

# Bereavement in children and young people

3<sup>rd</sup> November

Emotional Wellbeing Locality Forum

[Sophia.Friedrich@durham.gov.uk](mailto:Sophia.Friedrich@durham.gov.uk)

EWEL Team

# Welcome

- Online training – format and ground rules
- Confidentiality and sensitivity
- Emotional Opt out – this is a topic which most of us will have personal experience of so please take care of yourselves

# What is Bereavement and Loss?

**Bereavement** is a period of mourning after a loss, especially after the death of a loved one.

**Grief** is the emotional suffering felt when someone or something you love or is important to you is taken away. It is a normal and natural response to a painful circumstance. It is something which we all experience, but it's also unique.

**Loss** is losing/separating from someone or something that was loved or important to the **individual**. This could be the loss of a relationship, security, an object, skills, or loss of an aspect of ourselves e.g. a role, hopes and dreams.

# Why do we need to be prepared?

- 45,000 children are bereaved every single year in the UK
- 1 in 29 children have been bereaved of a parent or a sibling
- 41% of young offenders experienced bereavement as a child
- As of 2019, there were 78,150 children in care in England.
- Approx 310,000 children in England and Wales have a parent in prison
- The nature and circumstances of bereavement during the pandemic may lead to more complicated grief processes.

# How do children and young people respond to a bereavement?

People of all ages respond to grief in different ways, in the way they express their feelings or in how their griefs manifests in their behaviours. This may also depend on their age and stage of development.

Some typical responses you might see in children include:

Feelings	Behaviours
Anger	Non-compliance
Guilt	Difficulty focussing
Sadness	Sleep disturbances
Anxiety (inc. fear of being alone)	Difficulties with peers
Somatic feelings (e.g. stomach aches)	Reluctance to go to school
Feeling easily overwhelmed	Withdrawing

# What influences how children grieve?

The way a child processes their grief may also depend on a number of factors:

- The relationship they had with the person who died
- The circumstances of the loss and if it occurred in a traumatic way
- Whether it was anticipated or not
- Whether they have experienced multiple losses
- Individual resilience factors
- The external support they have available to them
- SEND and language capabilities
- Cultural/religious practices

# Children's Understanding of Death

**0-2 years:** Infants experience loss as a separation- can become withdrawn, increased crying etc. Impacted by the emotional state of people around them. Normality and routine are important.

**2-5 years:** Death is seen as reversible, and the child may also think that something they said or did caused the person to die. Children can be greatly affected by sadness of family members. Can be shown in nightmares, sleeping or eating disturbances or through play.

**6- 12 years:** Beginning to understand death as final. May not understand their own emotional response to loss, which can include fear and guilt. Can show immature reactions (regression) or difficult behaviour. Also physical symptoms e.g. headaches or stomach aches.

