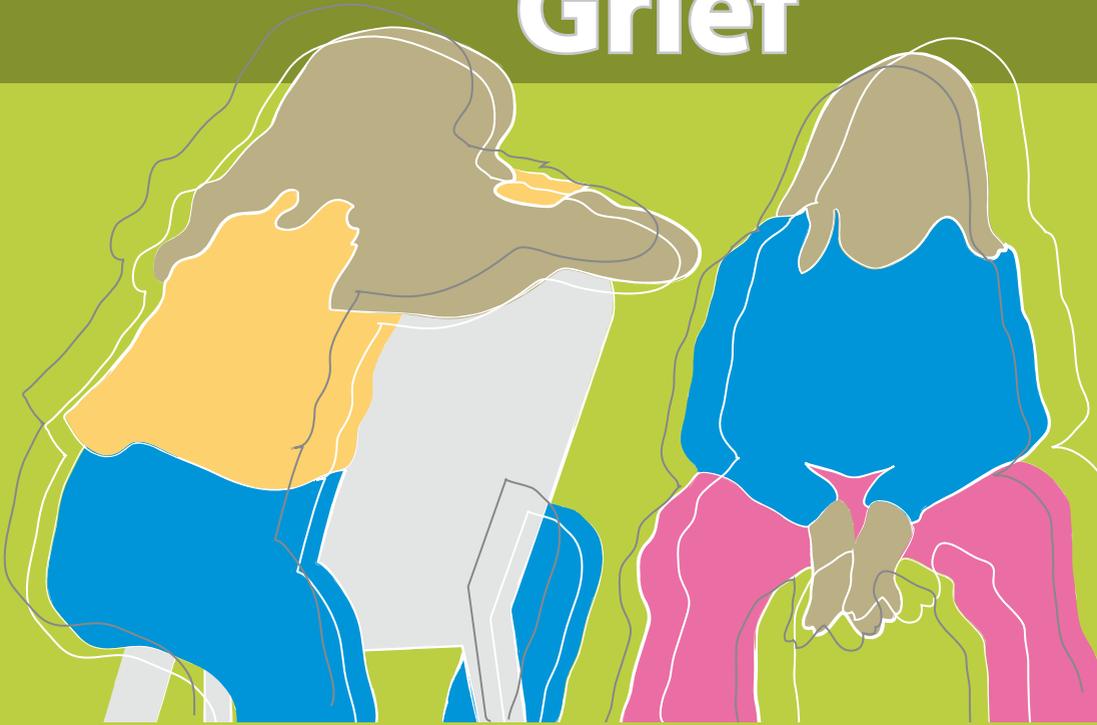




Cruse
Bereavement
Care

Supporting Children Through Grief



Supported by



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Supporting Children Through Grief

Experiencing the death of someone you love is like being parachuted into a strange land where you have no map and don't know the language. Navigating your own way – let alone helping a child find a way – through this land of pain and loss is very hard work.

Surviving this experience is something you and the children you care for will carry with you into the rest of your lives. Even if you are feeling crushed by your own grief, you are one of the best resources your child has.

Bereaved children need acknowledgement, understanding and holding, both physically and emotionally. Whatever role you may play in a bereaved child's life, you can help him/her to express and share their sorrow by your support, encouragement and practical help.

This booklet may be used as a road map through a child's grief, designed to help you understand some of the ways children respond and how you may be able to help them.

How Cruse Can Help

- **Face-to-face bereavement support for children** aged 4-18, available in all Cruse NI branches.
- **Someone for adults to talk to** – the opportunity to talk in confidence about your own needs with a trained bereavement volunteer.
- **Advice, support and informational literature** for parents and carers seeking to support bereaved children and young people.
- **Awareness raising training days** for teachers, parents, carers, social workers, and other professionals working with bereaved children and young people.

These services can be accessed through the Cruse Regional office, or through your local Cruse branch.

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www.cruse.org.uk

Someone To Turn To

At a time of loss when children often hide their own grief in order to protect others, Cruse Bereavement Care offers:

- A safe, **child friendly space** where young people can work through their grief in their own time and own way, accompanied by –
- A **trained and experienced volunteer** who will work individually with the young person over a period of 6 to 8 weekly sessions in one of our eight Cruse offices.

Children and young people can be referred by parents or carers, or can self refer if over 16.

