placing a heavy burden on their feelings, expectations and responsibilities.

No two people are the same, how they feel is different. How they react is different. The feeling of loss and the pain of grief will be very different for each person.

Times of grief can be very scary and confusing for children and young people with lots of pressures from home, school and friends. Dealing with the pain of grief can be very hard but this does give young people and children the opportunity to grow emotionally.

Grief

Grief is what is felt when a loss is experienced. There will be lots of losses that young people and children will experience in their lives, like losing a first tooth, changing schools, feeling left out in friendships, feeling lonely and different.

Grief is the price we all pay for loving and caring, some people will experience this hurt a little and some will hurt a great deal. A pain like no other pain, it can make young people feel trapped in a dark hole, like they are going mad.

Death, mourning and grief involve feelings of helplessness and lack of control. These feelings will be difficult for children and young people to cope with.



The taboo of death

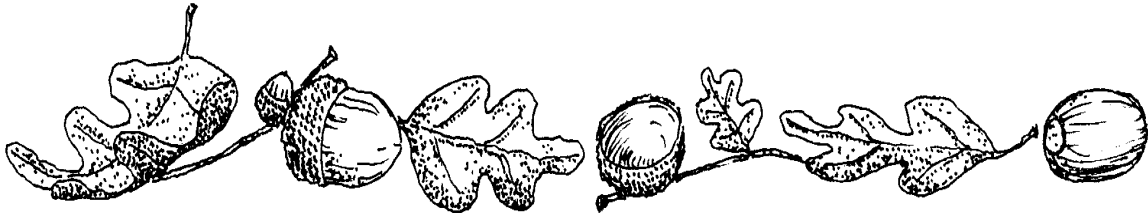
Our society is not very good at discussing the topic of death, it is usually avoided, the attitude being “it won’t happen to me”. This means that many people are totally unprepared for what happens.

As parents / carers you may ask the young person or child if they want to see the body of the person who has died. They must be allowed to make their own decision and not be forced into doing what they may not want to do.

Seeing the body can make them feel that the person they once knew is no longer there, it is only a body - not a person. This can be very upsetting for young people or children to see someone they once loved once so vibrant and full of life, now lacking vitality. For another person seeing the body can be very comforting, a physical sign that the soul has left the body and gone elsewhere.

The funeral too is an important ceremony. It is important that young people or children again choose whether or not to attend. Parents / carers may try to protect the young by suggesting they not attend; again children should decide for themselves. The funeral is often seen by those who loved the person who has died to be the last chance to say goodbye. The gathering of family and friends focusing on the person and sharing a collective sense of grief.

For some children and young people to openly talk about the dead person can be an easy thing to do, for others it can be extremely difficult. Adults can help children and young people by taking the time to remember the good things and talking about them. Laughing together about all the things you enjoyed and loved about the person who died is really important.



The process of grief

Grieving is an important part of coming to terms with death or any other losses.

It is recognised by doctor's and therapists who have worked with people that are grieving, that there are separate stages in the grieving process.

– Shock

This is the first response to death, bringing different reactions and sensations these can be physical collapse or numb apathy. A child or young person's reaction may be silent withdrawal or wild outburst of screaming. Very young children may feel bewildered confused or shocked, not quite understanding what is going on.

This can be a very confusing time for children and young people, feeling outside of the adult world which is getting on with the organising of the funeral, or other practicalities.

– Denial and Isolation

It can't be true! Everyone will experience this feeling in the early days. They know the loved one is dead, they may have seen the body but it is difficult to believe that he or she is no longer around.

– Growing awareness

a) Searching

Losing something and trying to find it. When it cannot be found it can build up as a huge fear. The eventual realisation that the person cannot be found again helps us to come to terms and accept that they never will be with us again.

b) Despair

This may follow the searching. Sometimes young people and children may find it difficult to attend school, the crying may start again. Gentle, firm encouragement from the parent may be helpful during this time.

c) Anger

Angry feelings may be experienced towards the person who has died, even by very young children; angry at someone leaving them, angry that their loved one has been taken away. They may show real fury, not in words but in physical actions - perhaps breaking toys or lying kicking on the floor.

Young people may express the same anger in a more outspoken way or more violent way, such as hitting out at others verbally or physically or sometimes by stealing.

Some young people or children may be able to express how they feel in words. The adults around need to be supportive and listen, accepting these feelings. Children and young people should be encouraged to express anger in a way that does not hurt other people.

– Depression

This can be a mixture of feelings, being worried, fearful or guilty. All these emotions muddled together make young people and children feel low or depressed. They may feel that the grief is too much to bear.

Young people and children may have real worries, very practical things may concern them, such as “Will we be able to go on holiday?”, “Who’ll give me my pocket money and help me with my homework?”, “Will I still be able to go to college?”

