

Supporting Bereaved Children
and Young People During Early Years,
Primary, Secondary and Further Education



Prelude

Simon Says supports children and young people, in Hampshire, up to the age of 18 years who have experienced bereavement or are coping with the terminal illness of someone close.

For many children and young people it makes a huge difference when teachers and staff within their educational settings, have some understanding of the emotions and feelings they may suffer after a bereavement.

Simon Says has put together this pack to assist you in coping with a death within your setting's community. This might be the death of a child or young person, the death of a member of staff or the death of someone in a child/young person's family. We hope that the pack will give you added confidence when coping with such difficult issues.

Always be aware of your own feelings and emotions: you may also have been affected by events or by memories of past personal experiences. Remember that, for advice and support, Simon Says is here to help you.



Background to Simon Says

Simon Stanley was a 37 year old teacher from Southampton when he died from cancer. His wife Sally found there was no bereavement support locally for their two small children. Their experience led to the establishment in 2001 of Simon Says as a registered charity.

Research has shown that the Stanleys' experience is not unique and there is a wider need to provide resources and information to children, parents and professionals who work with children and young people. It is estimated that approximately 7,500 children¹ between 5 years and 16 years in Hampshire have a parent or sibling who dies.

¹Source: Child Bereavement Network

What does Simon Says offer?

The death of someone important can have a devastating effect on a child or young person. However, with appropriate support and information, children and young people can be helped to understand what has happened and can be helped to rebuild their lives.

Whether a death is sudden or expected, Simon Says works closely in practical and creative ways to support children and young people in Hampshire when an important person in their life has died or is dying. We do this by:

- Running a telephone help line (023 8064 7550).
- Offering support groups for children (up to 11 years).
- Offering support groups for young people (11years – 18 years).
- Providing written information and resources.
- Providing a befriending service.
- Recommending counsellors who specialise in child bereavement, if the need arises.
- Offering support, training and advice to schools and other professional services working with and supporting bereaved children and young people.

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Introduction

1 in 25 children in Britain has experienced, or will experience, bereavement of a parent or sibling.¹

It is likely therefore, that at some point you and your setting will be affected by a death in one way or another. The use of this book may be stimulated by news stories, TV programmes or the result of a family crisis charged with emotion.

The pack has drawn on real experiences from the children and young people who attend Simon Says Support Groups, from parents' experiences and from professionals working with these children and young people.

If you are concerned about discussing death with the children or young people in your setting, you are not alone. Death is an inescapable fact of life. We must deal with it and so must the children we care for; if we are to help them, we must let them know it is OK to talk about it.

We can help children and young people by providing needed information, comfort and understanding. This of course depends on the age and stage and experiences of the children and young people and it will depend on your own experiences, beliefs and feelings.

As you use this pack please be aware of your own feelings and emotions and find yourself support as you help children and young people through their grief.

You may be reading this booklet due to recent events in your setting but it may remind you of past experiences in your own life.

For further help and support please call Simon Says on 023 8064 7550.

¹Source: Winston's Wish

A charter for bereaved children and young people

Although each bereavement will be unique, bereaved children and young people have key needs:

1. **Enough Information** Bereaved children/young people need answers to their questions. They need information that clearly explains what has happened, why it happened and what will happen now.
2. **Being Involved** Bereaved children/young people should be asked if they want to help with important decisions that will affect them (such as planning the funeral, remembering anniversaries).
3. **Family Involvement** Support for bereaved children/young people should include their parent(s). It should respect each child's confidentiality.
4. **Meeting Others** Bereaved children/young people can be helped by meeting others who have had similar experiences.
5. **Telling the Story** Bereaved children/young people have the right to tell their story. This may be through drawings, letters or puppets. The stories can be heard, read and seen by people important to them.
6. **Expressing Feelings** Bereaved children/young people should feel comfortable showing all feelings that go with grief such as anger, sadness, guilt and anxiety. They may need help to find ways to do this.
7. **Not to Blame** Young bereaved children often feel they are to blame for the death. They may need help to understand this is not true!
8. **Established Routines** Bereaved children/young people should continue with interests and activities they have enjoyed if they choose.
9. **School Response** Bereaved children/young people can benefit from a positive response from school or college.
10. **Remembering** Bereaved children/young people have the right to remember the person who died for the rest of their lives. This may involve reliving memories so that the person becomes an integral part of the child's/young person's ongoing life story.

“A child can live through anything provided they are told the truth and allowed to share the natural feelings people have when they are suffering” Eda Le Shan.

Children's Understanding of death

Early Years

Babies and very young children do not understand death. They do, however, experience loss as a separation from someone they have made an attachment to. They will not have the language to share their feelings, but will react to it by searching, crying inconsolably or by withdrawing.

Babies and very young children are also affected by the emotional state of other important people around them. It is important for them to have normal routines, steady and loving environments, and continuity of care in order to thrive.

It is important for a child to grow with an understanding of the person who died and, as their language develops, they should express themselves and build their own story. It is important for adults to help the child build this story as an integral part of their history.

Foundation Stage

Children aged between 2 and 5 years think about death as reversible. Children think 'magical thoughts' and that people who have died can come back.

Children may be sure, in their minds that they caused the death by something they said or something they did and may also think that they can use words, thoughts and actions to bring the person back again.

Reassurance is very important. Children need to understand that it was not their fault. This may need to be repeated regularly.

Children need to be told the truth and the use of direct words will help them to grasp what has happened. Using words such as 'dead' and 'died' alongside a clear explanation about why the person died will help:

'Daddy has died. Daddy died when his car hit the tree.'

Behaviour may revert to that of a younger child. It is important to be tolerant of this behaviour and, in time, when family life has resumed some normality, it is likely to disappear.

Children of this age will often ask the same question over and over again: they are naturally curious and want to understand the world they live in. This is normal behaviour and a child's grief is no different – they want to make sense of their loss. Repeating the answer, honestly, at a level they will understand helps them. The repeated question does not mean the explanation is not good enough, it means they are trying to understand what happened. If they receive the same answer it will help, as well as giving the child the opportunity to draw, read books about death and dying and play games, role play and dressing up. This will help the child to express their feelings and share their worries. Children of this age are totally dependant on adults to regain their balance.

Key Stage 1

At primary school age, it is not uncommon for children to think of death as 'spooky'. They may think of zombie like figures or ghosts that come to get you. It is important that these concerns are discussed and worries acknowledged.

They do understand death is irreversible and something that will happen to every living thing but they may still be confused about it. Children are reassured if these concerns and confusions are talked through, so that they can learn to be in charge of such feelings.

Children are curious and will have issues about what a dead body looks like and they will ask questions about what happens to dead bodies after a person has died. This is all very normal and not at all unhealthy. They will benefit from honest and clear explanations, particularly about the person not needing food or being able to feel any more, as sometimes they worry that the dead person will get cold or hungry.

Children will often react by having 'somatic' complaints. Somatic complaints such as a sore tummy, headaches or just generally feeling unwell arise when unexpressed feelings and emotions lead to physical symptoms.

Key Stage 2

Junior school children are much more aware of the finality of death and the impact that death has on them and on others. Children of this age like to feel 'normal' and the 'same' as their peers. When someone close to them dies they feel different and this can lead to difficulties with interaction. At this age self esteem is very important and children may begin to think about the long term consequences of the loss of the relationship. They understand the loss they are feeling in the present but also the other losses they may experience in their life time. They realise important milestones and occasions in their lives will not be shared with the person who has died.

Children of this age are also showing signs of mood swings; ups and downs and emotional releases such as anger and distress are not uncommon. They are beginning to move away from family dependence and they start to form important relationships with others. When a death of someone important occurs they may feel destabilised and revert back to dependence on the family to make them feel safe again.

Children of this age will benefit from adult willingness to listen, and reassurance that their feelings and outbursts are normal and understandable.

Secondary and Further Education

At this age, young people develop their idea of who they are and what is important to them. Acceptance by friends and peer groups is increasingly important. They are experiencing changes to their bodies, and are aware of their future and the possibilities for themselves. They are the most likely group to test boundaries and take risks.

Young people who have had someone important die may struggle to think about long term plans as they question the point and ask 'why bother?'

They may find themselves 'busy' with activities, so they don't have time to reflect and keep intense feelings under cover. This way they won't 'lose control' of their feelings.

It is important to help a young person share those feelings by reminding them that you are there for them but if they would prefer another trusted adult or friend to talk to then you will help them find that person. They are still developing emotionally and although showing strong signs of adulthood, they are not ready for adult responsibilities, even though they may think they are an adult.

Young people still need boundaries and limitations and it is important for these to be enforced to show reassurance, love and security.

Reactions to bereavement

Bereavement is something that will happen to all of us and the extent felt will depend on the relationship that was had with the person who has died.

Grief is a distressing and overwhelming experience that affects us all, emotionally, physically, behaviorally and spiritually.

Reactions are very individual which can cause huge problems within families and even within society.

Reactions may not occur immediately, and will depend on a number of factors:

Factors affecting the way children grieve:

- age, stage of development and understanding of life and death.
- relationship with the person who has died.
- previous experience of illness, loss and death.
- manner of death: long illness, suicide, accident.
- how and what they were told of the death - it is crucial that children are told the truth in order to come to terms with the death and move forward.
- availability of support networks- at home and at school.
- religious beliefs and practices.
- ethnic and cultural background- specific belief system/rituals.

Grief cycle:

The bereaved can experience the stages of the grief cycle in any order, more than once and sometimes up to and over a period of 2 years.

There is no set time to grieve but, within 2 years, a way forward should be identified, depending on the support that has been available.

The seven stages of the grief cycle:

1. Shock and denial - reaction to learning of the loss with numbed disbelief. There may be denial that the loss is reality in order to avoid the pain. The brain provides emotional protection from being overwhelmed all at once and will filter information through in stages which may last over a period of weeks.
2. Pain and guilt - as the shock wears off, it is replaced with unbelievable pain, stress, anger and unhappiness. Sometimes emotions may feel out of control and feelings which may never have been experienced before can be displayed both physically and mentally. It is important to work through this pain. It is necessary to understand it is normal and part of a process to work through in order to re-balance life. If feelings are blocked and masked or alcohol or drugs are used to 'escape', grief is just covered and is likely to resurface, even years later.
3. Anger and bargaining - frustration gives way to anger, it is normal to want to lash out and the personality may completely change around this period. Violence needs to be controlled or the consequences of actions may add to the grief. This is common within young people who can't control their anger within class and who will need additional support.
4. Depression, reflection, loneliness, exhaustion, helplessness, regret, lowered self esteem. Children and young people may feel all these when others think they should be getting on with their life. A long period of sad reflection may overtake them. They may want to isolate themselves to reflect on things they did with the person who died and to focus on memories. Allow them time to talk through their emotions and to write them down.
5. The upward turn - Life will seem calmer and start to become more organized. The physical and mental symptoms lessen and energy will be renewed.
6. Reconstruction and working through - As the child/young person becomes more functional again, and is less distracted they can concentrate more and seek solutions to problems. They begin adapting to life without the person who has died whilst maintaining their own level of support.
7. Acceptance and Hope - The child/young person will learn to accept the situation and actually plan for the future. Eventually they will be able to think of the person without wrenching pain. Life will never be the same but there will be a new strength to find joy from living again.

How Bereavement Can Affect Behaviour

When children are trying to come to terms with the death of someone important, it can be hard to know how to deal with difficult behaviour.

What is normal?

It is normal for children and young people to be particularly good and particularly difficult in the days, weeks and months after the death of someone who was important to them. They may become quiet and withdrawn, or they may become extrovert and display unacceptable behaviour. They may be kind or they may seem furious all the time, behaving as though it is someone else's fault. They may cling to you or they may ignore you, or, most commonly, they may do both.

What helps?

- **Remembering that children and young people grieve too**

Although children experience the turmoil, pain and confusion that happens when someone important dies. They are able to 'puddle jump', meaning that one moment they are feeling very upset and the next they are off playing and laughing – until they encounter the next puddle.

- **Keeping a balance**

Try to keep a balance between keeping things almost as they were before – if you never let the children do 'x' or 'y', don't let them do it now (unless there is a good reason and acknowledging that things have changed). It is important to understand that they are struggling to manage all sorts of complicated feelings and worries, so they may get distracted, short tempered, angry, or aggressive. You won't want to let them hurt themselves or anyone else, so you will want to try to contain that behaviour while showing them that you understand why it is happening.

- **Keep explaining**

Try to ensure that they understand as fully as they can what happened and what is going to happen. When children worry it often is displayed by difficult behaviour. Check that they have an understanding of the facts; their imagination can be worse than the facts, and keep checking that they are fully aware and understand what has happened and what is happening currently.

- **Involving them**

Helping children/young people to anticipate what will happen and preparing them for difficult or possibly upsetting events means that they can be part of them: Sharing in what happens can help them.

