



Supporting Families

BEREAVEMENT

What is grief?

Losing someone we love and feel close to, or going through a bereavement, can be extremely painful. Grief is our natural response to this loss, and it is a process rather than an event.

Your child, as well as you and other family members, may be grieving because:

- someone in the family has died, like a parent, grandparent or sibling
- their friend or someone at school has died
- they have lost someone by suicide
- someone they are close to has become ill
- a pet has died or been lost
- a change in family dynamics

What does grief feel like?

Grief feels different to every individual child. Our feelings around grief also change over time. It's important to remember that there is no right or wrong way to grieve. It's okay to feel whatever emotion we do, and to process it in our own way. It's a time for being kind and patient with ourselves.

It's important to understand that not everyone experiences all the stages of grief, and that we do not move through these stages one-by-one. We might move forwards or backwards between them, or experience them in any order. Or we might feel different emotions.

Physical signs of grief

Your child might also experience some of the physical signs of grief;

- waves of crying, which can sometimes feel like they come out of the blue
- feeling unwell or sick
- eating more or less than before
- being extremely tired
- finding it difficult to get to sleep
- finding it difficult to concentrate, including at school

It's helpful to remember that it is normal for your child to feel and experience these things after a loss.

Stages of grief

Denial – for example, feeling confused, numb or in shock.

Anger – this might be towards the person who has died, or with the world in general.

Bargaining – for example, going over things from the past, or feeling guilty or anxious.

Depression – this might feel like intense sadness or loneliness about living without the person.

Acceptance – this might be feeling more able to live with our grief, rather than feeling we have 'got over it'.

Tips for talking about grief and loss



Explain what's happened and what it means

When someone has died, tell them about this clearly using age-appropriate language. You can get advice to help you find the right words on the [Winston's Wish](#) website.



Use clear language

Even though it can feel difficult, use direct words such as 'died' or 'dead'. Avoid expressions such as 'gone to sleep' or 'passed on', as these can be confusing.



Give space for them to ask questions

Some children might want to talk about what happens after we die. You and your family might have your own religious and cultural beliefs about this. It is ok to say you don't have the answers.



Focus on listening and empathising

Be curious and non-judgmental about how they're feeling. Avoid trying to 'fix' things. You won't be able to make it all better, but being there to listen makes a huge difference.



Let them express whatever they're feeling

Remind them that there's no right or wrong way to grieve. It's completely understandable to feel however they do. If they are worried about feeling nothing or numb, reassure them that this is a normal reaction. It can be our body's way of protecting us until we are ready to start processing what's happened.



Make sure they know it isn't their fault

Your child might tell you they are blaming themselves, or you might be worried about this. Be very clear that while it's normal to worry about this, it is absolutely not their fault or responsibility. No one is ever responsible for someone dying or getting ill.

It is ok if your child isn't ready to talk. It's also okay to give them some space. Sometimes it helps to just sit together quietly, or to offer a hand squeeze or hug. Reassure them that it's okay to talk to someone else they trust too.

Tips for supporting children with a sudden death



Hold and reassure them

Wrap your arms around them and tell them how much you love them. Let them know they're not alone and you're here for them.



Tell the people who need to know

Tell everyone who needs to know what's happened, including someone at school via a phonecall or email. Alternatively, you can ask someone to contact us on your behalf.



Help them meet their basic needs

Guide them through daily things like eating (even if it's something small), drinking water, washing, keeping warm and getting some sleep.



Take care of their normal responsibilities

Let them continue with things like feeding and walking pets if they'd like to. But make sure they know they don't have to do these things right now. Arrange for someone else to cover them if they're worried about it.



Gently offer opportunities to talk

Create space for them to start talking when they're ready, letting them speak as often and for as long as they need to. We are here to support you.

When someone they're close to dies **suddenly** or **unexpectedly**, children are likely to feel extremely **shocked**. They may find it impossible to believe that it's happened, or **feel numb and empty**. They might find it difficult to talk, or to eat or drink. They may experience physical symptoms and these reactions are a **normal way of coping with huge shock**.

In the days and weeks after a sudden death, the most important thing you can do is provide safety and support. Take time to look after yourself and top up your own batteries when you can. If you are also grieving, things may feel overwhelming at times. Allow space for your own grief too. Remember that it's okay to ask for help from family, friends and us when you need it. If you need support with your own grief, or you're struggling to cope, it's really important that you get the help you need. This will make you more able to be there for your child.

Balloons - A small, local charity offering a range of support to children and young people aged 5 – 25 when someone significant in their life dies or is about to die.

Winston's Wish

Agencies that offer support

CRUSE - this is for adults in need of support

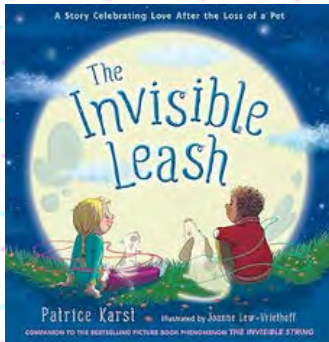
Child Bereavement UK

Miss Payne and Mrs Temple have special child bereavement training. Do speak to either teacher for additional support for your child.

On the next page are a range of picture books to support grief, loss and bereavement. By clicking on the book, it will direct you to buy a copy from Amazon. Alternatively, you can borrow these from school.

We are here to support your child.
Please do speak to us.
safeguardingteam@abbeyschool.co.uk

Picture book recommendations



Pet loss



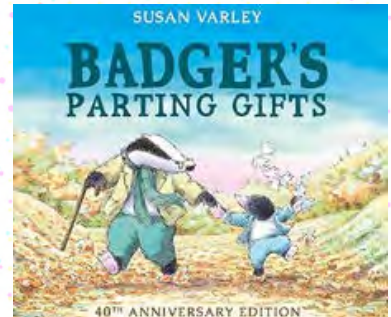
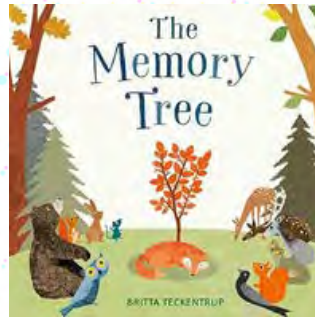
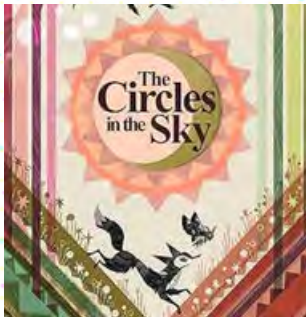
Before loss



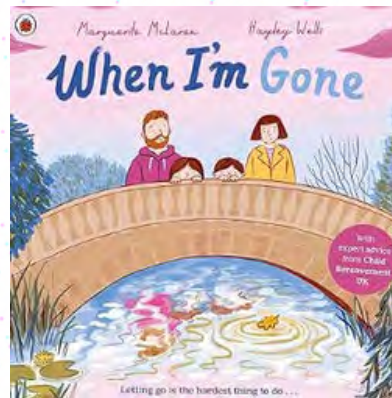
Pet loss



Unbreakable bonds



Books for grief and understanding death



Books for loss of a parent



Books for loss of a grandparent