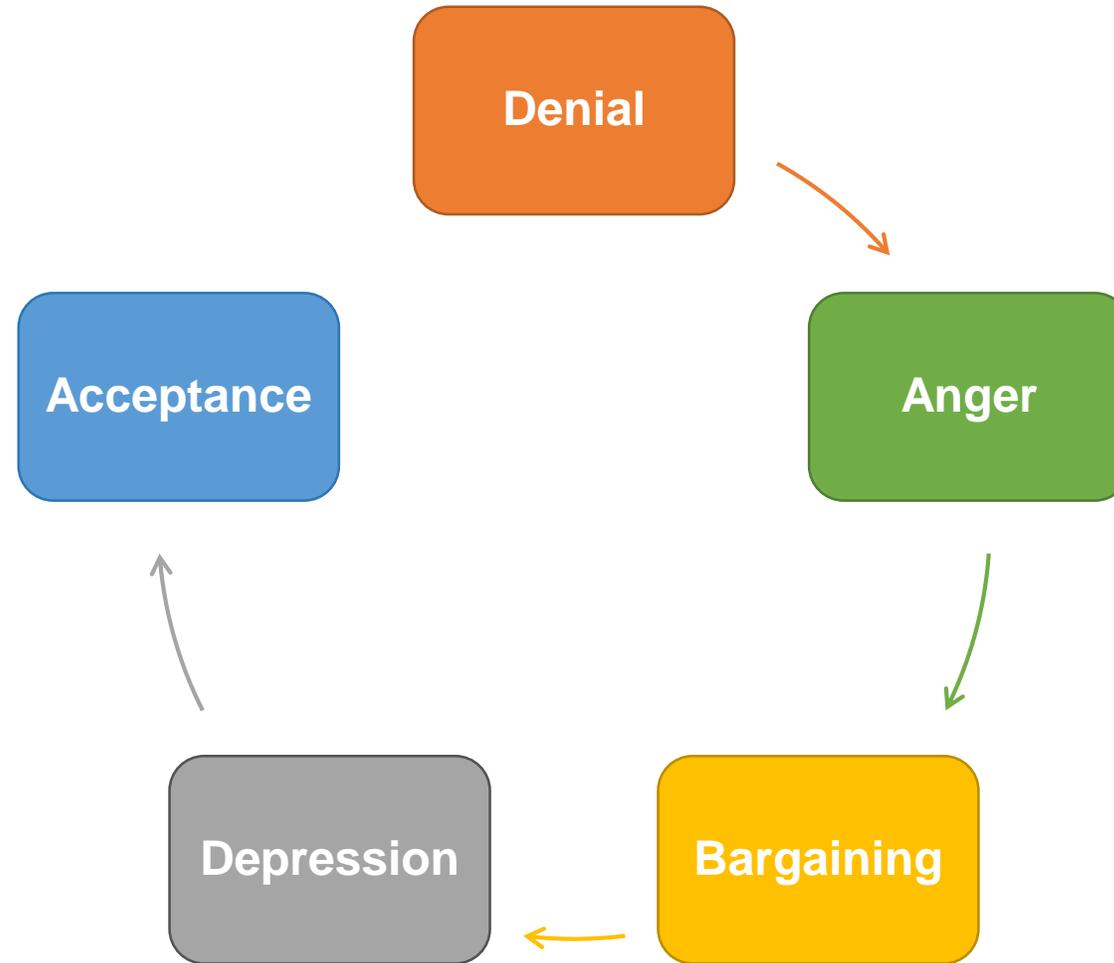
**13-18 years:** Usually have an 'adult' concept of death but may have heightened and powerful emotional responses. Reactions may include anger, depression and non-compliance. They may reflect on the meaning or purpose of life, or on philosophical/religious aspects e.g. life after death. They might not want to reflect and hide their feelings.



‘Puddle jumping through grief’

# Process of Grief

Kubler-Ross Model of Grief (1969)