- **Keep talking**

Be willing to talk about the person who died, or listen to the child talk. Show interest in their story or memory.

Supporting children and young people in your setting

Supporting a child or young person following a family member's death.

The death of a family member can have a profound effect on a child or young person in their setting or school. Staff, both teaching and non-teaching are not expected to be experts on bereavement but it helps if they show they care by listening to the child or young person, giving time for them to talk and express their feelings and by trying to show some understanding of how they may be feeling.

Perhaps the most common experience for professionals in education is that of a child or young person experiencing the death of a parent. Each child and young person will need different support. Even children from the same family will not require the same support. Remember that relationships are unique. The older brother will have had a different relationship with dad than the younger or middle brother or sister.

The death of a family member is often a shocking experience even if the person has suffered a long term illness. Having some expectation of the death doesn't mean the child or young person is ready, or prepared for the death.

Children and young people may stay off school for a few days after the death. School and routine may seem impossible for them and for their family but, it may be that routine and 'normality' is just what the child or young person needs. It may be what the family needs to reflect and to organise.

You will need to find out what it is the family want to do. A phone call home or even a visit to the home can be a great way to determine this and will let the family know that you care.

Simon Says children and young people often tell us 'no one cares'. A parent at a Support group at Simon Says shared his story and explained that at no point during his wife's illness, death or after the funeral did the Head Teacher acknowledge the family or the child or what was happening to them. He felt the school did not care. A simple letter, phone call or home visit would have made such a difference.

Letting other staff and students know.

How you pass on this information to others is very important. Before the child or young person returns have a discussion about what it is they want or need. Do they want you to tell the class, just their close friends, or the whole school or setting? Do they want to be with you when the news is shared or do they want it shared before they return? Remember children and young people are great observers. They will read messages from faces and body language. Communication at this point is not just about what we say but also about what we do not say.

It is usually best that their peers are told as they are likely to find out from others and if you can control the manner in which the news is shared, it will be better than rumour and inappropriate reporting. This is critical if the death has been due to accident, suicide or murder and has been in the public eye or reported in the news.

A death in an early years or school community (a pupil or staff member)

When the death of a pupil or member of staff occurs within an early years or school community there is often a profound sense of shock - even if the death is expected. For this reason it is important to have already thought through a plan of action as it is sometimes difficult to think clearly at a time of crisis. It is advisable that, with the consent of the family, accurate, factual information is shared with staff and pupils as soon as possible to avoid rumour or gossip circulating. You may find the following guidance helpful when considering how to respond to the death of a pupil or member of staff in your school community.

Immediate Actions

- Identify the member of staff (usually the Headteacher or Manager) who will be the initial contact for the bereaved family. This might change as time goes on.
- Initiate contact to offer the collective sympathy of the setting and to ascertain details of what has happened and what can be told to the rest of the setting. Some families may not want all facts known, but it is important to point out that information gets around by other sources and can be more distressing in the long run if not accurate.
- Contact those staff and governors who need to be told immediately and then arrange a meeting to inform all other members of staff. Don't forget to let ancillary/administrative staff know what has happened and any plans.
- Consider who else might be available for staff/child/young person support e.g. school nurse, counsellor, or Simon Says.
- Be aware of the impact on some staff for whom the news may have special significance e.g. activating memories of own losses, close relationship with the child/young person or member of staff.
- Ensure staff are aware of what support is available to them and where possible arrange for class cover if staff are unable to undertake their normal duties.

- Identify who will liaise with LA/Governors/press/parents/agencies in the event of a major incident or death due to contagious illness e.g. meningitis (refer to LA - Emergency Planning Guidance or your Critical Incident Plan).
- Agree what information will be given to the rest of the setting, by whom and in what manner. In larger settings, it can sometimes help to write a short statement for staff to read out to their classes to ensure consistency.
- Where possible, with the family's consent, a letter should be sent home explaining what has happened, what the children/young people have been told and what support is available in the setting for those who need it.
- Send/take flowers, cards on behalf of the setting – this can be not only an expression of support for the family but an acknowledgement of how much the person was valued.

Breaking news of the death to children/young people and making an action plan

- This is often best done as soon as possible in class or tutor groups where the teacher knows the children/young people and can explain and follow up what happened in the most sensitive way. If appropriate, a whole school assembly can be held to demonstrate the sense of shared loss within the school community.
- What has happened should be told simply and factually – don't stray into conjecture. You should use clear, correct language and terminology, avoiding euphemisms such as “lost” and “passed away” which might confuse younger children.
(see information on ‘Breaking the News’ page 14 and ‘A principal’s story page 32).
- Time should be allowed for children/young people to ask questions and express feelings. Reactions will vary – all should be acknowledged and children/young people should be helped to understand grief is a normal response to loss.
- It is helpful if you can have someone else in the room with you to support you and those children/young people particularly affected by the news. Acknowledge how the news has affected you if you wish to.

- Initially it may be necessary to waive timetable expectations for those children/young people badly affected by the news – time to be together as a group with support, talking, remembering, making cards, creating memory books or boxes which could be added to over the coming days, may be most helpful for some – others will want the routine of school to continue. If possible, offer choice.
- Be aware of the impact on key friendship groups – these may span different classes.
- Let children/young people know what support (people/places) will be available and how to access them.
- Begin to explore what can be done to support each other/the family of the person who died.
- Some settings find it helps to create a “memory board” on which staff and children/young people can post messages and memories of the person who died – set up in a quiet area where people can reflect and remember- can be quite healing. The memories can be collected later and put in a book for the family if appropriate – perhaps at an assembly or memorial event. See further ideas in this booklet or contact Simon Says.
- Arrange for staff and children/young people who wish to, to visit or send cards, flowers, drawings etc. to the bereaved family - this will send a message of support to the family and also help children/young people to express their emotions and feel they are doing something positive.
- Consider who should go to the funeral and how this should be organised. Consult with the family. For those who cannot attend and would like to, is it possible to mark the occasion in school in some way – e.g. light a candle, listen to music, share memories, silent reflection.
- This is a difficult time for children/young people and staff alike, so having given support to the children/young people it is important that the staff should feel supported too. It is often helpful for staff to be offered the opportunity to meet up at the end of the day, debrief and give and receive support from each other – tea and cake always helps! If people feel nurtured themselves; they are more able to nurture others. (See section on “Looking After You” page 48).

Ongoing Actions

- Be prepared to go over the same information several times with children/young people as bad news is sometimes hard to take in first time around. Ensure consistency of explanation among staff. Questions from children/young people may continue long after the death occurred.
- Be aware of any changes in behaviour or attitude over time which may indicate that someone is more affected by the death than they may be able to say. Ask them what would help.
- Discuss with family/staff/children/young people the development of a memorial if appropriate – this can be in the form of something practical like a bench or tree, or can take the form of an

annual fundraising event, cup or trophy reflecting the pupil or staff member's particular interest.

- Use books/activities to help pupils explore feelings and ideas about death.
(see list of books/website addresses at end of this booklet).
- Consider the need for a whole school assembly/memorial service.
(See section on "Remembering - assemblies and other ideas" page 34).
- Remember to mark the anniversary of the death in some way, if appropriate.

A death within an early years or school community can have a large effect on the setting as a whole. When discussing a personal bereavement with one child/young person or family, one is discreet and sensitive to their individual needs. Dealing with a death which will affect many children and young people, staff and parents needs to be 'managed' clearly and carefully.

The following ideas are specifically designed to be used when a whole setting is affected by a death of a child or young person or a member of staff or indeed a significant person in the community. The assembly ideas detail how to break the news of a death, and how that person who has died can be remembered by the whole setting.

Lesson ideas can be found on the Simon Says website should you feel the setting needs to explore the issues of death and their reactions to it.

Children and young people will benefit greatly from being able to take part in group activities so they can place their feelings in context and realise that their feelings, although alien to them, are totally normal.

Breaking the News

It is important to acknowledge that this is a serious assembly and that there will be time at the end for discussion back in class groups.

If a student or staff member has died, it will probably already be the subject of much speculation. You may wish to use this as a starting point, saying something like:

"Many of you may have heard a story in the playground or in the

newspapers about Mr Nichols. There are many different stories circulating that I have heard. Some of these stories are based on fact, others are totally made up. What I want to do right now, is to tell you all the truth, and as much of the story as I know. There may be other things you want to know, but that may not be possible right now, but we will try not to exclude you from anything that you do need to know.”

“I am sorry to say that over the weekend Mr Nichols died.”

“For some of you that may come as a real shock, and hearing those words is really difficult. For others you may feel that you already knew that. I am simply going to wait for a moment while we all think for a moment and compose our thoughts. Then I am going to tell you how he died, and what we are going to do to remember him.”

After this it might be useful to pause for a moment before giving the children/young people more information. Children/young people react better when they all know the information. This also makes it less easy to pass on, and create rumours.

Pupils will also want to know all about the funeral arrangements, what will happen to his class, will they be able to do anything to mark the occasion, and if there is any way that they can help.

When the child or young person returns to the setting they may want to get straight back into friends, work and routine. They will have been surrounded by grieving family members and often a chaotic household of visitors. School may be their break from that.

An Action Plan:

1. Identify a member of the team who will be the main contact point for the child/young person and their family.
2. Ensure regular contact is maintained with the child/young person and the family. This helps inform you about how they are coping and what support they may need now and in the future. You will also identify the child/young person’s concerns and worries and be able to help them with coping strategies.
3. If the child or young person stays at home, remember them. Have cards and messages sent to them from appropriate people. This will give the other children the opportunity to discuss their own concerns or experiences with the family and help them to feel they are doing something positive to support the child or young person. The bereavement may remind others of their own experiences and you need to be prepared to support them. You may find out information about a child in your class that you didn’t know before. Be ready to listen.

4. Before the child returns ensure all staff are aware of the bereavement and the possible affects on the child's/young person's, behaviour and learning so that appropriate care and support can be given. Remember bereaved children and young people have 'physical' illnesses, such as headaches, tummy aches and feeling sick, as well as mental sadness including lack of concentration, feeling tired, disorganisation, anger and frustration. Monitor how things are going on their return and maintain communication with all staff involved.

Maintain normal rules and expectations of behaviour. This is important for the children and young people within the setting and the child/young person who has been bereaved. Rules and expectations are all part of the 'normal' routine and will help to make the child or young person feel secure. Remember the impact of bereavement on the whole family when giving sanctions and the impact the sanctions may have on the whole family.

Consider 'time out' strategies that suit the child or young person and the setting. Time out cards, signals or signs can help the child exit the room quickly if they are feeling vulnerable or emotional. Make sure the child or young person has a safe place to go to.

Remember, there is no set pattern or time limit to grief – It is a unique experience and the process a lifelong one. At different ages, and during new or transitional times, the child or young person will have new questions requiring answers.

It is not unusual for bereaved pupils to take time off school during the early stages of their bereavement. For some, the need to be with their families will be strong, and indeed they may suffer from separation anxiety when the time comes for a return to school. For others the familiarity, stability and routines of school life may prompt an early return. Time away from school will vary from pupil to pupil but when they do return, they may have a number of concerns – you will only know what these are and how they might be resolved if you ask. Some of the more common concerns might be:

- How will staff and peers react– who has been told, what do they know, what will be said, how much will I have to say to people?

Meet with the child or young person to welcome them back, acknowledge the death and talk through their concerns. Saying

something simple like “I am sorry to hear that your dad died – sometimes it helps to talk about it and if so, who would you like to be there for you?” is usually much appreciated by the child/young person. If possible offer the child/young person choices about how things should be handled in school and what support would be helpful. Let staff and classmates know how the child/young person wants to be received and supported.

- **Fear of sudden emotional outbursts – anger, distress, panic.**

Normalise grief reactions and giving the child/young person choices about what strategies will help them to cope in the classroom e.g. able to leave lessons without fuss – “exit card” system, where they can go, who they can talk to.

- **Fear if they realise they cannot remember what the deceased person looks like.**

A laminated photo of the deceased person may give enormous comfort when the visual image begins to disappear. A special teddy or other memento will often give great comfort in times of distress and upset. They may also want to show this when talking about the person who died.

It should be stressed that whatever helps the child, within reason, should be encouraged.

- **Fear of being behind with work and unable to catch up.**

Clarify with other staff what is essential to accomplish and what can be left, and offering appropriate help to achieve what needs to be done.

- **Inability to concentrate and feel motivated or to sit still**

Reassure the child/young person that this lack of motivation and concentration is normal and will pass. Offer shorter more manageable tasks, give encouragement for achievements, and minimise difficulties.

- **Family grief impacting on normal family functioning**

Disrupted routines, sporadic meals, chaotic bedtimes are possible reasons why a child/young person is inadequately prepared for school, does not have the necessary equipment, and may be tired or hungry.