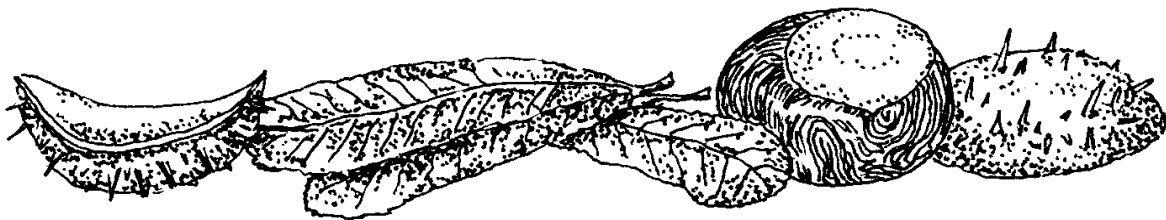
Parents / carers need to reassure them by discussing their concerns and helping to ease the emptiness and the pain of loss.

– Acceptance

This is the stage when it may be easier to talk more happily about the loss, settling into the new circumstances perhaps regaining a greater interest in life.

The above stages are one way of looking at grief but passing smoothly from stage to stage or feeling to feeling does not always happen. People may move backwards and forwards through the stages quickly or slowly. Sometimes some of the stages are omitted.

Another way of describing the feelings is there are good days and bad days, good and bad times.



How long will these feelings last?

This can vary a lot from person to person ,except that if you ask someone who has gone through the same thing they will say that you learn to cope over time.

“You won’t forget but you will get over it.”

Many people may grieve over a death for two years or even longer. It is important to give young people and children time to grieve, not hurrying them along. Their feelings and emotions can be very mixed up.

Many problems in adult life are shown to be related to not having resolved grief.

Grief is very frightening but it is important for us all to experience it, otherwise feelings can be bottled up inside, waiting to come out later in life.

“People are often lonely because they build walls instead of bridges.”

Joseph Newton

Young people and children often put off their own grief, supporting others around them. Parents / carers should try to encourage them to grieve alongside the adults, not putting off their grieving until others have moved on.

The feelings of grief

These can be very different and confusing, feelings of great sadness and often sleeplessness can be experienced.

After the funeral service life appears normal but for those close to the person who has died, life may not return to normality. Young people and children may experience their friends avoiding them, appearing embarrassed. Close friends may run out of sympathy. Parents / carers can explain to their children that this behaviour is perfectly normal and that young friends may not know what to say or do in order to comfort them.

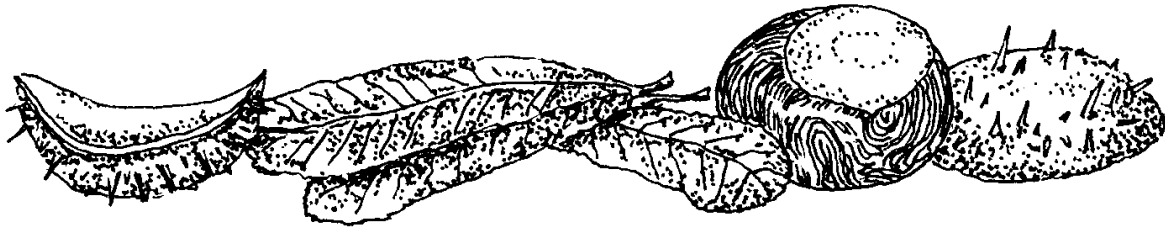
Feeling different can make friendships difficult. Young people and children can also be afraid of other loved ones dying and leaving them, reassurance is what they will be seeking from parents / carers.

How parents / carers can help

- talk to them, share their concerns
- get them to write their feelings down
- help them to make a list of ways to help
- set a time aside to talk to them about their feelings
- sit with them whilst they draw, write, compose music, something for the person who has died, keeping it in a safe place
- encourage them to exercise, join them
- if there is something they wish they had said to the person who has died get them to write it down or say it out loud, imagining they are in front of them
- if they are angry allow them to stamp, run, punch a pillow.



As an adult you may feel alarmed at the anger they express, at the intensity of their feelings. You may worry that they will never be normal again. Young people and children may be changed by grief but this may be only temporary. Eventually they will return to feeling OK and they will get on with their life.



Coping with guilt - not something else to feel guilty about

Feeling guilty is one of the most difficult feelings to deal with. A young person or child may feel guilty because they are angry, blaming themselves, regretting things they may have said, wishing they may have done things differently. All of these feelings are quite normal. Explain to the young person or child that what has happened has happened now. We are all human beings and none of us are perfect.

If there has been a sibling loss or involvement in a disaster, it may be that they experience survivor guilt (feeling that they should have died instead). Again this is quite a normal response. Reassure the child or young person that they are loved for themselves not any less for being the one that didn't die. As parents / carers, don't let them punish themselves for this, it is not their fault.

