

General guidance for parents/carers when supporting your child/children (any age) following loss/ bereavement/ traumatic incident

When a children or young person experiences loss, bereavement, or any type of traumatic incident, it can be very upsetting for them, and for you. It is very normal in these circumstances for children and young people to feel upset. It might be their first experience of such an event and therefore feels a challenge for you to help and support.

Even though the event will pass, children and young people may continue to have reactions that last a few days, weeks or even longer. You can help by offering support and reassurance, alongside their teachers and friends too.

Children and young people are likely to have thoughts and feelings which could have an effect on their behaviour following the event. Some common reactions could include:

Thoughts	Feelings	Behaviour
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusion • Thinking they cannot cope • Spending a lot of time thinking about what has happened – replaying details and trying to understand how something may have happened • Nightmares/bad dreams • Sense of injustice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worried • Anxious • Sad • Fearful • Confused • Angry • Panicked • Overwhelmed • Nervous • Guilty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiet and withdrawn – may be reluctant to talk • Clinginess • Easily upset • Not wanting to attend school or normal activities • Loss of appetite or ‘comfort eating’ • Feeling sick • Unable to sleep - tiredness • Irritable – being quarrelsome/arguing • Poor concentration • Return to younger behaviours, e.g. thumb sucking, bedwetting

It is important to remember that these are all normal reactions and that reactions will lessen in time (normally over several weeks). Ways in which you can help your child/children include the following:

Do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take time to listen and answer questions – reassure children in clear information they can understand. • Be honest in your explanations and in showing your own sadness and grief. It is OK to say “I don’t know” if you don’t know the answer to questions. • Share activities together such as going for a walk, or completing household jobs together – children are more likely to express their feelings about what has happened during these moments. • In the case of a death, talk about the person who has died. This will give your child/children permission to talk about the person who has died, will help to keep their memory alive and can be very comforting. • Continue and resume normal routines, e.g. bedtime, mealtimes, attending clubs and activities, as quickly as possible. This will help to give a sense of normality and security. • During times you might be away from your child/children, let them know where you are, try to return on time or let them know that you are safe. This will help to provide security so that they do not worry something has happened to you. • In the case of a death, talk about what will happen and how they could be included, e.g. writing a letter/poem, drawing a picture, use of a balloon. • Take the time to look after yourself. Take part in activities you enjoy doing and speak with other adults about your own feelings. Children cope better when they have a parent/carer who is coping.

Avoid
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using confusing language such as “gone to sleep”, “lost” or “gone on a long journey”, instead be clear, and communicate facts, including that a person has “died”. • Hiding your own sadness or grief – we want children to know that being sad and upset is normal, although our own sadness and grief should not overwhelm them. We should show them that crying or showing emotion is nothing to be embarrassed about (the very opposite in fact!). • Judging or assuming that children are not affected by the event, even if they seem busy in their play and activities and seem to have forgotten what has happened.

If you continue to have concerns, do not hesitate to seek support from your child’s school and/or General Practitioner (GP).