

Bereavement & Loss Guidance for Staff in Early Years Settings

Introduction

All Early Years settings are likely to be affected at some time by sad events involving bereavement and loss. These could include the serious illness, injury or death of a child, parent or member of staff. In addition, other traumatic events such as involvement in serious child protection cases or a major accident happening in the local community will also affect children, parents and staff.

This guidance has been written to help staff in early years settings to understand how young children may be affected by such events and to feel more confident in supporting them. This guidance is accompanied by the EPS Bereavement and Loss Guidance for schools and settings.

What is a Young Child's understanding of Death

Children under the age of five years lack an understanding that death is permanent and universal, therefore, they may show little reaction to hearing the news. They may ask questions suggesting that the death is only temporary, for example, "When will daddy come back?" They may also be concerned about the physical well being of the dead person, how they will get food or keep warm? Children at this age think in very practical and concrete terms so it is best to avoid abstract explanations or euphemisms such as the dead person is "asleep" or has "gone on a long journey".

They are, however, able to recognise and react to the loss and separation from someone close to them.

What do children need and how can adults help?

1. Continuity of Care

The quality of care is crucial to the emotional well being of a bereaved child. They need to know who will look after them and, as far as possible, routines and normal boundaries should be preserved. This will help them to feel safe and secure, along with extra cuddles and reassurance when necessary.

2. Information

Children should be told as gently as possible about what has happened. This is best done by an adult who is familiar to them and using language that they can understand. Give information a little at a time so that they can gradually build up a picture of what has happened. Allow time for the child to ask questions, be honest in your answers. It's okay to say you don't know. The child's questions will tell you what they need to know at that time. Don't worry if a child keeps asking the same question over again.

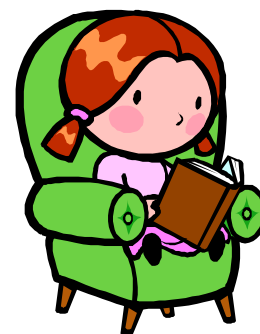


3. Help to Understand Feelings

In a move away from the linear models of grief which lead to detachment, acceptance, or moving on, Klass, Silverman and Nickman (1996) developed the idea of '**Continuing Bonds**'. Klass and colleagues (1996) argue that there is nothing pathological with continuing to experience a bond with the deceased. They argue that healthy grief is not about detaching from the deceased but instead, about building a new relationship with them. They talk about redefining your relationship with the deceased allowing a continued bond to endure. Children - Klass and colleagues (1996) argue – are a good example of the ways in which the bereaved find ways to maintain relationship with a person who has died (e.g. seeing themselves as a legacy of their parent).

4. Opportunities to Remember

Talking about the person who has died, looking at pictures and having something that belonged to them, all help children to understand and adjust to what has happened. Some children may need encouragement to do this if they think that talking about "mummy" will make "daddy" sad.



5. To be Involved

It is important to involve children in the rituals and ceremonies surrounding a death. This helps in the process of understanding and accepting the loss of someone close and helps children to feel less alone.



What more can adults do?

- Maintain regular communication with the child's parents. This will help the child to feel more settled and secure.
- Ensure that all relevant staff are aware of what has happened and know how to respond to the child's needs.
- Some children may act out what has happened through their play. Staff need to be aware that this is a normal and helpful process for many young children.
- Be aware that some temporary regression in behaviour is also a common reaction to losing someone close. The child may become more clingy, scared or dependent for a while, losing skills that they have previously mastered.
- For much of the time, however, young children may act as if nothing has happened – this is also okay.

The Importance of Self Care

Working with bereaved children and young people can be particularly challenging and stressful.

"We identify more with a child, more easily make their grief our own, and find it more difficult to stop thinking about what has happened". Dyregrov, 1991.

This can lead to over involvement, the blurring of boundaries and feelings of being overwhelmed. It is therefore vital that personal and professional safeguards are put in place to avoid emotional depletion.

Key points of good self care:

- Recognise and acknowledge the effects of the child's grief on yourself.
- Be aware that such incidents of bereavement and loss can make you feel helpless and powerless.
- Accept your own limitations.
- Establish good support systems both at work and at home.
- Find time to relax and switch off.