Things to do in support

- help them to laugh
- get them to be positive
- look to the future, positively
- escape, encourage them to put their mind to other things.

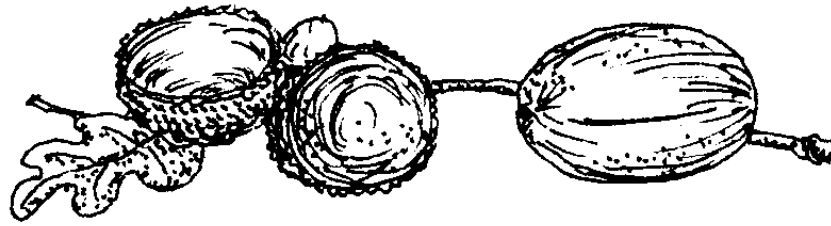


Reactions of grief

When young people are grieving, they may experience some of the following reactions, these are all normal reactions to grief.

- Young people or children may feel unwell, they may experience aching limbs, colds, infections, headaches, tummy upsets, if the loved one was ill before they died these symptoms are more likely.
- Some young people or children may become more fearful, be reluctant to go to school, children especially may be frightened of the dark even having nightmares, not wanting to go out. They may become anxious about being separated from their parents / carers.
- Younger children may also start to bite their nails, pick themselves or twiddle their hair, they may also start to stammer, wet the bed or regress to an early stage of development perhaps using baby talk.
- Children often engage in magical thinking and fantasy hence they need to be informed of all the facts and knowledge surrounding the death eg. thinking they caused the death by their thoughts.
- Eating difficulties are also common, some can overeat whilst others will lose their appetite. These reactions will only last for a short time. If this is not the case it may be a good idea to seek further help. People who can help are listed at the back of this booklet.
- Some young people may experience difficulties at school after a loss. They may find it difficult to concentrate, perhaps feel tired or lethargic. School work may suffer for a short time.
- Some young people or children will find their own ways of detracting from the pain and hurt. They may become engrossed in sport, in clothes or music, they may too, turn to alcohol or other substances to ease the pain. Obviously the latter are not helpful ways of easing the pain. An awareness by parents / carers may lead the young person or child in a healthier direction.
- The young person may worry about their own death, when someone close dies this can cause a sense of confusion and meaninglessness, especially if the person who died was young.

This booklet may help parents / carers to look at ways of helping their children to cope with their feelings without hurting or upsetting others.



The Family

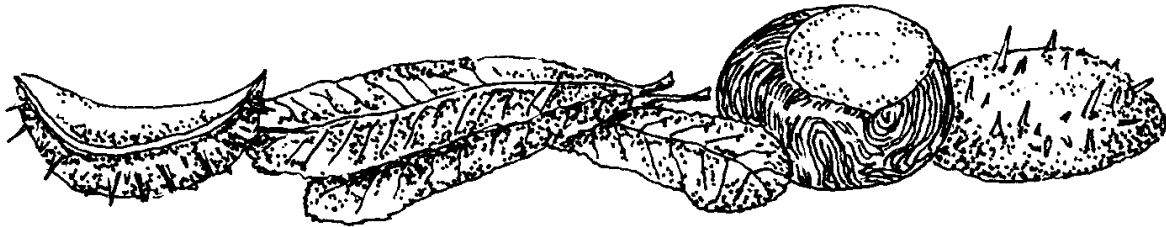
All the members of the family are individuals. Their feelings and ways of coping can be very different, so too can be their signs of stress and tension. As parents / carers, try to understand how the children or young people in your family may be feeling, allow them to tell you about their feelings even if it is painful for them and you. There are likely to be changes in the family routine and the roles each person plays in adjusting to losing the person who has died and their previous role in the family.

Complications

Grieving can take up to two years, sometimes more than this. It can be made more difficult if:

1. There was a difficult relationship with the person who has died. If this was the case the young person may have a sense of guilt remembering all the times when they did not get on. There may be moments when the young person may be glad that the person has died and then feel bad about this.
2. If the events around a death are unclear, for example, a suicide or if the person has died in a traumatic event / disaster in which other people have also died. Make sure you give your children / teenagers as many clear facts as possible.
3. If there have been other losses in the past or trauma, the most recent loss may bring back feelings of fear and vulnerability associated with the earlier losses. These feelings can come back much stronger than expected taking everyone by surprise.
4. If a young person or child cannot talk freely about their feelings or about the person who has died with their family or friends. Sometimes this may be because the death has been in some way shameful to society eg. suicide. Cases of abortion or miscarriage are not always seen as a death or loss. Support may not be given when people are not made aware of the death eg. school staff if the death happens during a holiday period.