Resources for Supporting Young People

Cruse Contacts

CRUSE (NI) REGIONAL OFFICE

Knockbracken Healthcare Park
Saintfield Road, Belfast, BT8 8BH
(028) 9079 2419

Regional Young Cruse Co-ordinator:

elaine.roub@cruse.org.uk

Assistant Young Cruse Co-ordinator:

andrea.greer@cruse.org.uk

ONLINE CRUSE HELP FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

www.rd4u.org.uk

email: info@rd4u.org.uk

Day-by-Day Youth Helpline:

0808 808 1677

www.cruse.org.uk

Local Area Offices

Armagh/Dungannon Area (028) 8778 4004
Merrion House, 46 The Square, Moy, BT71 7SG

Belfast Area (028) 9043 4600
10 College Green, Belfast, BT7 1LN

Foyle Area (028) 7126 2941
4 Dacre Terrace, Derry, BT48 6JU

Newry & Mourne Area (028) 3025 2322
Office 9, Enterprise House, Canal Quay,
Newry, BT35 6PH

North Down & Ards Area (028) 91272444
Bangor Community Hospital, Bangor, BT20 4TA

Northern Area: Bannside Office
(028) 2563 0900

Oak Cottage, Braid Valley Hospital,
Ballymena, BT43 6HL

Northern Area: Causeway Office
(028) 2766 6686

Robinson Memorial Hospital,
Ballymoney, BT53 6HH

Omagh/Fermanagh Area
(028) 8224 4414

Doctor's Residence, Tyrone Hospital,
Hospital Road, Omagh, BT79 0AU

Other Resources

WINSTON'S WISH

www.winstonswish.org.uk
Helpline: 0845 203 0405

PARENT'S SUPPORT HELPLINE

www.parentlineplus.org.uk
0808 800 2222

CHILDHOOD BEREAVEMENT NETWORK

www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

CHILDLINE

0800 1111 www.childline.org.uk

How Can I Help My Child?

If you are bereaved too, the first thing you can do for your child is to **look after yourself**. It can be very painful to manage both your own feelings and your child's. Sometimes it's just impossible.

Find other resources for yourself and your child. Don't try to carry it all on your own. Get away from the family from time to time and give yourself a break; it will help you to cope better when you are with them.

Most of all, **children need clear, direct information** so that they can begin to face the reality of death and cope with their pain and loss. Perhaps you want to protect your child, or feel it is better if they don't know the truth. But children are quick to notice when things are not right; silence will only bewilder and frighten them.

It is important for children to feel that you are strong enough to bear whatever they wish to talk about and to answer their questions.

DO

- Be honest in your explanations and in showing your own grief. This gives your child permission to do so.
- Give plenty of reassurance and affection. Let them know you love them and will be there for them.
- Keep routines and patterns as much as possible.
- Look after yourself
- Be aware that changes such as clinging or aggressive behaviour or physical problems may be an expression of grief.
- Take time to listen and answer questions; let them know their feelings are important.
- Help them remember the person who died.
- Take things one day at a time.

DON'T

- Try to hide your own pain. It is alright to cry in front of your child, though try not to overwhelm them.
- Tell your child not to worry or be sad. They cannot control their feelings.
- Feel like you have to have all the answers or get it right all the time.
- Be surprised at a child's ability to set the grief aside and alternate between sadness and happiness, tears and play. Play enables children to express themselves and release anxiety about events over which they have no control.

Children's Grief

Children experience similar feelings to adults following the death of a loved one. However, they often express their feelings differently, depending on their developmental age:

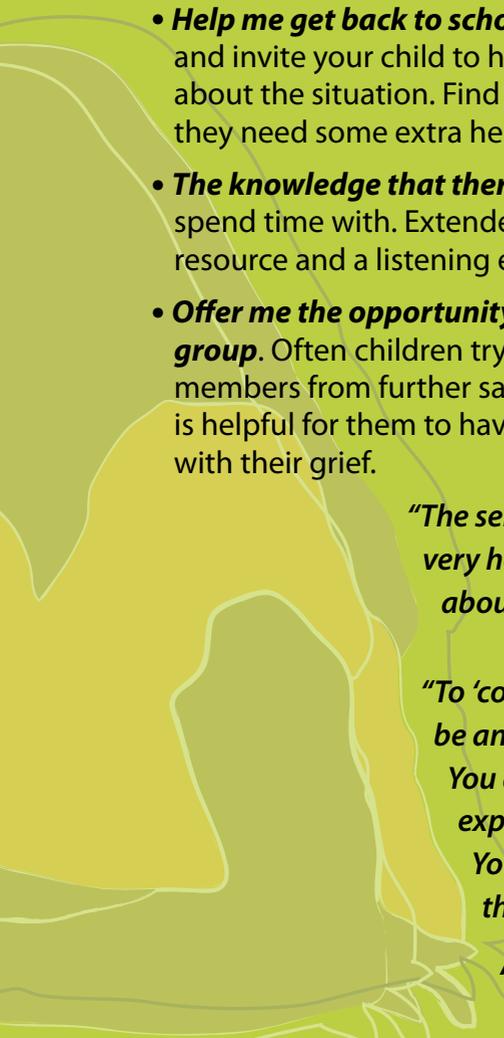
Age	Concept of Death	Possible Reactions
0-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No concept of death, separation or despair	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May search repeatedly for the deceased• Become clingy and afraid of strangers• Feeding & sleeping difficulties
2-5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Death seen as reversible• May feel they have caused the death• Magical thinking – make up fantasies to fill gaps in knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fears abandonment and separation• Loud protest• Despair• Indignant at changes in patterns or routine• Sleep problems• May revert to “baby” behaviours
5-11	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More exposure to death and understanding of death as permanent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Withdrawal, sadness, loneliness, depression• Anger, guilt, temper tantrums, nightmares• Behaviour, learning or school problems.• Perfect child, brave & in control• May become preoccupied with death
Adolescents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Death permanent• Denial – it can't happen	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Withdrawal, sadness, depression, loneliness• Anger, rejection• Joking, sarcasm• Dependence or regressing to younger age• Insecurity, low self-esteem

