

Telling A Child/Young Person Someone Has Died

At CHUMS we support bereaved children and families and we also give advice and guidance to parents.

Telling a Child

We know how hard this is. There is no way we can protect children from the pain of their reactions, however much we want to.

The following suggestions come from listening to children telling us what helps them. Children are very much aware of what is going on around them and if adults try to protect them too much, they may feel excluded.

Remember



- **Choose somewhere comfortable and familiar it is possible to sit close together.**
- **Ideally a parent or carer will break the news.**
- **Be age appropriate.**
- **Be sensitive.**
- **Be truthful.**



Ways to Explain

- It is important when talking to children about the death of someone close to use simple language, appropriate to the age of the child. Younger children may not be able to absorb much information whereas you may be able to tell older children much more.
- Be honest, tell the truth, but find a balance in telling the raw truth and being sensitive.
- Do not use euphemisms such as 'gone to sleep' 'lost' or 'gone on a journey' as these will only confuse children and can lead to difficulties later. Use the words 'dead' and 'died', explaining what these words mean if necessary. For instance, 'when someone dies, their body stops working, their heart no longer beats, and they will not come back to life.'
- Keep it simple. It is hard for children to take in too much information
- Recognise that younger children will not have an understanding that death is permanent and may keep asking when the person is coming back.
- Understand that children's behaviour can often regress for a period of time, i.e. bed wetting, fear of the dark, being clingy, having tantrums etc.
- Be ready to answer questions and if you don't know the answer, that's okay to say you don't know. If you are able to find out, you can let them know later.
- Check how much they have understood. You may need to repeat things over and over; be patient.
- Encourage the sharing of thoughts and feelings.
- Listen, accept and acknowledge their worries and emotions..
- Let children know what has happened and what may happen next, i.e. funeral, memorial etc .
- There is no one right way of telling children difficult news. Be open to their needs and do not be afraid of sharing your emotions – it helps them to understand their own..
- Find ways of comforting each other.

Suggested Ways of Explaining

'I have something very sad to tell you....do you remember me telling you how Grandma was poorly and had a very serious illness....sadly even though the doctors and nurses did everything they could, Grandma's illness was so serious that they could not make her better and she has died...'

'Generally, people die when they are very old but occasionally people may die if they have a very serious illness or a bad accident.'

'We all wish Grandma had not died and been able to live for many more years as we will miss her very much...but because of her serious illness her body was just not able to keep working...'

'When someone dies their body stops working completely... their heart stops beating, their lungs stop breathing and their brain stops working...and it cannot start again...some people believe that when someone dies their spirit / soul / spark that makes them unique goes on... heaven...Jannah...reincarnation... (whatever your family's beliefs may be...'



For Grieving Adults and Children

When someone you care about has died, you may experience many difficult and different feelings and emotions. You may feel shocked, sad, numb, angry, guilty, confused, anxious and disbelieving. It can at times feel overwhelming for you - remember these are all normal grief reactions – although they do not feel normal, they may feel painful.

Everyone experiences grief differently – there is no right or wrong way to grieve and you may notice that you don't always feel the same as others in your family. Some people may show openly that they are feeling very affected by a death, whilst others appear to carry on as normal, however this does not mean they do not care or are not grieving too.

Grief is individual and has no time limit. You may not feel you need to seek support now, but this might change in the future.

Remember to be extra kind to yourself and to others who are grieving at this time and for some time to come.

Children May Show their Grief in Other Ways

- Changes in behaviours
- Lack of concentration
- Lack of confidence
- Regression (wetting the bed, afraid of the dark)
- Increased anxiety (separation anxiety)
- Low self-esteem
- Mood swings
- Crying
- Angry outbursts
- Becoming withdrawn / isolated
- Tiredness
- Sleep disturbances
- Loss / increase in appetite
- Self-harm
- Substance abuse



All children and young people are individuals and may express their grief in different ways. Some may be very challenging and angry; others may be completely focused on other things. Some may not want to acknowledge their grief, looking for normality instead, not wanting to be treated differently; others may require a lot of emotional support. Some may show their grief immediately, others not for weeks, months or even years, grief is an ongoing process.



How to Help Grieving Children

- Children need to receive extra love, reassurance, and attention.
- Children need to feel safe. They need to know who is going to look after them. They need to stick to established routines and have firm boundaries.
- Children need to feel involved. Do not shut them out thinking this is helping them.
- Children need to be allowed to talk and be listened to. It can help them to see and hear adults expressing their feelings. This can help them to understand and express their own feelings.
- Children need to be told that it is normal to feel pain, anger, guilt or relief.
- Children need to be reminded it's okay to laugh and to talk about memories.
- Children may find it helpful to be creative by making a memory box, scrapbook, draw, paint etc
- Children may find it helpful to write down their thoughts, feelings or memories in a journal.
- Children may find it helpful to listen to music.
- Children may find it helpful to exercise.
- Children need to be reminded that it's okay to ask for help if they need it – talk to family, friends, GP, staff at school and support organisations.
- Remind children that it's also okay to go on living and enjoying life, having a good time does not mean they care less for the person who died

Support

CHUMS is still delivering all services, albeit we are now working remotely and conducting appointments, 1:1 sessions and groups virtually online or via telephone.

If you have any queries, please make contact via our usual email address: info@chums.uk.com
Our admin team will get back to you in due course.

Please have a look on **CHUMS** website for suggestions for helpful books and our online referral form if additional support is required www.chums.uk.com

PLEASE NOTE: **CHUMS** is not an urgent response service, therefore, if you feel that a child or young person is at immediate risk to themselves or others, please contact your GP, A&E department or call **NHS 111**.



CHUMS

Mental Health &
Emotional Wellbeing Service

Telephone Number

01622 427300

For online referrals visit:

www.chums.uk.com/referral