

Article One.

Supporting Children through Grief based on the Solihull Approach and Cruse Bereavement Care.



Experiencing the death of someone you love can feel like being parachuted into a strange land. You can feel at sea with no maps and you can't understand the language spoken around you. Navigating your way alone as well as helping a child find their way through pain and loss is very difficult.

Surviving this experience in the current restrictive situation is something both you and your child will carry with you for the rest of your lives. Even if you are feeling crushed and wearied by your own grief, you are still the ONE best resource your child has.

Children who have lost someone they love and had regular contact with need acknowledgement, understanding and holding, both physically and emotionally. You can help your child to express and share their sorrow with your support, encouragement and practical help.

These two articles will provide you with information to help you understand some of ways children respond and how you can help them.

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	No concept of death separation or despair	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The child may search repeatedly for the deceased• Become clingy and afraid of strangers• Feeding and sleeping difficulties (Children at this age will sense and respond to the adult's emotions)
2-5	Death can be seen as reversible Children may feel they have caused the death Magical thinking – make up fantasies to fill gaps in knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fear of abandonment and separation• Loud protests when asked to do something or is told something• Despair and sadness• Indignant ay changes in patterns or routines• Sleep patterns change including being unable to sleep• May revert to "baby" or "younger" behaviours

5-11	Children at this stage will have had more exposure to death and understanding of death as permanent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children may experience withdrawal, sadness, loneliness and depression • Anger, guilt, temper tantrums, nightmares • Changes in behaviour, learning or issue with concentration • Can try to become the perfect child, brave and in control • They may become preoccupied with death and seek explanations
Adolescents	Fully understand that death is permanent Denial – it cannot have happened	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawal from family life, sadness, depression, loneliness • Bouts of anger and rejection • Using joking and sarcasm to deflect feelings • Becoming dependent or regressing to younger behaviours • Insecurity and 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 in their own time. Children may seesaw in and out of grief, needing time to play and have fun as well as time to cry and be sad. Remember being sad is not bad.