

### WHAT BEREAVED CHILDREN NEED



The following article is based on what children and young people themselves have told counselling services they need when it comes to bereavement care. (Cruse Services)

#### **ANSWER MY QUESTIONS**

Simply, sensitively and factually answer questions children and young people ask. Be specific, using words like “dead” or “death” rather than “gone to a better place”. It can help to first ask about the child’s understanding of what happened in order to address misunderstandings.

#### **HELP ME UNDERSTAND**

Children need to understand that the person who has died can never come back. Explain clearly the cause of death and ensure the child knows the death was not their fault. Sometimes you will have to answer the same questions repeatedly; this is the child’s way of checking that the facts have not changed.

#### **GIVE ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE PART**

It is important to let children take some part in the mourning process, under normal circumstances children can be involved in funeral arrangements and the rituals associated with death. In current circumstances this is more difficult but children can be encouraged to draw, paint or write in memory of the person who has died. Telling the children what to expect and explain what is happening in the current situation is most important. You can plan a way to remember the loved one when the restrictions are lifted.

#### **GIVE ME EXTRA REASSURANCE AND AFFECTION**

This will help them know they are still loved even in the midst of all the sadness and loss. Children need to know and be reassured that someone will continue to care for them and be there to meet their basic physical and emotional needs. Keeping routines and consistency at home is even more important as they no longer have the routine of school life.

#### **THE CHANCE TO BE QUIET AND ALONE**

This is important from time to time; this will be more significant for older children.

#### **THE OPPORTUNITY TO TALK AT MY OWN PACE**

Children want to talk in their own time. They want the opportunity to express feelings openly, and to be reassured that the feelings they are experiencing are normal and other people feel the same way.

#### **WAY TO HELP ME REMEMBER THE PERSON WHO HAS DIED**

Opportunities to play and draw, paint or write will help to reveal a child’s inner world. Children can begin to create a memory book or box with photographs and special mementoes of the person who has died. Remember the sense of smell is significant to many children, if you have a specific perfume/aftershave or soap keep some to help the children in the future.

#### **HELP ME WHEN IT IS TIME TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL**

Inform the school about the loss and invite the child to help decide who and how others are told about the situation. Find out the name of a key person the child can talk to in school if they need some extra help. This is important even if a number of months have passed in the current circumstances.

**THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THERE ARE CARING ADULTS WHOM I CAN TRUST**

It is important that children know that the adults around them can be trusted and will spend time with them. Extended family, neighbours or teachers can be a resource and a listening ear, even in current circumstances it is possible to facilitate this via a range of social media and other methods of distance communication.

**OFFER ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK TO SOMEONE OUTSIDE THE FAMILY GROUP**

Often children try to protect parents and other family members from further sadness by hiding their own grief, and it is helpful for them to have a someone else to talk to. This may need to be from a distance by use of telephone or by a platform such as zoom (services are still available), eventually it is helpful for some children to have a safe place to face and begin dealing with their grief.

As you are bereaved too, the first thing you can do for your child is to LOOK AFTER YOURSELF. It can be very painful to manage both your own feelings and your child's. Sometimes it is just impossible, it can be normal. Don't try to carry it all on your own in isolation. Reach out to services that are available in the local area.

Overall, most children need clear, direct information so that they can begin to face the reality of death and cope with their pain and loss. You will instinctively want to protect your child, or feel it is better if they do not know the truth. However, children are quick to notice when things are not right; silence will only bewilder and frighten them.