Talk with the child/young person to ascertain where areas of difficulty lie and try and work out strategies with them and their family to help keep things on an even keel in school. Identify their strengths and help them build on them.

- **Unable to meet homework/project deadlines because of altered responsibilities within the family and home.**

Help the child/young person work out and meet priorities. Be flexible where possible and offer additional support where needed.

- **Forthcoming examinations**

Explain the process of notifying examination boards and the possible outcomes.

Ongoing check list for a child/young person returning to a setting

If the child/young person thinks it would be helpful, and friends agree, establish a peer support network – ensuring that those helping are given appropriate support themselves, or seek help outside, for example; Simon Says Support Group.

- Make a note of significant dates which might affect the pupil, e.g. date of death, birthdays, Christmas, anniversaries. Make sure other members of staff are aware of these and the possible reactions from the child/young person. Don't be afraid to acknowledge these potentially difficult times with the child/young person e.g. "I know Christmas is coming up and it might feel a very different and difficult time for you all this year without your Dad – so don't forget, if it helps to talk you can always come and see me".
- Consider possible reactions to certain class/assembly topics. Discuss how these difficulties might best be managed with the child/young person e.g. if making Mothers/Fathers day cards do ask the child/young person if they wish to be included in the activity. Very often the answer is 'yes' as they still want to remember the parent who has died.
- Recognise a child's/young person's own resources and help them identify and build on their strengths.
- Look out for any indication of isolation, bullying or difficulties in the playground – bereaved children/young people are often seen as vulnerable and may become a target for others.
- Consider using books/activities to help explore feelings and ideas about death as part of the normal school curriculum (call Simon Says for further advice).
- Be alert to changes in behaviour – these may be an indication that the child/young person is more affected by their bereavement than they are able or willing to say. Reactions may present themselves months or years after the event, and it may be difficult for staff and others to relate these to the bereavement.
- Notify examination boards of the impact of the bereavement if public exams are due.
- Follow up absences as absence could indicate bereavement as associated problems at home or school.
- Finally just being yourself, listening, caring and keeping familiar routines and behaviour boundaries in place can do much to help a grieving child/young person by promoting a sense of security.

Bereavement strategy for your setting

This guidance should assist your setting in developing a strategy to respond to a death of a child or young person within the setting, a family member or a member of staff.

You should consider having a policy which can link to your critical incident plan.

The Policy can identify

1. That support will be provided to all staff children and young people.
2. Everyone will have the opportunity to express their feelings safely.
3. You may want to include details of specialist services, resources and further information for the professionals.
4. It should include the procedure to follow when a death has occurred. This could be the Simon Says action flow chart, see page 23.
5. Include number of health professionals, religious bodies and other specialist services such as Simon Says that could support you, your staff and the children and young people within the setting.

The important detail about any policy is that the setting takes ownership of it, understand it and review and update it regularly.

A) Informing Staff and Other Personnel of a Death within the Settings Community

A death can affect the setting's community in different ways and depends on:

- The role that the deceased person had within it.
- How well known the deceased was in the local community.
- Circumstances surrounding the death, particularly suicide or other violent deaths.

The experience of working with many settings affected by death has taught Simon Says that adults and children benefit from being kept informed of a death. Rumour and gossip can be very damaging and can lead to both young and old developing the attitude that the death is not a topic to talk about. Children and young people have a healthy curiosity and if they are not informed of the circumstances or feel they are unable to ask questions, their normal grief process can be obstructed.

The following guidelines may help when informing staff and other personnel:

- Arrange a staff meeting as soon as practicable. Ensure that absent staff are identified.
- Tell the story of what happened leading up to the death.
- Give a factual explanation of how the death occurred.
- Be prepared for obvious upset and feeling of anger/guilt. People may connect the incident to their own personal experience of bereavement, so feelings about past bereavements may need to be discussed. This is perfectly natural.
- To enable absent staff to feel part of a caring team, arrangements should be made to inform them over the telephone if a personal visit is impractical. Consider the relationship between the absent colleague and deceased.
- For a death that may attract media coverage (e.g. if the member of staff was a well known personality or died tragically), identify a nominated spokesperson (e.g. Chair, Principal, Manager, Headteacher) to provide a ‘news statement’ at an agreed time, as a way of dealing with media intrusion. Liaison with the individual’s family is essential.
- Try to establish a ‘protected’ telephone line to ensure free flow of accurate information to and from the setting/hospital if this is appropriate. (If you have one direct line, consider the loan of a mobile telephone). BT will provide an additional line if the situation requires one.
- With death in traumatic circumstances such as suicide or murder, consider requesting bereavement support services – Simon Says can advise/support.
- Arrange staff condolences with collaborative agreement if felt appropriate.
- Provide details of someone who can be available to talk things through with a member of staff, parent or child if they are finding the situation particularly hard. This person could advise the family of support services available if required.

- Nominate staff to prepare a letter to parents and carers (to be given after school) sharing the news.
- Arrange a staff meeting for the end of the working day and invite each person to recount his or her feelings and to describe what was good and bad about the day. Staff who will be alone that night could be identified and arrangements made for colleagues to contact them by phone.
- Speed and chaos may be a major factor on a day when a Critical Incident has happened – the speed and chaos meaning that constantly referring to plans and lists is not possible. DON'T WORRY! Be confident enough to go with your gut instinct. Remember that keeping people as informed as possible is always helpful, and don't bear all the responsibility yourself, share it round. Remember to find support for yourself.
- Trained and experienced practitioners are available on the Simon Says help line should you want to check out ideas during the following days, weeks and months ahead.

(B) Informing Children and Young People

People often think that children do not grieve, but even very young children will want to know what happened, how it happened, why it happened and perhaps most importantly of all, what happens next?

The following guidelines will help you to inform children of the death of a teacher or other member of staff:

- Identify those children who had a long-term and/or close relationship with the deceased to be told together as a separate group. Where possible inform all the pupils in the smallest group practicable. Class or tutor groups are ideal.
- Experience has shown that it is more beneficial if all pupils are informed. It is always a shock when a death occurs in a school even if it may have been anticipated. In the eyes of the pupils, teachers are part of the fittings and fixtures in school and are not expected to die. Children expect to live forever, and so a fellow pupil dying whilst still young enough to attend school can also feel quite shocking.
- Provide staff with guidelines on how to inform children. For example:
 - i). “I’ve got some really sad news to tell you today that might upset you. I know most of you will have heard of cancer, and know that sometimes people with cancer get better, but other times people die from it. Mrs Smith, the Geography teacher and Year 11 tutor, has been ill with cancer for a long time. I have to tell you that Mrs Smith died yesterday in hospital.”

ii). “Sometimes people have accidents at work, at home, at school or on the road. People may be hurt or injured in the accident and they may have to go to hospital for treatment. Sadly, there are some accidents that cause people to die. I have some really sad news to tell you that might upset you. Yesterday Stephen, who is in Year 4, was in an accident and he was so badly injured that he died.”

- Refer to name naturally, “Mrs Smith died from cancer”.
- Children and young people will appreciate time to verbalise their feelings and fears. Allow space for “If only’s” to be acknowledged.
- Discussion - allow pupils to share their own experiences of death, e.g. “When my pet/my Gran died”, etc.
- Be honest about your own feelings and experiences, and talk honestly about the relationship that you had with the person.
- Answer pupil’s questions factually. Avoid using euphemisms like ‘passed away’, or ‘lost’ etc. Use the words dead, died and death to avoid confusion for children.
- Be prepared for children to say or do the unexpected, experience has shown some responses or apparent lack of response may be upsetting for adults. No apparent response does not mean that a child does not care.
- End up discussion on a positive note - not all people who are ill or have accidents die - many get better. Consider a prayer to remember the deceased and their family. Perhaps co-ordinate an assembly to end discussion.
- Do pupils want to arrange for representatives to attend the funeral? How will this be managed?
- Try to identify any key answers that you may need to prepare, e.g. the facts about an illness, or dates which may be relevant to the death such as end of school year and changing class or schools.

Bereavement strategy for your setting

The Family share the bereavement story with you.



Discuss as a team the tasks required and who is best to complete them.



Senior member of the team to send card/ letter of condolence.



Appointed person from the setting to discuss with the family and child or young person who they want their story shared with others.



Inform others – staff, families, children and young people of the setting as agreed with the bereaved family , child and young person.



Appointed person to be point of contact for family – discuss funeral arrangements.



Appointed person arrange to see child or young person at home or in the setting to assess their needs and level of support required at this time.



Appointed person liaise with child or young person and support their return to the setting.



Appointed person ensure significant dates and events for the child or young person are recorded and shared with all staff for future reference (Birthdays, anniversaries).



Appointed person continues to assess the needs of the child or young person. Observation, discussion with significant people, including the child or young person regarding their concerns or worries, and outside agencies if required.



Ensure friendships are secure as peer support can be very important.



Continue regular contact with the family – show you still care about them and their child or young person.



Ensure information is passed throughout the setting, particularly at transitional periods and if required to other setting.

Remember

Grief will last a life time and can surface throughout with new questions and many reflections.

Supporting bereaved children (0 – 10 years)

The early years of a child's life are critical for learning, developing and achieving. The development of a child can be affected by the death of a significant person.

Children of this age will feel loss and grieve but not as an adult would.

Attachment theory is critical at this point. Bowlby suggests a child will form an attachment to their main carer and this will determine the development of the child. Early experiences in childhood have an important influence on development and behaviour later in life.

Bereavement can lead to reactions of irritability, erratic eating, sleeping and crying. From the ages of 6 months to around 2 years children, may also search for the person who has died and suffer separation anxiety, withdrawn behaviours, apathy and loss of interest in normally enjoyable day to day activities.

From 2 years to around 5 years children are still unable to grasp the permanence of separation and the death of a significant person may start to undermine their security and sense of the world being a reliable place. Children will have to cope with reactions from peers, as well as their own feelings.

Understanding each child and their family as unique, with different needs and concerns is particularly important at this time. Children's development is overlapping. This overlap emphasises the fact that there can be big differences between the developments of children of similar ages. At the same time age can be a cue, when taken with all other factors, to indicate that development may be atypical and that a child may need extra support, particularly at this sad time.

Young children will have varied communication skills. They may not therefore have the language to describe how they are feeling or what they are thinking. We need to help them by providing a way for that communication to occur, for instance a Picture Exchange system or sign language.

No two cases will be the same - the person who died will have had a different relationship with each member of the family and their friends. You should treat them as individuals at this time, just as you would during any other time of the day within your setting. Parent/carer partnership is

vital to gain the knowledge you need to support the child within your setting. You should discuss the details of the death, the language being used around the child, and what is happening at home or at the place the child is spending most of their time (as this could vary due to the illness or death). Consistency of the ‘story’ being told is important for children. The adult or carer’s responses will provide the child with examples of behaviour. Being aware of the adult’s grief and concerns will help you to understand the child’s behaviours or reactions. Cultural backgrounds, faith and traditions will become apparent at this point.

The Help you can offer

Consistency is important at this age and the child’s given Key Worker has a key role to play during ‘normal’ days at the setting. During this time of grief, the Key Worker’s role is vital in providing normality, security and a sense of belonging for the child.

The specialist input you can provide needs to be offered to the child:

- Pay close attention – observing, listening and talking.
- Reassure the child. They may be thinking it is some way their fault the person has died.
- Provide positive emotional support and reinforce that what they are feeling or thinking is normal and expected.
- Acknowledge the child’s expressed feelings and behaviours, both positive and negative. This will reassure the child that you will still care for them in the same manner. Giving permission to show these feelings is important.
- Time and encouragement. Offering 1-1 time and support as well as group time will give opportunity and ‘permission’ for children to express how they are feeling or what they are thinking.
- You may feel incredibly sorry for the child in your care; however, children need boundaries and limits to make them feel secure and ‘normal’.
- BUT consider your expectations for the child. They may not be ready to move forward, and may instead show signs of regression, (for example, bed wetting or wanting a dummy or bottle when they have moved away from them).

Be aware of, and prepared for, individual reactions at any point – these may include:

- Bouts of violence.
- Emotional outburst.
- Not eating.

- Not sleeping (or sleep disturbance).
- Emotional withdrawal.
- Regression to a younger age or stage of development.
- Physical illnesses such as stomach ache.

You can help a child express their feelings through planned and un-planned activities using play, drawing, creativity, play dough, role play, puppets or personal dolls and the opportunity for expressing feelings during physical activity.

Physical activity often leads to some of those angry feelings being released in a positive manner.

Communication with the adult or main carer will help you

- Understand what is happening at home.
- Provide the adult with time and support, in turn supporting the child.
- Achieve consistency of ‘the story’.
- Achieve consistency of the language used (Daddy is in heaven, Daddy is a Star, Daddy is under the ground) - You should not use the term ‘gone to sleep’ as this may cause distress for the child at bed time or when another member of their family has a sleep.

