

# Techniques for Helping Bereaved Children



## How to Help the Bereaved Child

### **CHILDREN NEED:-**

**Comfort** - children will need extra love, cuddles, reassurance and attention.

**Honesty** - Be honest! It's ok to say you don't know something. Even grown ups aren't expected to know everything. Acknowledge your own feelings. Your child may need to know that it is o.k. for grown ups to feel sad too.

**Inclusion** - Children need to feel involved. Do not shut them out thinking this is helping them. Plan how they would like the person who died to be remembered. Let them be part of the planning. Plan what do to on special days.

**Listener** - Children need to be allowed to talk and to be listened to. It can help them to listen to others expressing their feelings, to see adults crying. This can help them understand and express their own feelings.

**Dependable adults** - Be alert to fear. Will I die when I am ill? Will you die? Who will look after me? It can help them if you tell them where you are going, when you will be back. Try to always return when you say you will.

**Remember the person who has died** - Children need to remember the person who died. Keep the memory alive by talking about the special person.

- What do you all remember, special stories.
- What did you like, not like about the person who died.
- What will you miss about them?

### **Express their feelings -**

- Children with the same feelings as you may show them in different ways (maybe through difficult behaviour). Try to understand what they are really saying/feeling.
- Very new feelings can make us all unpredictable, irrational, angry and confused. Being sad can really hurt.
- We all experience different feelings at different times and for different lengths of time. There is no one right way to grieve. All feelings are normal.
- Try activities aimed at anger direction, e.g. football, shouting games etc.

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Not to feel that it is their fault - Help children to talk about difficult memories. Children may blame themselves for what has happened.

**School support** - Keep schools informed, help them to understand what would most help you all as a family. Children may lose concentration at school or alternatively work extra hard for a while.

**Groups of other bereaved children** - Children can benefit enormously from meeting other bereaved children. Chums and Barney's workshops provide an opportunity for children to have fun as well, telling their story, sharing memories and talking about their difficult feelings.

**Routines** - Try to keep to your normal routine - it makes children feel safer. Keep them occupied, possibly with special tasks. Allow for some regression in behaviour, it is quite normal. However, remind your child that some behaviours are still not acceptable.

**Information** - Children need information about how and why the person died. Children's fantasies can be worse than reality. Avoid using terms like 'gone to sleep' or 'passed away' as children can find these confusing, even frightening.

**Encourage them to ask questions** - Be prepared to answer them openly, however difficult you find them e.g. what happens to the body? Will it smell? Will the worms eat it if we bury it?

**Fun** - Remember it's o.k. to laugh. Keep children occupied, possibly with special outings and activities. Children's grief has been compared to jumping in and out of puddles. One moment they are in the puddle, upset, asking questions and seeking reassurance, the next they are out of the puddle ready to play again. Be prepared to jump in and out of the puddle with them. Keep information short and simple, appropriate to the child's age.

**Please be kind to yourself too.**