Everybody's personality will affect how they grieve, if they are an optimistic person or the pessimistic type, if they are strong or weak, a controlling person or a victim. Some young people may find it hard to bear lots of confused feelings as often they like to be in control of their emotions.



Differences between boys and girls

Young males within our society are taught to keep their feelings hidden and be "strong". They may feel that it is not "manly" to be affected by grief. They do not cry as readily as girls - not in public or openly and they bottle up their emotions. This may result in them taking longer to come to terms with their loss and the new situation.

Fortunately, this attitude is improving, idols and heroes in the world of entertainment and sport openly show their feelings in public, making it apparent that the British "stiff upper lip" is no longer the norm. However boys may need quite a lot of help to express their feelings.

Letting go and moving on

Parents / carers need to support their young people and children to get back in control and take the driving seat again. Helping them to be free to get on with their lives, enjoying the sense of past and their memories.

Grieving is hard work, so too is getting on with life and letting go. This takes courage overcoming the fears and accepting the loss. Love the memories and then live life to the full can be a message to our young people and children.



Contacts

Organisation	Tel No.	Website address
VICTIM SUPPORT	0161 839 6098	
PARENTLINE	01702 559 900	
CRUSE <i>Bereavement Care</i> Local contact National Helpline National Youth line	0161 236 8103 0870 167 1677 0808 808 1677	Website for young people. www.rd4u.org.uk On this you can send emails and post messages. There is a leaflet to download.
SAMARITANS National Helpline Local Helpline	08457 90 90 90 0161 480 2222	www.samaritans.org
CHILDLINE National Helpline	0800 11 11	
THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS <i>For parents / carers who have lost a child.</i> National Helpline Greater Manchester Contact SIBBS Support in Bereavement for Siblings	0845 123 2304 01204 842 869 See above	www.tcf.org.uk Please see above for website.
GADDUM CENTRE <i>Bereavement counselling for Children & Families</i>	0161 834 6069	www.gaddumcentre.co.uk

Contacts at your local health centre:

- Your Doctor/General Practitioner. (The service is confidential.)
- The health visitor linked with your doctor. If you ask the receptionist at the health centre they will give you her name and telephone number or will leave a message.
- Some Health Centres offer a counselling service.

Contacts in school

- The school staff
Tel: your school.
- The Children & Young People's Directorate Psychology Service
Tel: 0161 474 3870
- Education Welfare Officer
Tel: 0161 474 2195
- The School Nurse
Tel: your school
- Parent Support Adviser
Tel: your school

Contacts out of school

- INTO Health - health information line
Tel: 0161 429 7010
- Your local Citizen Advice Bureau
- Young Minds National Helpline
Tel: 0800 018 2138
Mon & Fri 10am-1pm; Tues & Thurs 1-4pm; Wed 6-8pm
- SOBS Helpline (Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide)
Tel: 0870 241 3337
- Your religious leader
- Central Youth (youth counselling service)
Tel: 0161 480 9600
- Youthful Minds (offers support to young people)
Tel: 0161 477 1598
- Beacon Counselling
Tel: 0161 - 440 0055 (24 hour answerphone)
- Child Bereavement Trust
Tel: 01494 678 088

Booklist for young people

- A Franklyn Watts Book* Let's Talk about Death and Dying
Branfield, John The Fox in Winter
Bunting, Eve A Sudden Silence
Fox, Paula Monkey Island
Gilbram, Kalid The Prophet
Goble, Paul Beyond the Ridge
Hatfield, Jim Dead
Hathorn, Libby Grandma's Shoes
Haughton, Emma Dealing with Death
Hill, David See Ya, Simon
Howker, Janni Badger on the Barge
Jukes, Mavis I'll See You in My Dreams
Keaney, Brian This is the Real World
Keller, Holly Goodbye Max
Klein, Robin Seeing Things
Krementz, Jill How it Feels when a Parent Dies
Lewis, C S The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe
Lloyd, Errol Many Rivers To Cross
Lorentzen, Karin Lankey Longlegs
Mellonie, Bryan Beginnings and Endings with Lifetimes Inbetween
Miller, William Zora Hurston and the Chinaberry Tree
Moon, Pat The Spying Game
Sanders, Pete Death and Dying
Strachan, Ian Which way is Home?
Thompson, Colin Looking For Atlantis
Velthuijs, Max The Frog and the Birdsong
Waddell, Martin Grandma's Bill
Walker, Alice To Hell With Dying

Books for children

- Althea* When Uncle Bob Died
Bryant-Mole, K What's Happening: Death
Burningham, J Granpa
Padoan, G Remembering Grandad
Sanders, P Let's Talk About Death and Dying
Stickney, D Water Bugs and Butterflies
Varley, S Badgers Parting Gifts
Wilhelm, H I'll Always Love You



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Children & Young People's Directorate



Written by:
Sue Posada, Stockport Council Educational Psychologist

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