Supporting bereaved young people (11 – 18 years)

Supporting a young person after the death of a significant person is not so different from supporting a child, except that some times the young person feels like the adult. This is a significant event in a young person's life and we need to acknowledge it. Just saying something like 'I am very sorry to hear your father has died' is important. It helps the young person to know that you are aware of the death.

10 things young people want from the support they are given:

- 1 Adequate and honest information.
- 2 Fear and anxieties addressed.
- 3 Reassurance they are not to blame.
- 4 Careful listening and watching.
- 5 Validation of their feelings.
- 6 Help with overwhelming feelings.
- 7 Involvement and inclusion.
- 8 Continued routine activities.
- 9 Modelled grief behaviour (learned and copied from adults).
- 10 Opportunities to remember.

Adolescence is a time of rapid growth and change. Mood swings, angry outbursts, sullenness, risk taking and other challenging behaviour are all a normal part of being a teenager.

- Young people often ‘bottle up’ their emotions, thinking it is important to ‘be strong’. It is important to keep an eye out for this reaction, and to identify a place/person for them to be able to talk it through with, as this perception of coping, can be very harmful in the longer term if not picked up.
- Most grieving young people can be helped by friends and family listening, paying attention to them and respecting their feelings.
- Many bereaved young people benefit from meeting others who have been bereaved to share their experience. This could be done by attending a Simon Says young peoples support group.
- If grief continues to overwhelm the young person, or they remain unable to cope with day-to-day life, display suicidal tendencies or their behaviour is causing danger to themselves or others, then contact with a counsellor is advisable. Simon Says can help to support these young people and will be able to assist in finding suitable counselling to support their needs.
- Bereavement following a suicide, murder or other traumatic death may be particularly difficult to cope with.
- If a young person’s home situation is particularly chaotic or dysfunctional, this can be another indicator that more in depth help is required.
- Sources of help will include the GP, a specialist bereavement service such as Simon Says, a family social worker or a school counsellor.

What helps bereaved teenagers talk?

Everyone finds it easier to talk to someone they feel comfortable with, in a reasonably private setting and when there is plenty of time. However, many feel isolated and/or unable to trust and unable to talk at all.

You cannot make a teenager talk about their grief if they do not want to, and they may resent being made to feel under pressure.

There are many ways to express grief apart from talking eg playing music, writing, sharing on the internet or doing something that is a reminder of the person who has died.

Supporting adolescents

Sometimes it can be difficult to relate to young people and we forget what it is like to be a teenager and what a confusing time it can be. When someone close dies, this can often accentuate the feelings of confusion and anxiety that already exist.

Adolescents in the grief process.

Three of the most common strongest and unpleasant feelings are stress, unhappiness and anger and detailed below are some of their typical symptoms.

Stress:

- Feeling sick.
- Butterflies in the stomach.
- Shortness of breath.
- Sweating.
- Legs feeling heavy or like jelly.
- Going red in the face.
- Feeling light headed.
- Fainting.
- Aching muscles.
- Your mind goes blank.
- Difficulty in making decisions.

Anger:

- Shouting, yelling and screaming.
- Swearing and threatening.
- Throwing things.
- Breaking things.
- Slamming doors.
- Hitting, kicking, fighting.
- Wanting to hurt someone.

Unhappiness:

- Regularly tearful.
- Crying for no clear reason or over small things.
- Waking up early in the morning.
- Having difficulty in falling asleep at night.
- Feeling constantly tired and lacking in energy.
- Losing appetite or eating more
- Difficulty in concentrating.
- Losing interest in things previously enjoyed.
- Going out less often.
- Apathy.

10 tips to support adolescents through bereavement

1. Listen.
2. Don't take the experience away from the individual by saying 'I know how you feel'; you don't. Working alongside the individual needs is vital.
3. Normalise their feelings; whatever they feel is OK.
4. Acknowledge it is OK to feel 20 different emotions in one day; 'you are not going mad!'
5. The importance of seeking and maintaining support from professionals/support groups where you can be yourself.

6. Mention the person's name.
7. Be prepared for the person to repeat themselves often with the same detail; this is a normal way to process their grief.
8. Adolescents will want to feel normal; school can play an important part of maintaining this normal structure where they can feel safe.
9. Allow 'time out' cards if a student feels they need to leave the class.
10. Answer questions truthfully; involvement.

Self Awareness Strategies for Adolescents going through a Bereavement

Suggest that young people complete the following statements to explore their personal support system:

1. If I am feeling stressed I would contact:-
2. If I need a laugh I would contact:-
3. If I need to talk seriously about myself I would contact: -
4. The person I can speak to most openly in my family is my:-
5. The following activities help me to unwind after a busy day:-
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
 - d)

Comments by bereaved teenagers attending Simon Says support groups

What has been helpful:

- writing a journal.
- friends:
 - who listen no matter what;
 - who don't pretend to understand;
 - who knew the person who died;
 - who have been in a similar situation;
 - who are also grieving.
- talking to someone who knows about suicide.
- people making time for me.
- rituals like memorial services.
- playing their favourite song.
- drawing a picture of the person.
- cards from friends and friends calling in.
- spending time alone in my room.
- listening to music.
- student health service.
- knowing it is OK to cry.

What has been Unhelpful:

- study and school work pressure.
- friends who don't understand or who are hypocritical, saying they understand when you know they don't.
- teachers thinking they understand, being nosy, putting pressure on you, being insensitive.
- people asking questions, demanding answers when you don't feel like talking, saying 'snap out of it', spreading rumours, always bringing it up, putting their foot in it.
- parents saying you shouldn't cry.

What you would have liked:

- parents to chill out.
- people not being scared to mention the person's name and talk about them.

What has been the most difficult:

- being expected to be 'back to normal' after a certain time, for example 6 months.
- being where the person who died used to live and them not being there.
- going past the place where they died.
- selling and removing their clothing and possessions.
- not being able to talk about it because it happened a long time ago and so people don't mention it.
- blaming myself.
- not being able to cry at home.
- having to explain why I'm crying and not wanting to talk about it – so it's better not to cry.
- everyone supporting our parents and telling us to support them – what about us?
- not being told the facts – the truth being kept back.
- seeing parents cry.

A principal's story

One of the saddest things I ever have to deal with in my working life, as Principal of a large college, is the death of one of our students. A young person with so much potential, so much to look forward to and so much in front of them. Their death could be sudden or as a result of a long illness. Whatever the situation, they leave behind grieving parents, family and friends; fellow students, teachers and support staff. My role is to make sure that the college can provide help and support for those having to come to terms with their loss.

Each case needs to be managed in an individual way that reflects the unique circumstances but having had three student deaths in the course of a year I am sadly well versed in identifying the key factors you might need to consider.

The wishes of the parents and the family are paramount. Some parents will want to have direct contact with me, or a colleague they know well, and fully involve the college. This might be in making arrangements for the funeral or being involved in some way in the service. Some will want to maintain contact and will gain comfort in setting up some form of remembrance. We have special trees planted for some students or memorial prizes given each presentation evening. Making contact so soon after the death of child is never easy – but parents do appreciate that you care.

Siblings, close friends and fellow students are all going to be affected and this can often be their first experience of bereavement. Providing a supportive environment where they can share their grief, talk about the person they have lost and have some way of remembering them is important. We have a college flag that we lower to half mast as a mark of remembrance and respect and we hold a small ceremony where close friends and classmates can place flowers at the base of the flagpole. We held a whole college 2 minute silence in one particularly tragic circumstance, where a large proportion of students were aware and shaken by a death.

A quiet contemplative space and a memory book allow students and staff to take time to reflect on the person they have lost and share their memories. Some students may find it very difficult to express their feelings but might display behaviour that is out of character. Teachers and support staff need to be fully briefed so they are aware of what has happened and know how to support students who are grieving. And of course they themselves may need support if they were close to the student who has died. We have our own college counsellors that students and staff can access but we have brought in specialist bereavement counsellors if we think this is required.

There are very practical considerations such as notifying examination boards. I remember the sad job of withdrawing a student who had died just weeks before his final A level exams. He was on target to achieve straight As. The exam boards were very sensitive and awarded him his A levels posthumously. His parents found some comfort in having this recognition and very movingly came to collect his certificates at our presentation evening. The exam boards will also give special consideration to those students affected by grief, who may then underperform.

We had two instances where the local and national media became involved and that needs very careful and sensitive handling. Think about how any comments might be interpreted and presented – you are the guardian of how they might be represented.

There can be a real sense of drawing together as a community supporting each other in such sad circumstances. It is also important to remember that grief just doesn't end with the funeral. Marking and remembering someone's life can take many forms. A remembrance tree or quiet spot; a memorial award in the name of the person who has died; involvement with an associated charity can all provide an opportunity for the person who has died to still be a part of other lives and of the college community.

I do hope that your school or college does not suffer the loss of one of its students but thinking through how you would respond might enable your school or college to give valuable support to all those who would be affected. You cannot make such a death any less tragic but you can help those who have to live with the loss.

Di Roberts
Principal of Brockenhurst College

Remembering - assemblies and other ideas for dealing with bereavement

There are occasions when staff at a school may use a gathering such as an assembly to convey information about a death.

Here are some ideas which have been tried in educational settings and which have helped make the situation a little easier for the staff concerned. The assembly ideas are designed for those occasions when there has been a death within the educational community, not when an individual child/young person has experienced the death of a close relative.

Holding an assembly or memorial service

Bringing a whole school or part of a school community together to remember someone who has died can often be a very helpful, healing activity. It can be an act of remembrance and/or celebration which affirms the life and contribution to the school of the person who died and is often most successful when it is a joint activity between staff and pupils. Sometimes it helps to hold an initial service to acknowledge what has happened and share feelings about the loss, and then later to organise a commemorative event to celebrate the life of the person who has died. It can also be an acknowledged time for any pupil to remember anyone they wish to who has died.

Who should attend?

Basically anyone in the school community who wishes to, and, although they may not feel able to attend, many families appreciate being invited – or at least being informed that an event is taking place.

Who should be involved?

Very often the pupils themselves can come up with great ideas for celebrating or remembering the person who died – participating also gives them the feeling of doing something positive.

What to do

It might be best to hold the event before a break so that people have time to compose themselves before continuing the school day. This also means the day might end on a more “normal” note. If held at the end of the day, make sure people have time to compose themselves before going home. Whenever it is held make sure people know what support arrangements are available if needed.

Make sure you have a clear beginning, middle and end to the service and try and end on a positive note.

More ideas

- Light a candle.
- Incorporate the person’s favourite music/poetry/prose.
- Ask the pupils to compose a piece of poetry or prose or music.
- Make and display a collage of the person’s work/life in the school.
- Make a memory book/box of all the things people want to remember.
- Suggest the class create a “jar of memories”.
- Create a tribute or friendship tree – draw the outline of a tree and then offer people “leaves” on which to write their memories to be attached to the branches.
- Plant a tree/bulbs/shrub at the end of the event.
- Ask for suggestions about a lasting memorial (if appropriate).
- Suggest staff/ pupils organise a fundraising event in memory of the person who died.

Let people know how long the memory book will remain open - not everyone will be able to express their feelings immediately following a death but should be given time to make their responses.

People’s contributions can be displayed in school for a time and then offered to the family.

(see ‘Appendix 1’ page 58)

“Weep if you must, parting is hell
But life goes on, so sing as well”

(Joyce Grenfell)

Lesson Ideas / Group Activities

- Me and My Feelings.
- Times That I Felt.....
- Coffins and Customs.
- Musical Memories.
- What Does Dead Mean?

Me & My Feelings:

Being able to recognise and describe our feelings is an important part of growing up.

This session simply allows children/young people to express and communicate their feelings in an open and honest way. Following a death of someone they know they will have many mixed thoughts, feelings, emotions and memories.

Begin as a whole group by creating a huge mind map of all the different feelings, thoughts and emotions that they may have – prompt feelings that you know exist but which they may be too embarrassed to say in front of peers.

Main Activity:

Leave the mind map displayed. Ask each child/young person to work individually and write a poem, a short story, a diary article, a news report, or a rap about a memory that they have of the person who died and the way it makes them feel now.

Allow honesty. Some children/young people will have been close to the person who died and may be quite upset. Others may not have known them so well and so be struggling with guilt or shame about that now. It is fine for them to admit to this.

Ask each child/young person to read or perform his or her piece at the end of the session. It is important that they are all heard if they want to be and that their memories and thoughts are treated with respect.

Plenary:

Thank the children/young people, paying particular highlight to anyone who may have been exceptionally brave or honest. You may want to collect the work and bind it together into a book of memories and thoughts.

Times that I felt....

When different things happen to us, we feel different things. Ask the children/young people to think of a time that they were really happy. What were they doing at that time? Was it a special occasion? Now get the children/young people to think of some other emotions and again, times when they felt them.

