

Bereavement support for children and families

Supporting a bereaved child – parents and carers [Target audience: parents and carers]

As a parent or carer, you may feel uncertain how to support your own children when the death of someone close to the family happens.

Although it might be difficult, families, just by carrying on with their normal day to day activities and routines, can provide a secure and safe haven to support their grieving children. Below are some guidelines that will help you.

Useful things to consider

1. Every child and young person will experience grief in a unique and individual way.
2. Acknowledge what has happened and do not be afraid to talk to your children about the person who has died.
3. Encourage your child to express their thoughts, emotional feelings and physical feelings and do not be afraid to share your own feelings of sadness.
4. Recognise the full tragedy. Do not try to comfort with comments like 'you'll soon get over it'. Better to say that 'this is a difficult time for all of us, but we will support each other through it'.
5. Reassure your child when he/she expresses concerns or worries.
6. Don't assume that a lack of reaction means that your child has not been significantly affected by the death.

Talking about the person who has died

- Be honest – answer awkward questions truthfully – it's okay to say, 'I don't know the answer!'
- Give your child the opportunity to ask any questions they have – you might be able to answer then straight away, or you could write their questions down to come back to later.
- Encourage your child to share their memories of the person who has died. The bereaved child/young person may well need to do this.
- Try to avoid using euphemisms e.g. the dead person has 'gone away' or has 'gone to sleep'. It is better to use the word 'died'.
- Remember, some children and young people will find it easy to talk about their thoughts and feelings, others will find it more difficult. The key thing is to give them the opportunity to talk when and if they want to.
- Be prepared to listen to how they are feeling – see through your child's eyes / step into their shoes.
- Make time to listen and hesitate before speaking if your child gets stuck for something to say (often, silence enables a child to process their thoughts and feelings).

Remember – there is always someone who will be able to support you through this difficult time. It might be other family members or there are many helpful bereavement support organisations with trained workers and volunteers. There are a list of them on our Diocesan website. Contact Helen Brown (RE and Catholic Life Adviser) Helen.Brown@pcdtr.org.uk for further information.