

Supporting children with bereavement and loss through Covid-19

Helpline Parents: 0161 276 0115 (Monday – Friday 9.00am – 12.00)

School Staff: 0161 276 0114 Monday (Friday 1.00pm – 3.00pm)

Email a question and you will receive a reply from our educational psychology team: bereavementsupport@oneeducation.co.uk

In the coming weeks and months, more children and young people will face bereavement through the effects of the coronavirus (COVID-19). As educational psychologists, we work with parents, carers and school staff to offer guidance and support about how to speak to children about death and dying. Although COVID-19 is a shocking new situation, the general guidance on talking to children about the death of someone close holds true.

- Listen and give time for children to talk about what has happened and be open to answering difficult questions in an age appropriate way.
- Be clear and honest. Avoid using euphemisms, e.g. 'passed away', as this can create confusion, about the meaning of death especially with younger children.
- Accept children's feelings and allow a safe space for them to be able to express their sadness, confusion, anger etc.
- Reassurance that they are not to blame and that it's okay to have their own feelings and these can be different to how other people are feeling.
- It is important to try to continue with normal routines as far as possible.
- Allow time for children to make memories and create continuing bonds with the person who has died. This could be; creative memory making activities, journals or personal story telling.
- Look after yourself. Supporting distressed children is emotionally demanding. Look to others to support you manage these experiences and feelings.

Supporting children when someone close has died from COVID-19

There are some complicating factors about deaths from COVID-19 that may affect children:

- **Suddenness:** People may sicken and die quite rapidly; children will have little time to adjust to a rapidly changing future.
- **Separation:** Children may not be able to spend time with their dying relative, won't be able to touch or hug them or even be in the same room.
- **Fear:** People may react to the news that this person had died with instinctive fear rather than instinctive comfort.
- **Support structures:** Children and young people may be physically distant from those who might support them – friends, teachers, wider family.
- **Anger:** Children and young people may feel angry about things they perceive to have contributed to this death: people being slow to self-isolate, lack of ventilators etc.
- **Anxiety:** While children and young people will worry about other family members dying after any death, in the present situation, such anxiety is sharper and less easy to soothe.
- **Absence of rituals:** With heavy restrictions on funerals, children and young people may have less chance to 'say goodbye' in a formal sense
- **Unpredictability:** It's not only very old and frail people who are dying. Some of these factors can make it more complicated to talk about. For example, it will be harder to explain why their special person died, (when perhaps someone else with similar symptoms didn't) as there is much still unknown about how the virus works. It may also feel harder to assure children that other people they know won't die yet.

Sources of support

Every family is different and these are extremely difficult times. We are available to talk through any questions or concerns you may have:

Helpful Resources

Newsround: Visit the CBBC Newsround special on childhood bereavement.

Young Minds: Parents Helpline: 0808 802 5544 <https://youngminds.org.uk/>

Winston's Wish: 08088 020 021 www.winstonswish.co.uk

Child Bereavement UK: 0800 02 888 40 www.childbereavementnetwork.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care: 0844 477 9400 www.cruse.org.uk

Children's Bereavement Support: 0161 711 0339 www.onceuponasmile.co.uk