Point out that some things, like getting presents on our birthday, can make us really happy. Other things, like someone dying, can make us really sad.

Materials Needed:

Packet of digestive biscuits, icing sugar, water, sweets.

Main Activity:

Give each one of the children/young people three biscuits, some icing and a selection of sweets. They are going to make three different faces. A face that describes how they feel today, a face that shows them when they are sad, and a face that they can decide for themselves.

They can use the biscuits as the face and choose sweets for the eyes, nose, mouth, hair, tears etc, which they stick on with little blobs of icing.

Plenary:

To finish, get each child/young person to show their biscuit faces and talk about the feelings that are represented and what it was that made them feel that way.

Coffins & Customs

When a death occurs within a school community it may be the first experience of death for many children/young people. In multi-ethnic areas it will also highlight the different cultural and religious practises that exist around the world. This may lead to many questions from children/young people.

Begin by asking children/young people to share any experiences they have had of funerals and customs surrounding burial and remembrance. Also ask if they are aware of any other practises around the world.

Main Activity

Split the class into groups and assign each group to a different religion, culture, custom or country. Ask them to research what followers of that religion/culture/custom/nationality believe about death, the afterlife and the way in which they conduct a funeral and the grieving period.

Each group is to present back to the rest, a summary of what they have found, detailing how it is similar and how it is different to experiences shared at the start of the session.

Children/young people should be aware of the various faiths and beliefs held by members of the group and understand how they might help an individual who holds those beliefs.

Plenary:

It is important that children/young people are aware of the many different practices, beliefs and customs that exist around the world, and that they grow to become tolerant of each of them. They should also begin to understand the reasons for these practices and realise how they might aid a grieving family.

Musical Memories

Begin by playing two very different types of music to the group. You could choose some heavy metal and an excerpt from Mozart for example. Play the pieces one at a time and ask the group to be aware of how the music makes them feel.

Main Activity:

Ask the group to think of, and share any times when a piece of music has been played alongside a very emotional moment for them. It may have been at a wedding, a funeral or a football match etc.

Give children/young people the task of compiling a list of the top tunes that mean something to them. The tunes must have a story behind them. They could be songs played on a first date, or Mum's favourite track to sing along to at karaoke, or a tune that reminds them of a specific holiday.

Ask each child/young person to write the song title down, and also the story of why that song is so special (it may be special for happy or difficult reasons).

Plenary:

Ask members of the group to share their tracks, and the stories behind them. If you wanted to make this activity last into another session, you could ask some children/young people to bring in the tracks that they have written about so that they can be played to the class as well as telling the memory that makes that tune so special.

What does 'dead' mean?

Ask children/young people what they think the word 'dead' means. You may have a storybook that you could read about a character dying, or you may like to ask if any of the children/young people have ever had a pet that has died. If so, get them to share their stories...maybe write the name of all the pets that have died up on the board.

Materials Needed:

Leaves, plants, insects, possibly a pet such as a hamster.

Main Activity

Display an object, for example an old dead leaf from a plant or a tree. Pass it round and ask children/young people to think of some words that they could use to describe it. Repeat this exercise for some dead insects; again asking children/young people to say how they know it is dead, and what it feels like.

Now bring out a live plant. What are the differences between this and the dead leaf? What do the children/young people notice? After doing this, bring out a live animal, this could be a butterfly, or hamster, or dog, something that is obviously alive. Make a list of all the characteristics of something that is alive, and something that is dead.

This may also be a good opportunity to bring into discussion different parts of the body such as the heart and the brain. What do they do? How might someone die if there is a problem with these organs?

Plenary:

It is important that children/young people begin to hear that once something or someone is dead, it can't come back to life. Also, that when someone has died, they no longer have any feelings. They may worry that a person who has been buried gets cold, or that if a family member is cremated, it will really hurt them.

Supporting children/young people who are coping with pre-bereavement

Even when a child/young person is living with a family member who is very ill, they will still want to attend nursery, school or college as it gives them a sense of stability and normality. They can come and forget what is happening at home for a while.

When with you at nursery, school or college, the child/young person may not be able to concentrate but they may want to attend. Some children and young people will not want to come to school at all - they may feel too anxious about what is happening at home and feel they may miss something important or they may feel they are needed at home.

It is important that you know what is happening at home so you can prepare the support that the child or young person may need.

Children and young people can become deeply affected by the serious illness or terminal illness of a family member. Children and young people need to feel involved. Their families are already under great stress and often the child or young person is cared for by others. They need to be prepared for the journey ahead. Pre-bereavement support is important and the same rules apply as to bereavement.

1. Honest information.
2. Time to listen and share worries and concerns.
3. Support.

This will help them feel strong and confident enough to share the feelings throughout.

Some children become young carers and they do not want to give up their home responsibilities. You should try to understand this, while at the same time offering support for the child or young person enabling them to achieve some normality.

Supporting a pupil with a life limiting illness

You may be supporting a child or young person who themselves has a life limiting illness. Supporting them, their family and the settings community can be challenging and stressful.

But sharing this journey can also be rewarding and enriching for the community.

Many children/young people with a life limiting illness will want to continue to attend the setting for as long as they can. Among other things, this enables them to have some normality in their lives and maintains friendships.

Routines such as attending school give the child or the young person a sense of achievement and give them back a sense of identity other than being a patient.

Nominate one person to take responsibility for having regular contact with the family. This person will then share updates and changes to the child or young person's health and will be able to assess the changing needs or support mechanisms.

When the child or young person is unable to attend the setting, keep in contact. Cards, letters and photos of activities happening will help them to remain part of school life. Visits could be arranged through the family at appropriate times.

If the child is receiving treatment from a local hospice or hospital there is often a nurse or social worker whose job includes visiting schools to explain to pupils about the illness and the effects of the treatment involved. With the agreement of the family, contact could be made with this person for advice and support for staff and pupils alike.

Parents of other pupils may have concerns about their own child being made anxious about information given about their seriously ill classmate. With the agreement of the family, it might help to pass on what information is being given in the classroom and what measures are in place to support all pupils during this time.

There is likely to come a time when the pupil's health deteriorates significantly and it may become necessary to keep the other pupils informed of what is happening to avoid rumours circulating about either the illness or subsequent death. This should be done with the knowledge and permission of the family and it may be helpful to consider ways in which this could be done before it happens. Remember, children deal better with difficult situations when given honest explanations in a language they can understand.

So consider: *(and see section on 'A death in an early years or school community (a pupil or staff member) page 11)*

- Who will break the news – class teacher or Head?
- How far through the school does the news have to spread?
- What support system will be in place for those pupils or staff who are most affected by the news – do they need someone to talk to/quiet space to go?
- Should a letter go home to parents telling them what information has been given, what support is available in school for pupils and what reactions parents might expect from their child so that they are prepared and can offer support at home?
- How should the school respond when the death occurs – should cards/flowers be sent, visits made? By whom? Staff, pupils, governors?
- In the event of a death, with the family's agreement, how many parents should receive a letter giving information about what has happened and what action the school has taken to support the pupils? Class/whole school?
- If pupils are to attend the funeral, who will prepare them for the event? What do they need to know about what will happen? What support will there be for them and for those pupils who remain at school?
- What will happen to the child's desk/chair/peg? – let class have input.
- Should the school hold its own special memorial service? If so who should be involved and what form should the service take – favourite stories, poems, music, display of work, remembrance table, friendship tree? Talk it over with the class and family.
- Is a lasting memorial appropriate? If so, what? Tree, trophy, book, fundraising event?
- Who should be involved with decision – family/pupils?

Children, like adults, will grieve in their own ways and very often what they need is:

- To have the bereavement acknowledged and have the opportunity to talk about the person who has died if they wish.
- To understand that what they are feeling is normal, and whatever they are feeling is accepted by those around them.
- To know that there is someone in school who will support them if they get upset.
- To have their questions answered honestly, in a way that they can understand. With medical issues, it might be helpful if the School Health Nurse is available to brief staff/answer questions.

Be prepared for pupils to say or do the unexpected when given bad news – they could show a range of grief reactions, or no immediate reaction at all – watch out for emotions/behaviours to emerge as time goes on.

Questions may arise long after the death occurred.

Remember, if a pupil asks you a question and you are not sure how to respond, you can always ask them what they think about the issue. “*What do you think?*” can often give the pupil the opportunity to work the answer out for themselves or clarify their thinking – and a “*That’s a really interesting question, let me think about that and get back to you*” gives you chance to clarify yours! And as always, if you don’t have the answer, don’t be afraid to say you don’t know, but will try and find someone who does!

You can contact Simon Says for more advice and information about supporting children/young people with a life limiting illness and their peers.

Supporting a pupil bereaved by suicide

Death by suicide is a traumatic and sometimes violent event which often results in complicated bereavement issues. Families are often left with agonising questions and, in many cases, have to learn to live without answers. Suicide quickly becomes a very public event and schools can be a hotbed of rumour and speculation, so it is important that staff have thought through an appropriate response if informed of such a death. We have therefore put together the following guidelines which you might find helpful when formulating your school response.

- Acknowledge the death with parent/carer and pupil - just as you would any other death (*see section on 'Supporting a child/young person following a family member's death' page 10*).
- Establish what the children in the family know.
- Establish what the parent/carer (and pupil) wants the rest of the staff and the other pupils to know – pointing out that rumours are bound to circulate (or have already) and it might be more helpful to the family and pupil if simple, accurate information is given by the school.
- If there are discrepancies between what the family believe their children know and what is being said in the class or playground, it is important to relay this information back to the family so that they can reassess the information they pass to their children.
- Arrange a staff meeting and let staff know what information is to be given to which groups.
- If the parent and pupil agree that the information about the suicide be shared (and this may only be necessary if the information is already in the public domain and other pupils are asking questions) it might be helpful for younger children to say something like:

“Many of you will already know that X has died.

People usually die when they are very old, they have an illness or they have an accident but sometimes people decide they do not want to live any longer and hurt themselves so badly that they die. This is called suicide and that is what happened to X.

We do not know why X did not want to live any longer, but we do know that this is an extremely sad time for (pupil) and his family and what is important for us to do now is to think of ways we can help (pupil)” Whilst you can talk in general terms about why people chose to die, it is best not to enter into speculation about this particular death. You might also want to reassure pupils that this is a rare occurrence so they need not fear for members of their own families.

- When details of the death are given to pupils, it is sometimes helpful to send a letter home explaining what the children have been told, and giving details of where parents can get information about how they can support their children should this be necessary. Make sure the family are aware of this action and of the contents of the letter.
- If the parent or pupil does not want the details of the death disclosed, but agree that the class know that the death has happened, you may want to say something along the lines of:
“I have something very sad to tell you. (Pupil’s) Daddy died last night. We do know that this is an extremely sad time for (pupil) and his family and what is important for us to do now is to think of ways we can help (pupil).”
- Keep in regular contact with the family/pupil so that any changes in support needs can be accommodated.
- Bear in mind the fact that there may be an inquest. This may take place some time after the event and give rise to renewed anxiety and distress for pupil and family alike.

Some important points to bear in mind when supporting a pupil bereaved by suicide

- It is important to acknowledge the death with the pupil and family and offer support in the same way as you would any other death – if teachers don’t talk about what happened with the pupil and their family, this may reinforce feelings of isolation, guilt and shame.
- A family suicide may be felt by a child or young person as the ultimate rejection, and can result in a lowering of self esteem. Staff can help pupils feel better about themselves by recognising the smallest achievements, emphasising any positives and identifying and encouraging personal strengths.
- It is important to reassure pupils that nothing they said or did was the cause of the death – the person who died made their own decision, for whatever reasons, to take their own life. Often there is no single reason why someone decides to end their life; it may be a culmination of events and issues over time.

- The intense feelings which often result from a death by suicide may result in the pupil exhibiting challenging behaviour in school. Acknowledge these feelings with the pupil and, together, try and work out ways of managing the behaviour in school.
- Children who witnessed any part of the suicide may experience flashbacks or have intrusive memories of the event. This will have a major impact on their ability to concentrate and may affect their day to day functioning at home and at school. Watch and listen - and if concerned, discuss with the parent and refer the pupil on as they may require specialist help.
- Suicide may be a particularly difficult subject for some staff – check out who is the most appropriate person to offer support to the pupil and their family.

(If you wish to read more widely around the issues of suicide, you may find the information contained on the Winston's Wish website helpful – www.winstonswish.org.uk).

No matter how risky and uncomfortable it feels to us, almost any attempt to communicate and involve the young person is better than exclusion and silence.

In conclusion

Always remember the diverse and individual needs of each family and each child within that family. The outcome of children's grief experiences hinges to a large extent on whether adults are able to tolerate their expressions of strong feelings about what has happened. Complications seem most likely to arise in children who have not felt permitted to show and express their genuine feelings or have not had their awareness and expression of these feelings encouraged and supported. Remember that when the loss has stricken the care giving adult or adults deeply, children may be reluctant, resistant, or unwilling to share and process their feelings at home.