Local Organisations

Together for Short Lives

Telephone: 0117 9897820

Helpline: 0808 808 8100

Website: www.togetherforshortlives.org.uk

Suite 1B
Whitefriars
Lewins Mead
Bristol
BS21 2NT

Compassionate Friends

(Self-help organisation for bereaved parents)

Helpline: : 0845 123 2304

Website: www.tcf.org.uk

Email: infor@tcf.org.uk

53 North Street,
Bristol,
BS3 1EN

The Rainbow Centre

(For children affected by cancer, life threatening illness & bereavement)

Telephone: 0117 985 3343

Website: www.rainbowcentre.org.uk

27 Lilymead Avenue,
Bristol,
BS4 2BY

Cruse Bereavement Care

Telephone: 01458 830 984

Helpline: 0808 8081617

Website: www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Somerset Crispin Community Centre,
Leigh Road,
Street,
Somerset,
BA16 0HA

National Organisations

Winston's Wish

Telephone: 01242 515157

Website: www.winstonswish.org.uk

Email: info@winstonswish.org.uk

The Clara Burgess Centre
Westmorland House
80-86 Bath Road
Cheltenham
GL53 7JT

Cruse Bereavement Care

Helpline: : 0844 477 9400

Website: www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Email: info@cruse.org.uk

Unit 0.1
1 Victoria Villas,
Richmond,
Surrey,
TW9 2GW

Child Death Helpline Dept.

Helpline: 0800 282 986

Website: www.rainbowcentre.org.uk

Great Ormond Street Hospital,
Great Ormond Street,
London,
WC1N 3JH

Child Bereavement Network

Telephone: 020 7843 6309

Website: www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

Email: cbn@ncb.org.uk

8 Wakley Street
London
EC1V 7QE

National Organisations Cont,d

UK Trauma Council

Website: www.uktraumacouncil.org

Anna Freud Centre
4-8 Rodney Street
London
N1 9JH

The Child Bereavement Trust

Telephone: : 0845 357 1000

Website: www.childbereavement.org.uk

Email: enquiries@childbereavement.org.uk

Aston House,
West Wycombe,
High Wycombe,
Bucks,
HP14 3AG



Bibliography

Non-Fiction Books

Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine

Author: Diana Crossley
Publisher: Hawthorn Press on behalf of
Winston's Wish
ISBN: 1869890582

Sad Isn't Bad

Author: Michaelene Mundy
Publisher: Abbey Press
ISBN: 0870293214

Ewen's Little Brother

Author: S Lamont
Publisher: Victoria Publications
ISBN: 187147602X

Someone Special has Died

Author and Publisher: The Department of Social
Work, St Christopher's Hospice, 1989

Beginnings and Endings With Lifetimes In Between

Author: Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen
Publisher: Belitha Press Ltd
ISBN: 1855617609

Remembering Mum

Author: G Perkins
Publisher: A & C Black
ISBN: 071364432X

When Uncle Bob Died

Author: Althea (Part of the 'Dinosaur' series of
titles)
Publisher: Happy Cat Books
ISBN: 1903285089

I Miss You: A First Look at Death

Author: Pat Thomas
Publisher: Barron's Educational Series
ISBN: 0764117645

Bibliography

Fiction Books

Dear Grandma Bunny

Author: Dick Bruna
 Publisher: Egmont
 ISBN: 1405219017

A Star for Bobby

Author: Helen Keenor
 Publisher: Bosun Publishing on behalf of SANDS
 ISBN: 095469322

The Tenth Good Thing About Barney

Author: Judith Viorst
 Publisher: Prentice Hall
 ISBN: 0689712030

Fred

Author: Posy Simmonds
 Publisher: Picture Puffin
 ISBN: 0099264129

I'll Always Love You

Author: H Wilhelm
 Publisher: Hodder & Stoughton
 ISBN: 0517572656

Goodbye Mousie

Author: Robie H Harris
 Publisher: Simon & Schuster Children's Books
 ISBN: 0743462130

Grandpa

Author: J Burningham
 Publisher: Picture Puffin

Scrumpy

Author: E Dale
 Publisher: Anderson Press
 ISBN: 9995605163

Christmas with Grandfather

Author: W Wolf
 Publisher: North South Books
 ISBN: 1558582975

Badger's Parting Gifts

Author: Susan Varley
 Publisher: Picture Lions
 ISBN: 0006643175

Waterbugs and Dragonflies

Author: Doris Stickney
 Publisher: Continuum International Publishing Group
 ISBN: 0826464580

The Very Hungry Caterpillar

Author: Eric Carle
 Publisher: Picture Puffin
 ISBN: 0241003008

The Snowman

Author: Raymond Briggs
 Publisher: Picture Puffin
 ISBN: 0241141036

The Velveteen Rabbit

Author: M Williams
 Publisher: Hodder & Stoughton
 ISBN: 0380002558

Goodbye Mog

Author: Judith Kerr
 Publisher: Collins
 ISBN: 0007149697

Grandpa's Slide Show

Author: D Gould
 Publisher: Puffin
 ISBN: 0140508716

The Big Sea

Author: J Eachus
 Publisher: Walker Books
 ISBN: 1564020665

This is Bear on the Scary Night

Author: S Hayes and H Craig
 Publisher: Walker Books
 ISBN: 0744531470

This guidance has been adapted from guidance provided by Somerset Educational Psychology Service.