

Let your child keep something that belonged to the person who has died.

### **Give your child a hug.**

Help your child to have fun and laugh sometimes. This does not mean he/she is 'over it, has 'forgotten' or 'couldn't care'.

Give your child space but talk to him/her if you are worried that he/she are not eating properly or having sleep or other problems, so you can do something about it together.

Arrange for you and your child to get extra help if you are feeling stuck and overwhelmed.

Please understand that this is for now and your child's needs will change. Please check up on this as time moves on.

### **When to seek help**

The normal bereavement cycle is estimated at being around two years in duration. If your child's reaction is still extreme after six to nine months you should seek help from your GP in the first instance.

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Prepared by Dumfries and Galloway Psychological Service.

# Information on bereavement

## For parents and carers



## Children's reactions to bereavement

These are affected by many factors to do with them, their family, their age, what has happened and other circumstances.

Some of the reactions which are common among bereaved children are:

- anxiety
- vivid memories
- sleep difficulties
- sadness and longing
- anger and acting-out behaviour
- guilt, self-reproach and shame
- school problems
- acting like a younger child
- physical complaints

Some children do not have a full understanding of grief due to their age. Children's development is not always in line with their chronological age, so the following information is only a guideline. Children up to the age of around two years old have no concept of death but will show signs of distress at being separated from a loved one. Pre-schoolers generally see death as being temporary. Only 60% of five year olds have an almost complete understanding of death. Almost all eight year olds have a fuller understanding of death but they also may believe that wishes come true. They may worry they caused the death because in an angry moment they wished the person dead. Nine to twelve year olds may become fearful of their own lives while adolescents may consider the meaning of life.

Bereavement is a major life change and while it can be upsetting to see these reactions in a child you care for, it is not surprising. With acknowledgement and support from parents, carers, friends, teachers and others around them, children can find ways to manage their grief.

Grief can return years later when significant life events occur, such as leaving school or getting married.

## How to support a grieving child

When someone important to your child or family dies it can be difficult to know what to say and do to help them. At the same time you may be needed to support others in your family with practical matters. You may also have been bereaved and it can be difficult to know what to say and do.

### Here are some suggestions:

Talk to your child honestly and explain about what has happened in a way they can understand. Try not to use 'soft' language like 'gone away' or 'gone to sleep' as this can lead to misunderstandings. It's OK to say that someone has died and talk about death.

Talk to your child about the funeral and how they can be included. It will help him/her to remember and say goodbye. Try to include your child in decisions and give him/her choices.

If you have a faith then your priest, the school chaplain or your imam or other faith professional may be able to help.

Inform the school about the child's loss and find out who he/she can talk to in school if he/she needs some help. Help him/her get back into school by talking to him/her about what additional support might be needed. It may be difficult for your child to leave home.

Notice if your child is feeling lonely and find out about groups for children and young people coping with loss and change.

Remind your child that he/she is not to blame and that it's not his/her fault although he/she may need to talk about this.

Help your child keep memories alive by talking and remembering, especially on anniversaries. There will be things your child needs to remember and others he/she wants to forget.