Low-key support is not always enough. Families under stress may need further support from other agencies to be able to support the welfare of the child.

You can liaise with other agencies or find further support such as

1. Home Visiting schemes.
2. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) Process.
3. Specialist support services for child and adult bereavement.

Looking after you

It is important when you are faced with bereavement within your community that you consider yourself.

Bereavement is exhausting and painful. The ripples of death go on for miles and you, as the person responsible for pulling information together, supporting staff, children and families have a huge and exhausting role.

Sadly, no quick fix will make it better. The support you offer may last over a long period of time. The experience you are facing may ignite thoughts of personal bereavement experiences your own mortality.

You will have had a relationship with the person who died. It may have been purely professional; it may have overlapped to a personal friendship, you may not have liked the person, but you will still find it painful.

Supporting bereaved children and young people is stressful and you may find every day life distressing both to watch and to manage.

Bereavement is ‘not only painful to experience, but also painful to witness’ BOWLBY (1980).

Taking time to address your own feelings and gather your own thoughts about death and dying is important. Clearly understand how you are going to gain support, help and advice – be it via the structure of the setting or from outside agencies or professionals.

- You can offer the child or young person support on their journey of grief. You cannot make the journey yourself.
- You can give time to listen and share your thoughts and feelings ,you can not think and feel the way they do nor can you take the pain away from them.
- Prepare yourself for how children and young people react to bereavement and share the strategies with colleagues or friends.
- Confidence and knowledge about bereavement and children's grief will help you manage. Read up about the subject and seek professional support and advice.
- Know your limitations and do not offer more than you are able, physically or mentally.
- Take time, at the end of each day, for you. Do not feel guilty about being ‘normal’ or doing the routine activities you would normally enjoy. You will offer greater help for longer if you look after yourself.

Reading and resources list

All books are available through normal book retail outlets except where specified. Alternatively, copies may be borrowed from Simon Says.

Reading for adults

Good Grief

Exploring feelings, loss and Death with U11's (separate book for over 11's), Barbara Ward & Ass.
Excellent school resource. Written for teachers – contains information, activities and ideas to help children explore issues around separation, loss and death. The material can be photocopied.

Helping Children Cope with Grief

Rosemary Wells.
Very helpful and easy to read. Practical advice and suggestions, real life examples of children's reactions to bereavement. Particularly suitable for adults working with children.

Grief in Children

A handbook for adults, Atle Dyregov.
Useful and readable. Explains how children understand and react to death. Contains specific information about how to handle death in school and school's response to the needs of bereaved children.

Death and Loss

Compassionate Approaches in the Classroom, Oliver Leaman.
For teachers involved in the pastoral care of pupils. Includes ideas about curriculum content within PHSE.

Giving Sorrow Words

(Video and Book) Killick & Lindeman (Available via www.luckyduck.co.uk).
Useful training package designed for school staff to help them deal with the effects of bereavement. Offers practical advice and demonstrates effective techniques for working with children and young people.

Wise before the Event

William Yule & Anne Gold.
Describes some of the ways crises can affect schools, and suggests ways that schools can lessen the physical and emotional effects of disasters. Very readable and useful.

Saying Goodbye to Greg

Christine Chapman.
Understanding bereavement at Foundation, KS1 and KS2
Very good bereavement training resource set in story form, using the "real life" situation of the death of a pupil in a primary school. The aim is to lead primary teachers through the bereavement process.

The Social Curriculum Death and Bereavement

Guidance for Schools, Essex County Council, (Available via Essex County Council, Learning Services 01245 431021).
Very useful and readable booklet detailing all aspects of managing death and bereavement in schools.

Loss Change and Grief

An Educational Perspective, Erica Brown.
Useful book exploring the experiences of bereavement within an educational setting including suggestions about supporting children with learning difficulties.

Books on death for age 5 and under

Dear Grandma Bunny

Written and Illustrated by Dick Bruna, 1996 ISBN:1-4052-1901-7.

Suitable for very young children this book tells the story of what happened and how Miffy felt and coped when Grandma died.

Goodbye Max

H Keller, 1990, Walker Books ISBN: 074-451455X.

Ben struggles with his feelings after losing his pet dog Max.

Goodbye Mousie

By Robie H. Harris & illustrated by Jan Ormerod, Aladdin Paperbacks Reprint edition (Nov 2004) ISBN 978-0689871344.

This beautifully illustrated picture book tells the story of a little boy who's told that his pet mouse has died. At first he doesn't believe it, thinking it is just asleep, but by asking lots of questions and with the help of his family he begins to accept Mousie's death. This is a great story and would be very helpful to introduce death to young children and a starting point to discuss what happens after someone dies and the different feelings one may have.

Heaven

Written by Nicholas Allan, 2006, Red Fox ISBN: 978-0099488149.

Dill, the dog, knows his time is up, so he packs his case and tells Lily, his owner, that he's off "up there". "Can I come too?" asks Lily. "Er...not yet," replies Dill. While he is waiting for the angels to collect him, Dill explains to Lily what he thinks heaven is like: hundreds of lampposts to pee against, lots of whiffy things to smell and bones everywhere - with meat on them! But, Lily completely disagrees, she thinks heaven is quite different. Luckily, they agree to disagree just in time for a fond, and very poignant, last goodbye.

I Miss You: A First Look at Death

By Pat Thomas & illustrated by Lesley Harker, 2001, Barron's Educational Series ISBN: 978-0764117640.

This bright and colourful picture book very simply talks about life and death. It briefly covers a range of issues such as why people die, how you may feel when someone dies and what happens afterwards. It includes questions for the reader to answer about their own experiences and a section at the back for adults on how to best use the book. An excellent educational book, which could be used as a starting point for discussion.

The Day Great Grandma Moved House

By J Smith, 2000, Kevin Meyhew ISBN: 0-84003-663-X.

A story explaining death and bereavement to young children.

When Uncle Bob Died (Talking it through)

By Althea & illustrated by Lisa Kopper, 2001, Happy Cat Books Ltd ISBN: 978-1903285084.

A young boy talks about death and about Uncle Bob who died from an illness. It clearly explains some basic facts such as what 'dead' means and what a funeral is. It also talks about feelings and memories. This small picture book would be a good starting point for very young children with lots of opportunity for further discussion.

Books on death for age 5 - 8 years

Extra Special - for when someone you love dies

By Anna Payne.

This short story focuses on Ben and Fiona who love to visit the home of their elderly friend Theo. They delight to spend time pouring over Theo's collection of Extra Special things. Their favourite item is a butterfly studded with precious jewels, and it is their love of this butterfly that teaches Ben and Fiona that sometimes we have to release back to the 'owner' even the things that are extra special to us. Simon Says has endorsed this book, and has written some guidelines for adults supporting young children. If you would like to buy a copy contact Simon Says. (£4.99)

A Birthday Present for Daniel

Juliet Rothman, 2001 A Child's Story of Loss, Prometheus Books ISBN: 978-1573929462.

Told by a young girl whose brother, Daniel, has died, she talks about how things have changed in the family. She also talks about the things she does when she is sad and how these differ from other members of her family. This book has small black and white pictures with minimal text but it conveys some important issues. It would be particularly useful to broach the subject of birthdays as it describes how the family remembered Daniel on his birthday.

Always and Forever

By Alan Durant & illustrated by Debi Gliori, 2003 (h'back) ISBN: 978-0552548779.

Otter, Mole and Hare miss Fox when he falls ill and dies. They stay at home and don't want to talk about him because it makes them sadder. Then Squirrel visits and reminds them of all the fun times they had together. They all find a way to remember Fox and get on with their lives. Colourful, detailed pictures in this book emphasise the importance of holding on to memories.

Badger's Parting Gifts

By Susan Varley, 1992, Picture Lions ISBN: 0006643175.

Badger is old and knows he is going to die soon. When he does, the other animals think they will be sad forever, but they begin to talk about the memories they have of the things Badger taught them and learn to cope with his death. A lovely picture book that emphasises the importance of remembering the person who has died.

Charlotte's Web

E B White, 1993, Penguin ISBN: 014036-4498.

A wonderful story of Wilbur the pig and Charlotte the spider; it is all about friendship and the harsh realities of life. Poignant ending.

Drop Dead

By Babette Cole, 1998, Red Fox ISBN: 0099659115.

A humorous book with comic-like pictures, two 'bald old wrinklies' tell their grandchildren about their life growing up and how one day they will just drop down dead. It is a light-hearted book about life that emphasises the normality and inevitability of dying. It is very direct and some readers may not like its style.

Flamingo Dream

By Donna Jo Napoli & illustrated by Cathie Felstead, 2003, Greenwillow Books ISBN: 978-0688167967.

In this bright and colourful book, a young boy tells the story of his Dad who is seriously ill and dies soon after a trip to Florida to see the place where he grew up. The collage style illustrations capture the things the boy collects to remind him of his Dad. A sensitive but honest book which emphasises the importance of memories.

Fred

By Posy Simmonds, 1998, Red Fox ISBN: 0099264129.

A light-hearted book with detailed illustrations about Fred, Nick and Sophie's lazy cat that dies. After burying him in the garden, they wake up at night to find all the cats in the area have come to say goodbye to Fred, the famous singer! This funny and touching story would be useful to introduce death to children.

Granpa – The Book of the Film

Based on the story by John Burningham, 1990, A Red Fox Picture Book ISBN: 0099752409.

This beautifully detailed picture book has very few words but tells the story of a little girl's relationship with her Granpa. It takes the reader through many happy times they spent together playing games, telling stories and on outings. On the last page, Granpa's chair is empty, signifying that he has died. Children may benefit from reading this book with an adult to talk about the pictures and to elaborate some of the messages it conveys.

READING LIST

Heaven

Written and Illustrated by Nicholas Allan, ISBN: 978-0099488149.

Dill, the dog, knows his time is up, so he packs his case and tells Lily, his owner, that he's off "up there". "Can I come too?" asks Lily. "Er...not yet," replies Dill. While he is waiting for the angels to collect him, Dill explains to Lily what he thinks heaven is like: hundreds of lampposts to pee against, lots of whiffy things to smell and bones everywhere - with meat on them! But, Lily completely disagrees, she thinks heaven is quite different. Luckily, they agree to disagree just in time for a fond, and very poignant, last goodbye.

Help Me Say Goodbye

J Silverman, 1999, Fairview Press ISBN: 1-57749-085-1.
Activity workbook to help when someone has died.

Laura's Star

Baumgart, K, 1996, Tiger Press ISBN 1-85430-480-1.
In this classic magical story a lonely girl learns that friendship means letting go of your most precious treasures.

Muddles Puddles and Sunshine

D Crossley, 2000, Winstons Wish Hawthorn Press ISBN: 1-86989058-2.
An activity book to help a child when someone has died.

Sad Isn't Bad

Michaelene Mundy, University of Massachusetts Press ISBN: 0870293214.
A good - grief guide for children dealing with loss.

Saying Goodbye to Daddy

By Judith Vigna, 1991 (h'back), Albert Whitman & Company ISBN: 978-0807572535.
Clare's Dad died in a car accident and this book looks at changes in the family, difficult feelings, funerals and memories through the eyes of Clare. It would also be a good book to help parents understand the child's perspective. It gives good examples of how adults can answer children's questions, emphasising the need to be clear and honest.

The Huge Bag of Worries

By Virginia Ironside & illustrated by Frank Rodgers, 1996, Hodder Wayland ISBN: 0-75002-124-1.

Jenny begins to worry about lots of different things and these worries build up and get out of control. She just can't get rid of them, until she meets the old lady next door who helps her feel better. A lovely story with fun illustrations encourages children to talk about their worries.

The Sunshine Cat

Written by Miriam Moss Illustrated by Lisa Flather
Orchard Picturebooks ISBN: 978-1841215679

Sunny the cat is loved by all his human family, but one day there is a knock at the door - Sunny has been killed in an accident. A sensitive story which aims to help children come to terms with death.

The Tenth Good Thing About Barney

By Judith Viorst & illustrated by Erik Blegvad
1987, Prentice Hall & IBD
ISBN: 978-0689712036

A young boy's cat dies and his parents suggest that he could think of ten good things about Barney to tell at the funeral. But he can only think of nine, until he talks to his Father about what happens to someone after they have died, and he discovers the tenth. A carefully written book with black and white pictures, that sensitively deals with death and lets the reader make his or her own decisions about what happens after the funeral.

