

It's OK to:

- ❖ feel anxious for a while about your child's grieving.
- ❖ talk about the memories; looking at photos can be a good way to start talking.
- ❖ keep up with some usual activities, if keeping busy doesn't stop the grieving process.
- ❖ give yourself extra time to be together, and to sleep so as to repair your own hurt.
- ❖ tell people such as your child's teacher so they can support your child. Perhaps mention it to your child's friends so they know it's OK to talk about the loss.
- ❖ cry, be sad, be angry, or even to smile

It's OK for your child to choose to go to the funeral or not to go. If they are too young to choose it may be easier for you or for them if they don't go.

Try not to:

- ❖ bottle up your own feelings. A cry and a cuddle together can help all of you.
- ❖ insist that life must go on exactly as before. It can help to relax routines.
- ❖ squash memories. Time will sort out the good from the bad.
- ❖ put your own needs to one side. You coping with your grief will help your child see that it's OK to feel very very sad.
- ❖ over-compensate by giving into your child, or buying them lots of presents. This is hard to readjust later.
- ❖ give a time limit to your child's grief, or think they should be over it by now. It may come in waves for a long time.

When grief doesn't end

Most grieving has run its full course within two years, and the most intense grieving within a year. You can tell if your child is adjusting to the new situation if they return to their previous behaviour. They should become more secure, their sleep patterns should have returned to normal and they should not need to be so near you. If your child has become very withdrawn or depressed, does not get over the grieving or remains preoccupied with death then you may feel you need to get in touch with a professional agency through your GP or through school.



There are other leaflets available which cover a range of difficulties that your child may experience at home and school. For a list of leaflets ask your school or contact the EPS on (01302) 737291.

BEREAVEMENT

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

Bringing up children is a difficult job and no-one teaches us how to do it. We do not claim to have all the answers, but we hope these leaflets will help you to understand why some of these problems occur and how to deal with them.



DONCASTER EDUCATIONAL
PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE

Bereavement

If your child has experienced the death of someone close, then you and the rest of your family are probably affected. A child may not show their feelings in the same way as an adult, but seeing you coping with your grief will help your child to cope.

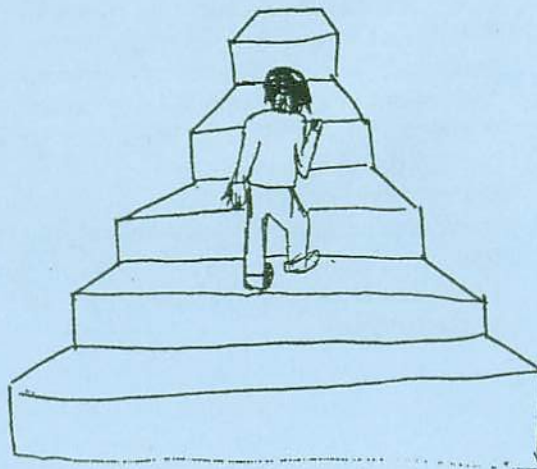
If there are religious beliefs held within the family, it is important that these are explained to the children; for example a Christian belief in heaven and an eternal life. These are more than comforting and help everyone concerned to make sense of the events.

Using clear language

Younger children particularly are often confused by the terms we use such as "passed on" and do not realise the finality of death. **Very young children** see everything from their own point of view, they may think that they can change the situation, and that they can bring the person back. **Slightly older children** can feel that they are in some way responsible maybe by their own bad behaviour. They may try to deny what has happened by not talking about it, or carrying on as if nothing is different. Some children are unwilling to talk about their feelings, so it is important for adults to be able to say clearly what has happened and be ready to answer questions too. You will not really protect your child in the long term by not talking about things, it may make things harder for them the next time someone dies.

What happens through bereavement

It helps to remember that a bereavement can make children realise that everyone dies. They may worry very much that you will die and that they will die, especially if the recent death was sudden.



There are stages of bereavement that may be experienced, but not everyone goes through all of them:

- ❖ experiencing the pain of the loss. This is often accompanied by a feeling of disbelief or numbness and in younger children perhaps a belief that the person will come back.
- ❖ emotional feelings of anger, unfairness, sometimes guilt that they are still alive, perhaps blaming themselves.
- ❖ accepting the reality of the loss when it is understood that the person will not come back.

- ❖ adjusting to life without the person who has died. People have their ups and downs so that birthdays and Christmas can be upsetting occasions.
- ❖ starting to form new relationships, not to forget the person, but to help heal the hurt that has resulted.

Very young children may not fully understand, and may keep asking questions, but **by about the age of 6 or 7** most children will understand that once people die they cannot come back to life again, that all the body is dead, that everything living will die at some point, and that there has been a cause to death.

Behaviour changes

Children may change their behaviour in reaction to the death, but remember that changes in behaviour are also part of growing up. Most behaviour changes are only temporary and children return to usual behaviour after a few weeks. They may behave in any of the following ways:

- ❖ crying alone or openly
- ❖ being less cheerful or even depressed
- ❖ showing anger or aggressiveness
- ❖ being anxious and uncertain, especially about new things
- ❖ showing fears of the dark or of you going away
- ❖ being attention-seeking
- ❖ showing much younger behaviours