There is no right or wrong way to grieve. It is important to allow children to grieve in their own way and their own time. They may seesaw in and out of grief, needing time to play and have fun as well as to cry.

What bereaved children and young people need

Children and young people themselves have told us what they need when it comes to bereavement care:

- **Answer my questions** – simply, sensitively and factually. Be specific, using words like “dead” or “death” rather than “gone to a better place”. It can help to first ask about the child’s understanding of what happened in order to address misunderstandings.
- **Help me understand** that the dead person can never come back. Explain clearly the cause of death and ensure the child knows the death was not his/her fault. Sometimes you may need to answer the same questions repeatedly; this is the child’s way of checking that the facts have not changed.
- **Give me the opportunity to take part** in the mourning process, to be involved in the funeral and take part in other rituals associated with death. Telling children what to expect and explaining what happens at a funeral will help them to decide whether or not they want to attend.
- **Give me extra reassurance and affection**, so I know I am still loved even in the midst of all the sadness and loss. Children need to know that someone will continue to care for them and be there to meet basic physical and emotional needs. Keeping routines and consistency at home and school can help a child feel more secure.
- **The chance to be quiet and alone** from time to time.

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- **The opportunity to talk at my own pace**, in my own time. The chance to express feelings openly, and to be reassured that these feelings are common to bereaved people.
 - **Ways to help me remember the person** who has died. Opportunities to play and draw will help to reveal a child's inner world. Children can create a memory book or box with photos and special mementoes of the dead person. (See Resources section for more ideas).
 - **Help me get back to school.** Inform the school about the loss and invite your child to help decide who and how others are told about the situation. Find out who the child can talk to in school if they need some extra help.
 - **The knowledge that there are caring adults** whom I can trust and spend time with. Extended family, neighbours or teachers can be a resource and a listening ear.
 - **Offer me the opportunity to speak to someone outside the family group.** Often children try to protect parents and other family members from further sadness by hiding their own grief, and it is helpful for them to have a safe place to face and begin dealing with their grief.

"The service Cruse provided for my daughter was very helpful. It gave her an opportunity to talk about her feelings in a safe environment."

"To 'companion' bereaved children means to be an active participant in their healing... You allow yourself to learn from their experiences.

You make the commitment to walk with them as they journey through grief."

Alan Wolfelt (1996)

Resource List

Many of these resources are available through Cruse Bereavement Care, based in London. See Cruse website for details.

FOR CHILDREN

- *Waterbugs and Dragonflies*: Doris Stricknew, 1984. www.continuumbooks.com
- *What on Earth do you do When Someone Dies?:* Trevor Romain, 1999. Free Spirit Publishing (www.freespirit.com)
- *Sad Isn't Bad*: Michaelen Mundy, Abbey Press
- *Help Me Say Goodbye*: Janis Silverman, Fairview Press
- *Badger's Parting Gifts*: Susan Varley, Harper Collins Children's Books
- *When Dinosaurs Die*: Laurie Brown, Krasney & Brown, Marc
- *Gentle Willow*: Joyce C Mills, Imagination Press

FOR TEENAGERS

- *A Taste of Blackberries*: Doris Buchanan Smith, University Press, Belfast
- *The Hideaway*: Bill Merrington, Kevin Meyhew Ltd
- *When Someone Dies: Help for Young People Coping with Grief*: Dwaine Steffes, 1997. Cruse Bereavement Care
- *Still Here With Me*: Suzanne Sjoqvist, Jessica Kingsley Publishing
- *Ask the Experts*: DVD (email: andrea.greer@cruse.org.uk)

FOR ADULTS

- *A Child's Grief*: Stubbs, Winston's Wish
- *Beyond the Rough Rock*: Stubbs & Stokes, Winston's Wish
- *Ask the Experts*: DVD (email: andrea.greer@cruse.org.uk)

www.rd4u.org.uk

To receive this booklet in alternative formats, ring (028) 9079 2419