When Dinosaurs Die

By Laurie Krasny & illustrated by Marc Brown
1998, Time Warner Trade Publishing
ISBN: 0316119555

A Guide to Understanding Death. This factual picture book uses cartoon dinosaurs to illustrate the text and comment on what is said. It is a bright and colourful book that explains death in a simple and unthreatening way. It covers many issues including 'why does someone die?', 'feelings about death' and 'saying goodbye'. It would be an excellent resource for anyone caring for young children.

Books on death for age 9 - 12 years

After the Funeral

J Winsch, 1995, Paulist Press ISBN: 0-8091-6625-9.
Discusses the various feelings accompanying the death of a loved one including sadness, grief and the fear of death itself.

Beginnings and Endings with Lifetimes in Between

By Bryan Mellonie & Robert Ingpen, 1997, Belitha Press ISBN: 1855617609.

A beautiful way to explain life and death to children. This thought provoking book has large pictures complemented with small sections of text. It clearly explains about life and death focussing on plants, animals and insects before moving on to people. It emphasises that death is part of the life cycle and is natural and normal whenever it occurs. A simple book with a powerful message.

Bridge to Terabithia

K Patterson, 1995, Puffin Books ISBN: 014-0366180.
The story of the friendship of two 10 year olds and one dies in an accident. DVD also available.

Death

J Amos, 1997, Cherry Tree Books ISBN: 184234-163-4.
Stories based on death supported by a selection of letters from the characters airing their problems and worries, with reassuring replies from family and friends, as well as practical advice.

Death: What's Happening?

By Karen Bryant-Mole, 1994, Hodder Wayland ISBN: 0750213795.

This factual book has clear text and large photos. It uses stories of young people to discuss issues surrounding death such as feeling frightened, the funeral and the future. It includes advice on how to feel better and cope with difficult situations after someone has died. Using straightforward language, this book may reassure the reader there are other young people who have had someone important to them die and answer some of their questions and concerns.

The Cat Mummy

By Jacqueline Wilson & illustrated by Nick Sharratt, 2002, Corgi Children's ISBN: 978-0440864165 (also on audiocassette).

Verity's Mum died the day she was born but she rarely talks about her. Verity doesn't want to upset her Dad or

Grandparents. This humorous but sensitive story mainly focuses on Verity's missing cat Mabel but reveals some of the misunderstandings and anxieties children can have about death. It also shows it can be good to be open, honest and to talk about difficult issues.

The Ghost of Uncle Arvie

By Sharon Creech, 1997, Macmillan Children's Books ISBN: 978-0333656327.

This fun and humorous book is about Danny, an ordinary nine-year-old boy. However, once or twice a year a ghost visits him. This time it is the ghost of his Uncle Arvie who follows him, persuading him to make his three wishes come true. As a result Danny and his dog get into adventures which makes him think about his dad who has also died. This book has some important messages and talks about death in an open way, but is primarily fun and imaginative.

The Mountains of Tibet

By Mordicai Gerstein, 1989, Barefoot Paperbacks ISBN: 978-1898000549.

Based on Tibetan teachings, this book tells of a small boy who grows up to be a woodcutter. When he dies, he discovers there is a chance to live again but first he must make a number of choices. A simple tale with deep meaning but the theme of reincarnation could be confusing.

John's Book

J Fuller, 1993, Lutterworth Press ISBN: 071-882-8704.
A novel designed to help children come to terms with the death of a parent. John's father died and through the story the author tackles emotions, funeral, grief, anger, bewilderment and facing ones peers.

Losing Uncle Tim

By Mary Kate Jordan & illustrated by Judith Friedman, 1999, Albert Whitman & Company ISBN: 978-0807547564.

This picture book for slightly older children explains how a young boy finds out his Uncle Tim has AIDS and is going to die. It is a serious and sensitive book covering many of the issues, changes and difficult feelings that can occur when someone has a serious illness.

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Michael Rosen's SAD BOOK

By Michael Rosen & illustrated by Quentin Blake, 2004, Walker Books ISBN: 0744598982.

This book has large illustrations and small snippets of text. It is wonderfully honest and will appeal to children and adults of all ages. We all have sad stuff, but what makes Michael Rosen most sad is thinking about his son who died. This book is a simple but emotive story. He talks about what sad is and how it affects him and what he does to cope with it. In true Michael Rosen style, this book manages to make you smile as well.

Milly's Bug Nut

By Jill Janey, 2002, Winston's Wish ISBN: 978-0-9539123-4-6. A short, simple story with black and white pictures, of a young girl who's Dad has died. It talks about the ups and downs of family life and how things slowly get easier as time goes. Milly misses her Dad and things are just not the same anymore. She knows when people die, they can't come back but she still keeps a wish to see her Dad one more time.

The Best Day of the Week

By Hannah Cole & illustrated by John Prater, 1997, Walker Books ISBN: 0744554675.

This storybook tells of two young children who spend Saturdays with their Grandparents when Mum is at work. It has three chapters, with stories of three different Saturdays. The first is a happy day; the second is at the hospital and sad as Granny dies, the third at the theatre. It is a lovely story that gives an important message that it is still okay to have fun after someone dies.

There's NO Such Thing as a Dragon

By Jack Kent, 1975, Golden Books Publishing Company ISBN: 0-307-10214-9.

Part of the Family Storytime series, relates the charming tale of Billy Bixbee, who awakens to find a dragon "about the size of a kitten" sitting on his bed. The dragon grows by leaps and bounds, until Billy dares to pet the attention-seeking creature and it shrinks back down into an adoring little lap dragon.

Water Bugs and Dragonflies

By Doris Stickney & illustrated by Gloria Stickney, 1983, Continuum International Pub Group ISBN: 0264669045.

Explaining death to children. This pocket size booklet with small black and white pictures is based on a fable, associating death with a water bug's transformation into a dragonfly. It portrays the mystery around death but may need an adult to explain the analogy and help a child relate it to their own experience. It uses Christian beliefs with a focus on life after death and also contains advice for parents.

What on Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies?

By Trevor Romain, 1999, Free Spirit Publishing Inc ISBN: 1575420554.

This book for older children is a factual guide, answering questions such as 'why do people have to die?', 'is it okay to cry?' and 'what is a funeral/memorial service?' It is written in a straightforward way, with practical tips, advice and information about different faiths and beliefs.

When Someone Very Special Dies

M Heegaard 1988, Woodland Press, USA ISBN: 0-9620502-0-2. Workbook.

Books on death for age 13 - 16 years

Double Act

By Jacqueline Wilson & illustrated by Nick Sharratt, 1996, Corgi Children's ISBN: 0440863341 (Also on audiocassette). Ruby and Garnet are 10-year-old twins. They do everything together, especially since their mum died three years ago. When their dad finds a new partner and they move house, Ruby and Garnet find it hard and get into all sorts of trouble. Eventually, they settle down and learn to live with the changes. A lively and humorous book that deals sensitively with change.

Dustbin Baby

By Jacqueline Wilson, 2002, Corgi Children's ISBN: 0552547964 (Also on audiocassette). April was abandoned in a dustbin as a baby on the 1st April. Having spent all her life in a children's home and with different foster parents (one of whom committed suicide), things haven't been easy and April is struggling. Now she's fourteen and on her birthday, determined to find out more about her past, sets off to find some important people. This is an emotive book with a great storyline in usual Jacqueline Wilson style. It is open and honest.

Say Goodnight Gracie

J Reece Deaver, 1992, Pan MacMillan ISBN: 0330310518. 17 year old Morgan has to adjust after losing her friend Jimmy in a car accident killed by a drunk driver.

Straight Talk About Death for Teenagers

By Earl A. Grollman, 1999, Sagebrush Ed Resources ISBN: 0785719873. How to Cope with Losing Someone You Love. This book was written after the author spoke to thousands of teenagers and found they often felt forgotten after someone has died. Written in short, clear sentences that are easy to read, it covers feelings, different types of death and the future. This book gives the reader many options of what can happen, how s/he may feel, giving advice and reassuring readers grief is normal.

The Charlie Barber Treatment

By Carole Lloyd, 1990, Walker Books ISBN: 0744514886. Simon's Mum died suddenly from a brain haemorrhage and he came home from school to find she had died. With his GCSE coursework piling up and having to help around the house, Simon finds it hard and doesn't go out much with his friends. He then meets Charlie, who is visiting her

Grandma, and believes their meeting was fate. Simon starts to enjoy life again and to re-build relationships with his family and friends. A sensitive and realistic book that conveys some of the thoughts and emotions of a teenage boy.

The Lost Boys' Appreciation Society

By Alan Gibbons, 2004, Orion Children's Books ISBN: 1842550950. Teenage life is difficult enough for Gary and John, but when their Mum dies in a car accident, things get steadily worse. John struggles to keep the peace as Gary goes off the rails, saying his new mates are now his family. With GCSE exams looming and his Dad going out on dates, things become unbearable for John. A gripping book exploring relationships and how different people react to life events.

The Man who didn't want to die

Retold by Sherab Chodzin & Alexandra Kohn from The Barefoot Book of Buddhist Tales Illustrated by Marie Cameron, 1999 Barefoot Books ISBN: 1841480096. This short story is based on a Japanese folk tale and approaches death from an unusual angle. When a man decides he doesn't want to die, he is sent to the Land of Never-ending Life and expects to meet the happiest people in the world. However, the realities of living forever are not as attractive as he thought and he consequently learns an important lesson. This story is very thought provoking and could lead to some interesting discussions.

The Spying Game

By Pat Moon, 2003, Orchard Books ISBN: 1843622017. Joe's dad died in a car accident and he feels really angry towards the man who killed his father. He decides to set up a secret 'Nightmare Plan' to vent his anger and begins to persecute the man and his family by scratching his car and sending hate mail. This powerful book reveals the difficult emotions Joe faces both at home and at school. A very readable and fast paced book that would appeal to many young people.

Two Weeks with the Queen

By Morris Gleitzman & illustrated by Andy Bacha, 1999, Puffin Books ISBN: 014130300X (Also available in audiocassette). Twelve-year-old Colin, an Australian boy, is sent to stay with relatives in England when his brother becomes ill with

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cancer. He is determined to find a way of curing his brother, which leads him into all sorts of adventures including trying to visit the Queen! Colin finds a friend in an older man named Ted who helps him express his feelings and understand what he has to do.

Up on Cloud Nine

By Anne Fine, 2003, Corgi Children's ISBN: 0552548405 (Also available in audiocassette).

Stol falls out of a top floor window and ends up unconscious in hospital with lots of broken bones and no-one knows whether it was attempted suicide or an accident. This book is written from the perspective of his best friend Ian whilst he is sitting by his bedside. He recalls all the fun times they have had together as well as acknowledging the slightly different way Stol sees the world. Ian captures the emotions of his own adoptive parents as well as Stol's family and the hospital staff in an amusing yet moving way illustrating how Stol has had an inspirational effect on everyone.

Vicky Angel

By Jacqueline Wilson & illustrated by Nick Sharratt, 2001, Corgi Children's ISBN: 0440864151 (Also available in audiocassette).

When Jade's best friend Vicky, is run over by a car and dies in hospital everyone at home and school starts treating her differently. 'Vicky Angel' then starts following Jade around, distracting her and getting her into trouble. This moving but amusing story illustrates how hard it is to carry on with every day life after a tragic accident.

And When Did You Last See Your Father

By Blake Morrison, 2006, Granta Books ISBN: 978-1862079083.

The book tells of how Dr Morrisons life slowly slips away during the last few weeks of his life. Interspersed with this are the authors recollections of his father, who whilst being a difficult man at times, always remained a loving husband and father. The author is at all times open and honest - sometimes brutally so - and lays open his feelings for all to share. One of the strengths of the book is that whilst it is about the death of a loved one it never gets too mawkish or sentimental and remains at all times a good read.

Helpful websites

simonsays.org.uk	Child/Adolescent Bereavement Support.
winstonswish.org.uk	Help for grieving children and their families.
childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk	Childhood bereavement.
rd4u.org.uk	Specifically for young people aged 12-18. Information and interactive.
crusebereavementcare.org.uk	All aspects of bereavement. Some information for children.
ukselphelp.info/careline/	Confidential crisis telephone counselling for children, young people and adults.
childline.org.uk	Free national telephone helpline for children and young people. Information on bereavement.
connexions-direct.com	Information and advice for young people.
griefencounter.com	Helps bereaved children & young people rebuild their lives after a death.
noahsarkcafe.org.uk	Offer support groups to children & teenagers who have suffered loss through death, divorce or other transitions.
papyrus-uk.org	Provides resources & support for those dealing with suicide, depression or distress – particularly teenagers & young adults.
riprap.org.uk	Helps children who have a parent with cancer.
uk-sobs.org.uk	Those who are left behind after a suicide can be helped by talking to others who have experienced a similar loss.
supportline.org.uk	Confidential emotional support for children, young people & adults.
teenissues.co.uk	Internet based unique reference point for teenagers to find answers to commonly experienced issues. there4me.com For 12-16 year olds needing advice or help with worries.
tcfsiblingsupport.org.uk	Support and information for siblings after a death. Pen-pal link for over 16's.
childbereavement.org.uk	Support, information & training when a baby or child dies, or when a child is bereaved.
teachers.tv/schoolmatters	1) Coping with bereavement } videos about school 2) Life stuff: Without You } coping with death.
seesaw.org.uk	Grief support service for children and young people. Support for schools.
uk-sands.org	Providing support for parents & families whose baby is stillborn or dies soon after birth.

