

The four tasks of bereavement and what you can do to help with each task

1. To accept the reality of the loss.

- Act as naturally as possible. Don't pretend that nothing has happened.
- Help the child or young person to believe that the person is dead and will not return.
- Give the child or young person accurate information. Tell them as simply and honestly as possible what has happened. Without it they will often fill the gaps for themselves.
- Bereavement can make people unsure of what's coming. So, as children and young people struggle to cope with overwhelming feelings and to understand what happened, try and make things as normal as possible: we all feel safer when we know what to expect. Help them feel safer sooner by sticking to their normal routines as much as possible.
- Avoid directing attention to them but find a private moment to check how they are. Identify a designated place or person they can go to.

2. To work through the pain of grief.

- In a nutshell: be available, open and accepting; a listener and a witness; yourself. You can help by taking the child or young person through the grief process but not by seeking to remove it.
- Children and young people will have the same emotions as adults but may not understand and name them as well as we can. Don't presume to know what they are feeling. It can be useful to ask, 'I don't know how you must be feeling. Can you tell me how things are for you?'
- Be a good role model by being open about your feelings and your grieving without being overwhelmed by them. This makes it clear that they can show their feelings openly without fear of upsetting others.

Share your own experiences of loss: raising the subject shows it's ok to remember and talk about people who have died.

- Acknowledge in words and actions what has happened to them.
- Be available as and when they are ready.

Support and encourage talking but don't force it.

Let them express their feelings. Receive their feelings received without judgement.

Don't worry that you will upset them or make things worse: they are likely to want to talk about what's happened.

opening up communication

'I've heard...'

'It can't be easy...'

'I'm trying to imagine...'

'I remember when...what's it been like for you?'

'I'm just wondering if...'

'This may sound a bit crazy but...'

- Anger, worry and sadness are all normal reactions. Such feelings will be felt and displayed on and off, over a long period of time, and often at unexpected moments. Worries and fears need to be listened to and addressed whether they are realistic or imaginary.

Let them know it's alright to enjoy themselves.

- Take care with language and try to avoid abstract explanations.

Accept that they will go through the stages of grieving at their own level and pace.

- Let them ask questions- repeatedly if necessary.

Don't stifle their search for the answers.

Provide information clearly and honestly. They are often able to deal with very difficult situations if they are trusted with the truth and given support to deal with it.

If you don't know the answer then there is no harm in saying so.

Make sure there are no misconceptions.

Reduce confusion: make sure all adults keep to the same story that explains what happened.

- Do look after yourself: you might want to talk to another adult about your upset feelings.

3. To adjust to an environment in which the dead person is missing.

- Offer opportunities to remember, however long after the death. Remembering is a way of staying connected with the person who died.

Ask about mementos and how the person is remembered, especially around anniversaries and special days.

- Offer opportunities to be supported by others including other children and young people.
- Give them time to commemorate the deceased person.
- Give them the tools for remember them. A photograph can be a great source of comfort.

4. To emotionally relocate the dead person and move on with life.

- Significant bereavements can continue to affect children and young people for a very long time.

methods of healing

Real life or fictional accounts, stories and films.

Drawing, painting.

Educational information: books, the internet, leaflets.

Scrap book and memory box.

Facilitating peer discussion.

Writing a letter.

Doing something in their memory.

Red flag behaviours: seek professional help if the child or young person...

- shows aggressive behaviour.
- is persistently anxious.
- has chronic unexplained physical problems such as headaches, stomach aches, difficulty with breathing and muscle discomfort.
- has sleeping or eating disturbances.
- is markedly withdrawn or often becomes very dreamy or distant.
- is underachieving academically.
- persistently blames themselves or feels guilty or displays self-destructive behaviour.