

Bereavement During Covid-19



Grieving in exceptional times

During this time of isolation some families will experience the death of a loved one. It may be due to COVID-19, or it could be completely unrelated. It is natural to want to protect and shield children from death; however, we need to talk to children to help them feel safer. The best thing to do is give honest, developmentally appropriate information about death. It is difficult to see a child upset, but children cope better with sad news when they are told the truth.

Creating a sense of connection

We can try create the type of connection that happens at funerals and similar types of ceremonies in different ways. While children are at home they can connect virtually with friends, families and schools to share memories and create ideas together.

Virtual sessions can be planned for people to read tributes, poems or play the music they would have done at a funeral. For the purposes of infection control we must keep physically distant from each other. This is especially hard when we are grieving. Giving hugs to those around us is our normal way of showing support, but now we must restrict these actions to those within our safe isolation zone. Being together in isolation may allow more time to support each other with emotions and feelings around the loss.

Funerals

We would ordinarily encourage parents to allow children to take part in opportunities to say goodbye to loved ones in ways they feel comfortable. Children and young people are often involved in funerals and ceremonies. It helps them understand the finality of death and shows them how to give and receive compassion. These ceremonies can help children feel less isolated as they are part of a shared experience. During these exceptional times, however, it may not be possible to take part in the end-of-life celebrations and remembrance events such as funerals, memorial services and ceremonies. Infection controls may mean family members do not have an opportunity to spend time with someone who is dying, to say goodbye or attend funerals.





Finding new ways to connect in our grief

We have to adapt and develop new ways around supporting each other to grieve until the crisis passes. Children and young people can be encouraged to use their creative skills.

- Younger children could create stories and pictures of the person who died. They can fill memory boxes and scrapbooks and create photobooks to share with others.
- Older children may also find comfort in drawing, painting, writing and creating keepsakes to remember the person who died.
- The family, or school - with the family's consent, could create an online space to share memories, pictures and videos as a way of collectively remembering.
- Help children express their feelings in a way that works for them e.g. writing a poem or song, going for a walk to the person's favourite place or baking/cooking their favourite recipe (See below for more information on activities).

Staying emotionally connected is very important – help children to reach out and talk to the people they are close to, but have to be physically apart from just now. Encourage children to talk about their emotions. Let them know there are adults and friends they can speak to. Let them know that all emotions are ok e.g. sad, confused, angry, lonely. Let them know that grief can be messy but together we can help each other.

The world is a scary place at present. COVID-19 is on all our minds, for families who are bereaved their grief is the biggest thing on their minds. Children get their support from those they trust and who make them feel safe. This means that adults supporting the children and young people need to look after themselves and practice self-care. Make sure adults also have people to talk to, that they allow themselves to experience and express the emotions that they have.

'We can't give what we don't have'

Parental wellbeing is one of the most crucial aspects of supporting a child through the bereavement of a loved one, as parents need to be nourished and supported if they are to effectively care for their children. This includes focusing on their own physical and longer-term psychological wellbeing. Parents should focus on who is in their own support network, who they can talk to, where they can go when they need some space, and things they can do to help manage and cope with their own grief. There may be challenges to this during the current lockdown, however it is important that parents understand they too are experiencing a bereavement of a loved one, and should allow themselves opportunities to process this grief, make connections, and find their own strategies for coping with this.



Memory Box

Children collect items in a special box items that remind them of the person who has died and times shared with them.

Examples could include - cards received, perfume or aftershave, shells from a beach holiday, tickets from an outing, an item of clothing, jewellery or photographs.

Memory Playlist

A playlist of music that the person who died loved can be helpful as a way of connecting with the memories and processing emotions.

Family Record

This can help a child or young person gain a sense of where they and the person who has died fits into the family. A family tree can be put together. Family photographs, documents, certificates and mementoes can be included. It can be particularly powerful to include stories about the person's life which can be contributed by family members and friends. For example, what was the funniest thing the person ever did? What was their best subject at school? If you are going to include videos or sound tapes of the person who has died consider making a copy just to be on the safe side.

Memory Jar

It can be difficult for some children to express their thoughts or feelings around a bereavement. A memory jar is a visual way of representing these memories. A jar can be layered with different colours of chalk mixed with salt to represent different memories, you can also add objects to the jar that have significant meanings.

Perfume/ Aftershave

Spraying the person who has died's aftershave or perfume on to a scarf or hankie can be a source of comfort.

Comfort Cushion

Made from pieces of fabric belonging to the person who has died (shirts, blouses, trousers). You can also have a photograph of the person who died printed on the cushion. Hugging the cushion can provide comfort.



Ways COVID-19 may impact on us

The current situation impacts all of us. We will be challenged. One of the best things we can do is follow the official guidance and play our part to stop the spread. Sometimes we will feel angry, sad and confused by all that is going on. Children will have these feelings as well. Children may worry they have not been as good at following the measures to stop the spread. These anxieties will be worse if someone close to them dies; as adults it is our job to reassure them that no one is to blame.

After someone important dies children are likely to be worried about the rest of their family and the impact on them. It can be helpful to acknowledge their fears and worries; these could include someone else dying and/or someone becoming ill and being unable to look after them. Talk to them honestly but calmly. You do not have to have all of the facts or answers. You could look at resources together (see the link below for resources from Winston's Wish). Have gentle conversations so they do not feel like they are on their own. Acknowledge their concerns, provide reassurance and talk to them about coronavirus.

Being informed, supportive and looking after yourself will help during these difficult times.

Useful Website & Telephone Numbers

If you have any concerns about your child / young person you can access support through the following contact numbers:

- **Winston's Wish**
<https://www.winstonswish.org/>
Freephone National Helpline 08088 020 021 (Monday-Friday 9am-5pm)
ASK Email service ask@winstonswish.org
Online chat – click the 'ASK US' image on the website, available Wednesdays & Friday from 12-4pm
Free 24/7 text crisis support Text WW to 85258
Resources for talking to child about Coronavirus:
<https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus-supporting-bereaved-children-and-young-people/>
- **Childhood Bereavement UK**
<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>
Helpline 0800 02 888 40 (Monday-Friday 9am-5pm)
Email for bereavement support: support@childbereavementuk.org
Live chat via the website
- **Cruse Bereavement Care**
<https://www.cruse.org.uk/>
Helpline 0808 808 1677 (Monday-Friday 9.30am-5pm, excluding bank holidays and extended hours on Tue/Wed/Thurs when they are open to 8pm)
Email helpline@cruse.org.uk
Information on Coronavirus:
<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief>

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