Appendix 1

Ideas for memories in your setting

Including:

- Holding a memorial.
- Memory Wall.
- Area of Remembrance.
- Memory Book.
- Memory Box.
- Garden area (plant a tree / bench with plaque / flowered area).
- Making a film.
- Memory stones.
- Jar of Memories.

Holding a Memorial

After a death, we can often be left with a strong urge to ‘do something’ which marks the significance of the death and which states its importance to us. For family members this is usually the funeral or a ceremony of some other sort. It is not always either appropriate or possible for school children to attend these occasions though, so facilitating something within the school context is very important. The following are just a few ideas that are easy to do, yet significant. They can of course be combined.

- Light a candle and reflect.
- Listen to some music. Maybe a significant piece to the person who has died – you may want to combine this with lighting a candle.
- Create a memory box or book. Invite pupils to write a memory in the book about the person who has died, or place an object that means something to them and that has a story attached to it, in a memory box. This box could then be displayed, or kept, or presented to the family of the person who has died. (Children can make mistakes, which, especially in sensitive circumstances can upset them. You may want to get them to write on cards which are then stuck into the book, rather than directly into the book itself).

- Plant a tree in memory of the person.
- Create a plaque, or wall display to commemorate their life.
- Were they sporty? Name a cup after them and hold an annual sports tournament to win the trophy, or present it to the most improved sportsperson of the year.
- Did they like singing or acting? Hold a cabaret event in their honour.
- Invite pupils to write poems, songs, draw pictures and write letters to or about the person who died.
- Hold a balloon release ceremony where pupils each attach a message to helium filled balloons, and then all release them together.
- Hold a minute's silence.
- Get the school canteen to serve the person's favourite meal one day.
- If the death was due to illness, raise funds to support an appropriate charity that works with sufferers of that illness.

Making a life book

Here are some ideas on making a life book, to help a child/young person keep memories alive of someone who was important to them. It is designed to help a child/young person understand more about the person who has died and to give them information that they may find invaluable as they grow older.

The contents could include some of the following:

- Information about the person's childhood – where they were born, their family, education.
- The person's hobbies and interests as a child; any special achievements.
- Where they went to school and what they did when they left school.
- Their jobs/careers.
- Interests and hobbies as a young adult.
- How they met their partner; what they enjoyed doing together.
- Information about the marriage; moving in together.

- The person's good points eg really good at
- The person's not so good points eg not very good at
- Information about the birth of the child(ren).
- Relationships with the child(ren).
- The person's hopes and dreams.
- Things that worried the person.
- Information about the illness and treatment, or details of how the person died, including where the child(ren) were when it happened.
- Information about when/if the person knew they were going to die.
- Information about the death and the funeral.
- Information about 'us' as a family without the person.
- Things missed most, now that the person has died.
- Things that are remembered about the person.
- Favourites – holidays, special places, foods, sports, TV, films, books, perfume/aftershave etc.

These headings are simply a guide and can be altered to suit the needs of your family. It may be easier to record thoughts and ideas onto a tape/CD/DVD. A close friend or family members may be able to help gather the information together.

Memory Wall

Materials Needed:

Photos, paper, paints, paper mache, art materials of your choice.

Introduction:

Begin by asking the group to brainstorm memories that they have of the person who died. It may be that the memories are a little slow in coming to begin with, but they will soon begin to flow – you can help by sharing a memory first. The group may find it easier to break into smaller groups and think of memories first. It can include their smile, laugh, mannerisms, favourite hobbies, funny moments, best clothes, trips out to town etc.

Main Activity:

The task is to create a wall display of memories and stories. Children/young people can use photos, models, poems, artefacts from home... anything that they want.

Hopefully the wall display will be full of great memories of their life with stories of moments spent with the person who died.

Include notes that detail the story behind each memory and explain the artwork or the model that is displayed.

Plenary:

Spend some time looking at the wall display once it is finished and get each child/young person to share the story of the piece of the display that they worked on.

Taking the wall display down will also be a big thing for some children/young people. It is important that they are involved in this and able to keep the bits that they made. Coming in one morning to find it taken down and thrown in the bin could feel disrespectful, especially to those who were close to the person who died.

Memory Stones

The concept of memory stones is a very simple one, yet it is a great tool to help children/young people to speak honestly about their feelings and their memories.

First, hold a jagged, rocky pebble up high. Either you, or some children/young people should then describe it. It is rough, and has sharp bits. Ask a child/young person to hold it tightly and squeeze it in the palm of their hands – how does it feel? Not nice, it may even hurt a little. Use this pebble to explain that there may be some difficult memories or feelings that some children/young people have right now. They may be struggling with the way in which the person died, or they may be feeling guilty that they did not actually like the person, and the last words they shared were nasty ones, a fact which they now really regret.

Next, hold aloft a normal pebble. Again, you may want to ask children/young people to describe it. You are looking to find words such as “normal” “smooth” “ordinary”. State that this stone signifies the ordinary, everyday memories that children/young people may have of the person who died; the fact that they ate prawn cocktail crisps or liked English lessons!

Finally, display a shiny, precious stone. The characteristics of this stone are that it is sparkling and precious, it looks great. Use this to explain that we will have some great memories of the person who died.

All three stones are important and the feelings and memories described by them are all true. The

stones can all be held together in one hand, and the memories can all be held in our minds together.

Depending on the size of the group and their closeness to the person who has died, it may be good to let each child/young person have a set of the three stones. This will help them to remember the point and manage their feelings.

If you are working with young children – using examples, explain what feels nice and what doesn't.

Jar of memories

Children may like to make a coloured “Salt Sculpture” to help remember important things about the person who has died.

You will need:

- A small jar with a lid and wide neck (e.g. baby food jar).
- Salt.
- 5 coloured chinks.
- 6 pieces of paper.

Looking through the box can help with the process of grieving by bringing to mind the different aspects of the person who died – who they were, what they did or did not like, what they were good and not so good at, as well as the things that were important to them.

What to do:

1. Fill your jar to the brim with salt. On one of the pieces of paper write down 5 things you remember about the person who died. These could be things you know they liked, something you enjoyed doing, perhaps somewhere you went together or what you remember about them as a person. Then choose a different colour to represent each memory and put a dot of that colour next to each memory.
2. Spread out 5 sheets of paper and divide the salt from the jar between them.
3. Then colour each pile of salt using one of the 5 chinks. Rub each chalk backwards and forwards into the salt. The salt will begin to take on the colour of the chalk. The harder you rub the brighter the coloured salt will become.
4. Carefully pick up each piece of paper and pour the coloured salts into your jar one at a time. (If you tilt your jar you can make waves of colour appear).
5. When all the colours have been added, hold the jar and tap it down on a work surface to settle the salt. Do not shake the jar unless you want to mix up all the colours. Then fill the remaining space with plain salt (right up to the top!) this is important and will stop the colours mixing.
6. Secure the lid firmly and use some sellotape to hold it in place. Try to keep your list of what the colours mean to you close by your jar. You may like to show other people your 'jar of memories'. Can you think of a special place where you can put your jar?

Appendix 2

Examples of letters informing parents/carers of the death of:

- A child or young person within the setting.
- A member of staff within the setting.

Informing Parents/Carers of the Death of a Pupil

This is an example of a letter to parents/carers. Change details according to the needs of the situation.

Hampshire School

<Date>

Dear Parent

Your child's tutor has had the sad task today of informing the students of the death of <Name>, a child/young person in <Year>.

When someone dies, their family and friends have lots of feelings of sadness, anger, and confusion - these are all normal. Our pupils have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school, but I have made available some information which may help you to answer your child's questions as they arise. You can obtain this information from the school website or by contacting Simon Says a Hampshire based charity which supports bereaved children and young people. Their contact details are: telephone 023 8064 7550, email info@simonsays.org.uk or visit their website www.simonsays.org.uk.

<_____'s> funeral will take place at <Named Church or Crematorium> on <Day and Date> at <Time>. Your child may wish to attend the funeral. If this is the case you may collect your child from school and accompany them to the church. Please inform your child's tutor if this is the case.

Yours sincerely

<Name>

Headteacher

Informing Parents/Carers of the Death of a Teacher

This is an example of a letter to parents/carers. Change details according to the needs of the situation.

Hampshire School

<Date>

Dear Parent

Your child's class teacher had the sad task of informing the children of the tragic death of <Name>, who has been a teacher at this school for <number> years.

Our thoughts are with <Name>'s family at this time and in an effort to try and respond to his/her death in a positive manner, all children have been informed.

The children were told that <Name> died from an asthma attack on <Date>. A number of pupils have been identified as being asthmatic and <Name>, the School Nurse has today reassured them that it is unusual for a person to die from asthma.

When someone dies, their family and friends have lots of feelings - sadness, anger, and confusion - which are all normal. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school, but I have made available some information which may help you to answer your child's questions as they arise. You can obtain this from the school office, or by contacting Simon Says a Hampshire based charity which supports bereaved children and young people. Their contact details are: Telephone 023 8064 7550, email info@simonsays.org.uk or visit their website www.simonsays.org.uk.

The funeral will take place at <Named Church or Crematorium> on <Day and Date> at <Time>. Your child may wish to attend the funeral. If this is the case you may collect your child from school and accompany them to the church.

Yours sincerely

<Name>

Headteacher

Daddy's poem

Her hair was up in a pony tail,
Her favourite dress tied with a bow,
Today was Daddy's Day at school,
And she couldn't wait to go.

But her mummy tried to tell her,
That she probably should stay at home,
Why the kids might not understand,
If she went to school alone.

But she was not afraid,
She knew just what to say,
What to tell her classmates,
Of why he wasn't there today.

But still her mother worried,
For her to face this day alone,
And that was why once again,
She tried to keep her daughter home.

But the little girl went to school,
Eager to tell them all,
About a dad she never sees,
A dad who never calls,
There were daddies along the wall,
For everyone to meet,
Children squirming impatiently,
Anxious in their seats.

One by one the teacher called,
A student from the class,
To introduce their daddy,
As seconds slowly passed.

At last the teacher called her name,
Every child turned to stare,
Each of them was searching,
For a man who wasn't there,
"Where's her daddy!",
She heard a boy call out,
"She probably doesn't have one",
Another student dared to shout.

And from somewhere near the back,
She heard a daddy say,
"Looks like another deadbeat dad,
too busy to waste his day",
The words did not offend her,
As she smiled up at her mom,
And looked back at her teacher,
Who told her to go on

And with hands behind her back,
Slowly she began to speak,
And out from the mouth of a child,
Came words incredibly unique,
"My daddy couldn't be here,
Because he lives so far away,
But I know he wishes he could be,
Since this is such a special day.

And though you cannot meet him,
I wanted you to know,
All about my daddy,
And how much he loves me so,
He loved to tell me stories,
He taught me to ride my bike,
He surprised me with pink roses,
And he taught me to fly a kite.

We used to share fudge sundaes,
And ice cream in a cone,
And though you cannot see him,
I'm not standing here alone,
'Cause my daddy's always with me,
Even though we are apart,
I know because he told me,
He'll forever be in my heart".

With that, her little hand reached up,
And lay across her chest,
Feeling her own heartbeat,
Beneath her favourite dress.

And from somewhere in the
crowd of dads,
Her mother stood in tears,
Proudly watching her daughter,
Who was wise beyond her years.

For she stood up for the love,
Of a man not in her life,
Doing what was best for her,
Doing what was right.

And when she dropped
her hand back down,
Staring straight into the crowd,
She finished with a voice so soft,
But its message clear and loud,
"I love my daddy very much,
He's my shining star,
And if he could, he'd be here,
But heaven's just too far."

Support in Your Setting

Support workers from Simon Says are available to attend your setting to offer generic training sessions and workshops on child/young people's bereavement, or to discuss specific issues within your setting.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Simon Says office.

Telephone 023 8064 7550

Email info@simonsays.org.uk

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Christine Druce

See Saw, Grief Support for Children and Young People in Oxfordshire – www.seesaw.org.uk

Winstons Wish - www.winstonswish.org.uk

Child Bereavement Charity – www.childbereavement.org.uk



Write: Simon Says, PO Box 485, Eastleigh, SO50 0BA
Telephone: 023 8064 7550
Email: info@simonsays.org.uk
Website: www.simonsays.org.uk
Simon Says Registered Charity Number: 1088746