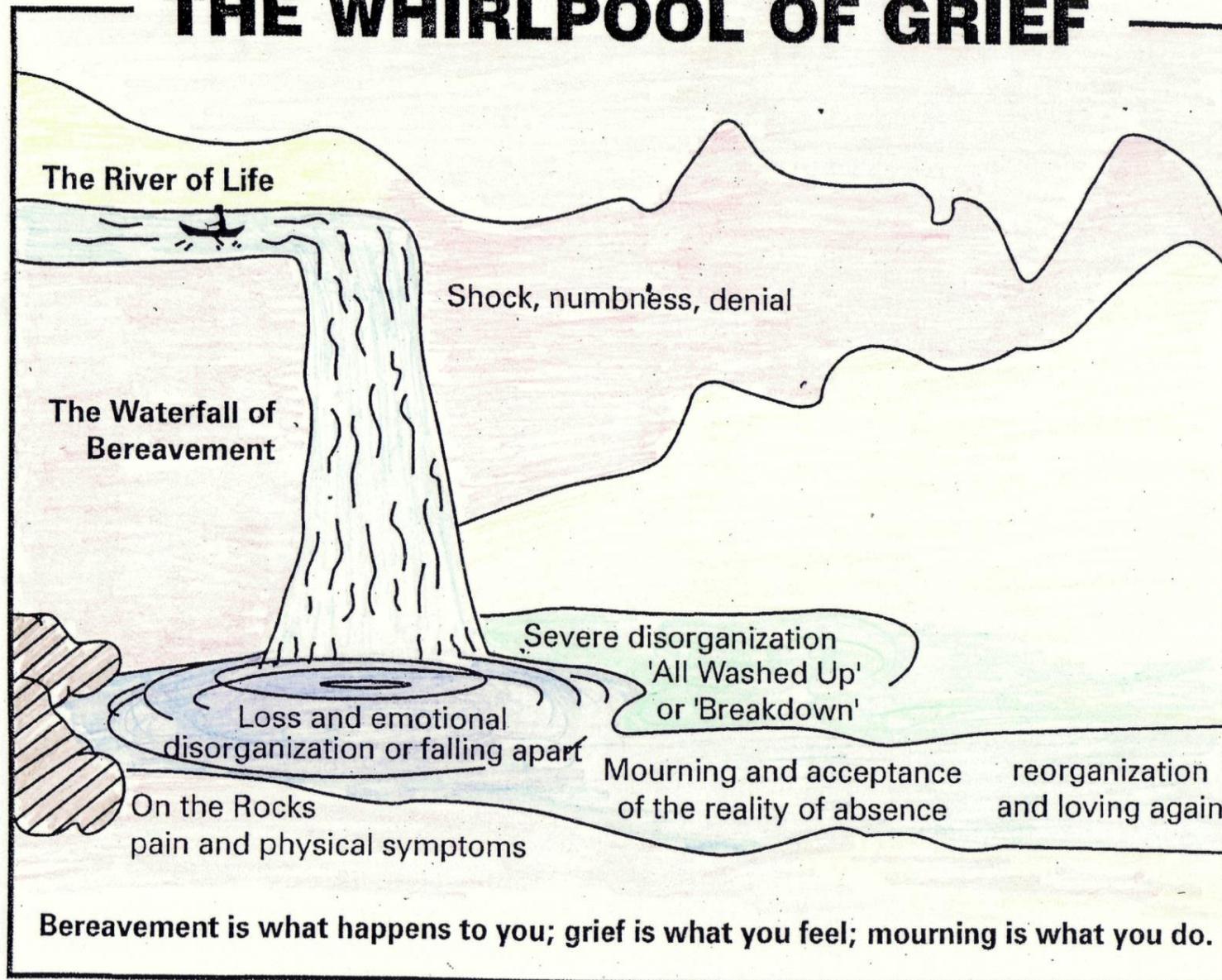


# Tasks of Mourning

Worden (2008) suggested the tasks of mourning. These are not linear stages but part of an active process which involves the bereaved person

- Accepting the reality of their loss
- Feeling and processing the pain of their grief
- Adjusting to a world without the person who has died
- Maintaining an enduring connection with the person who had died, even when moving forward with their life.

# THE WHIRLPOOL OF GRIEF



# GROWING AROUND GRIEF

HERE IS A NEW WAY OF THINKING ABOUT GRIEF AND RECOVERY:



THIS CIRCLE REPRESENTS A LIFE THAT IS TOTALLY CONSUMED BY GRIEF.



ONE SHOULD ACCEPT THAT THE GRIEF WILL NEVER ENTIRELY DISAPPEAR, BUT OVER TIME IT WILL BECOME A SMALLER, MORE MANAGEABLE PART OF LIFE.



EVEN THOUGH THE GRIEF IS STILL THERE, A NEW LIFE EXPANDS AROUND IT; ONE IS ABLE TO GROW AROUND GRIEF.

# Theories of Grief – key themes

- Grief is a normal response to death, and experiencing a whole range of feelings is normal and ok.
- Recovering from a bereavement takes time and is not a linear process.
- Children and young people ‘puddle-jump’ through their grief
- It’s important for children to find an ‘enduring connection’ with the person who has died.
- Although the grief and loss will always be there, children can grow new life around their grief.
- Most bereaved children can be supported by their family, community and school. Some will need additional support but only a small number will need access to specialist services.

# Supporting children and young people

*Think of a word to describe how you might feel approaching a child who has been bereaved.*

# How you can support

## Some key principles

- Children will benefit from a return to structure and routine following a bereavement wherever possible.
- Some additional flexibility can be useful in school, e.g. ability to use a timeout card, time with a key member of staff.
- Remember to ask the family about their wishes.
- Awareness of religion and diversity in people's belief systems
- Self-care
- Clear use of language

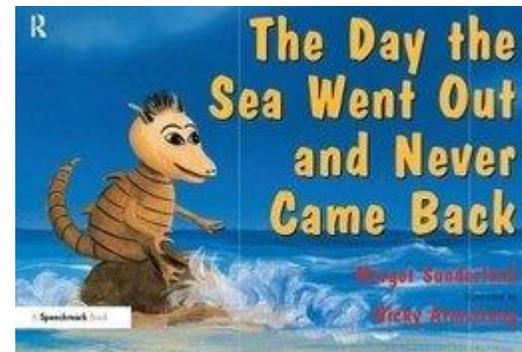
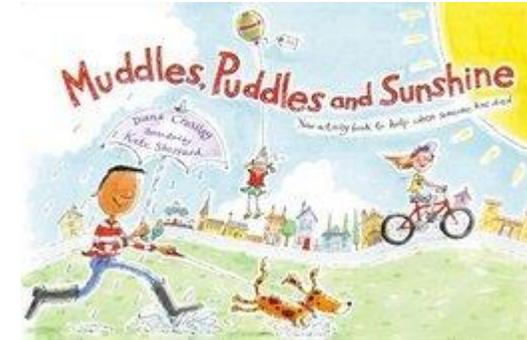
# How you can support

