

Havens
Hospices



Grief and Bereavement Children & Young People

Every memory
Making every
day count.

Grief and Bereavement Children & Young People

Most children will be exposed to sickness and death at some point in their young lives because death is a part of the natural cycle of life. Some children and young people though will experience death at a much younger age.

Children do grieve and, like adults, they too are unique in their mourning. When a child or young person experiences the death of somebody close, for the first time in their life they may feel very unsafe because everything they knew to be real and true is now different. Life has changed for them forever.

Telling a child or young person about the death of somebody close can feel overwhelming at a time when often those significant adults around them are also feeling crushed by their own grief. However it's important to remember that despite the unimaginable grief and emotion the adults around them are experiencing, parents/carers/significant adults are enough, they are the best resource the child or young person has.

Remember, if you can:

- Be open and honest with the child/young person, explain age-appropriately using clear language. Avoid using expressions such as 'gone away' or 'gone to sleep' or 'gone to a better place.' These expressions are very confusing and will lead the child/young person to come to their own, often, misleading, conclusions.
- Answer all the difficult questions even though it is likely to be painful and uncomfortable. It's OK to not have all the answers, it's OK to tell them that you don't know the answer, and maybe that you will find out the answer for them if you can.
- Listen to how your child is feeling and reassure the child/young person that you are always there for them. They too may feel worried about being alone or feeling abandoned when adults around them are unable to have the emotional capacity to support them.

Remember, if you can:

- Don't be afraid to express your own emotions – by showing your grief you are encouraging the child to express theirs too. Be led by the child/young person, their journey of grief will be completely different to the many people around them.
- Sometimes they 'forget' and believe the person is still alive. This is normal in the early stages of grief but can be a problem if it persists. Always seek support if you are concerned.
- Prepare the child/young person for the changes they may face. The death of a loved one can have a huge impact on a family's routine and structure. Ease any worries, such as who will pick them up from school/college.
- Talk to the child/young person about how they want to say goodbye. Some alternatives could be lighting a candle, releasing balloons, saying a prayer or poem, writing a letter, making a memory box or visiting the grave or another special place that holds memories of their loved one.

Children and young people's understanding of death develops alongside their cognitive ability so this means their understanding of death depends on their age and cognitive development, or thinking. Children and young people with developmental delays or children with disabilities or additional needs will likely process their grief at a different rate.

Useful websites

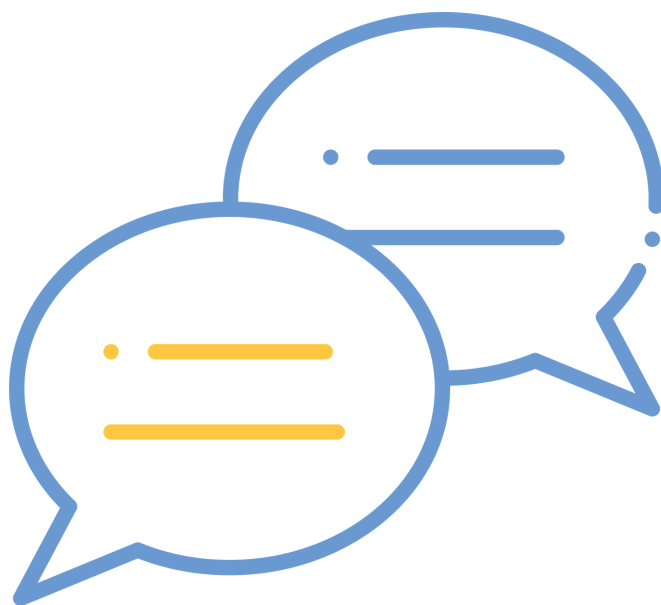
www.winstonswish.org

www.cruse.org.uk

www.childbereavementuk.org

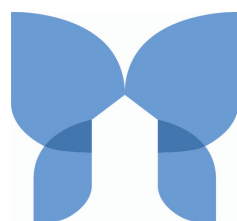
www.autism.org.uk

www.seesaw.org.uk



When an adult or child has been diagnosed with a complex or incurable condition, Havens Hospices can provide the care they need, 'Making every day count'.

For further information or to make a donation, please visit havenshospices.org.uk or call 01702 220 350.



**Havens
Hospices**

Registered Charity Number 1022119