

# Bereavement Parent / carer information

## How to support your child

- Ask your child what they feel would help them the most.
- Sticking to normal daily routines, rules and boundaries can give children and young people some normality and help them feel safe.
- Your child may want to ask many questions around the death and their grief. When talking to your child, it is best to be honest in an age-appropriate way and to keep language simple and clear to avoid misunderstandings.
- Remind your child that they are not to blame.
- Avoid using ways to express death that have double meanings, for example 'gone to sleep' and 'lost his friend' can cause feelings of anxiety around sleep and loss. It is better to use factual words such as 'died'.
- Support your child to find appropriate ways to express their feelings; talking with a trusted adult, making a memory box of meaningful items and connecting with friends may help your child process their grief.
- Give your child a voice when deciding important decisions about any involvement they have in the funeral or remembering anniversaries.
- Remind your child that grieving is a process and it is ok for them to forget the grief and feel happy and enjoy life, as much as it is ok for them to feel sad. Some days their grief will feel huge and others it will feel small.
- Often a recent death can trigger feelings from a past bereavement or traumatic event. If you are concerned that your child may not be coping, please see the 'What to do if you are concerned' section.

## Normal grief responses

Everyone's response to grief is different. It is important that your young person does not feel ashamed or embarrassed about their reaction if it is different to their peers or family members. Listed below are a few ways in which grief can affect a young person.

### Emotions

**Sadness, anxiety, confusion, anger, guilt, numbness, denial, fear, feelings of helplessness, loneliness**

### Behaviour

**Withdrawal, crying, aggression, defiance, no apparent behaviour change, rejection, spending more time with peers**

### Physical changes

**Change in appetite, headaches, stomach upset, chest tightness, sleep disturbance, exhaustion**

If your child has special educational needs or a disability their natural grief response may be limited by their level of physical independence or any communication difficulties. Supporting extra socialisation and communication opportunities will be likely to have a positive impact for your child.

## What to do if you are concerned

Grief is a normal reaction to loss, most children and young people will process their grief with the acceptance and support from friends and family. However, sometimes a child or young person may need further support if they are not coping or have been engaging in harmful/risky behaviours. In this instance please contact their school or the Educational Psychology Service who may be able to signpost you to appropriate support services.