## Talking to children about grief and death

- Acknowledge the loss and let them know you are here for them.
- It's ok not to know what to say – saying something is better than nothing.
- Avoid euphemisms and use plain language such as dead or death.
- Show warmth and empathy.
- Let them know whatever they are feeling is ok – all feelings are permitted.
- Be aware that children may have lots of questions. Answer as openly and honestly as you can. It's ok not to know the answer.
- Involve them
- Children take their cues from the adults around them – reflect on what you are modelling to them.
- Some children may not have the words to articulate their grief, or be ready to talk.

# How you can support Creative Ways to Work with Children

- Memory boxes
- Sand Jars
- Drawing
- Stories and metaphor
- Planting trees / flowers
- Worry dolls
- Opportunity to play



# Rituals and Remembrance

- Rituals around death and funerals help us to process the finality of death, can bring people together and help us to begin to re-calibrate our relationship with the person who has died.
- In a school setting, a remembrance service can be helpful if a death affects the whole school, with children and young people can taking an active role in the organising of it.
- Take into account religious and cultural practices.
- Think about how to sensitively handle anniversaries, and be aware of trigger points like Christmas, mother's day/father's day.

# Bereavement During Covid-19

- The key principles are the same, however there are additional complicating factors such as the restrictions on visiting people who are ill, and attendance at funerals.
- Support between families and services may not be as readily accessible.
- Coping strategies and ways of remembering may need to adapt during the restrictions – think creatively.
- Talk openly and honestly about the facts and their emotions.
- Talk to children in an age appropriate way about the virus, reminding them that most people who catch the virus get better. Children may need additional reassurance, and time.
- Keep to routines where possible and invite children to make choices so they can have some control in their day to day life.

# Referral to specialist agencies

Although there are no limits as to how long grieving should last, if over time children and young people are unable to move forward and appear to be 'stuck' in their grief, they may need support from specialist bereavement services. Signs that the child might need specialist intervention include:

- Frequent trouble accepting the death
- Inability to trust others since the death
- Uneasiness about moving forwards with life
- Detachment from other people to whom the bereaved person was previously close
- The prolonged feeling that life is meaningless and
- The view that the future will never hold any prospect of fulfilment
- Excessive and prolonged agitation since the death

# Support available for children and families

- [Child Bereavement Network UK](#)
- [Cruse Bereavement Care](#) - Offering support to grieving parents and carers as they support a bereaved child or young person.
- [Cruse - Hope Again](#) - The youth website of Cruse Bereavement Care. It is a safe place where young people can learn from other young people, how to cope with grief, and feel less alone.
- [Grief Encounter](#) - Providing support, group activities and remembrance days to bereaved children and families.
- [The Jigsaw Project at St Cuthbert's Hospice](#) - A counselling service for young adults and children who have experienced grief, loss and bereavement.
- [Winston's Wish](#)
- [If u care share](#) offer support for families who are affected by suicide

Visit: <http://www.durham.gov.uk/bereavementsupport> for more information.

# Support/information for schools

- Bereavement Policy Document
- EPS support to school leaders for critical incidents – see Critical Incident Document
- Advice/intervention/training from the EWEL team – ‘bereavement awareness’ on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December ‘Bereavement Support’ Spring Term, Dates TBC
- St Cuthberts/Jigsaw Project Education Resource Pack
- Child Bereavement UK Information Pack:  
<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/managing-bereavement-a-guide-for-secondary-schools>

# Resources

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>

## Useful books to support children and young people:

‘Helping Children with Loss’ and ‘The Day the Sea Went Out and Never Came Back: A Story for Children Who Have Lost Someone They Love’ by Margot Sunderland

Muddles Puddles and Sunshine (Activity Book to Help When Someone Has Died) by Diana Crossley

Badgers Parting Gifts by Susan Varley

Water Bugs and Dragonflies: Explaining Death to Young Children by Doris Stickney

The Memory Tree by Britta Teckentrup

Michael Rosen’s Sad Book by Michael Rosen and Quentin Blake