

The impact of bereavement in an early years setting

Di Stubbs



Question:-

☼ Why do children grow up in one parent families?





Statistics in context

☼ Around 60 British children were bereaved of a parent "in 9/11"





Statistics in context

- ✧ Around 60 British children were bereaved of a parent “in” 9/11
- ✧ Around 110 other British children were bereaved of a parent “on” 9/11



Statistics in context

- ✧ Around 60 British children were bereaved of a parent “in” 9/11
- ✧ Around 110 other British children were bereaved of a parent “on” 9/11
- ✧ Around 110 British children were bereaved of a parent “on” 9/12: and 9/13 and yesterday.....



Statistics

- ✧ 110 children a day are bereaved of a parent
- ✧ Every 22 minutes a child is bereaved of a parent – approx 40,000 bereaved children a year
- ✧ Many more will be bereaved of a sibling or other close family member
- ✧ 309,000 (3.5% of) children in Great Britain aged 5 to 16 have experienced the death of a parent or sibling



Deaths affecting an early years' setting

☼ **Death of a child's parent or sibling**

- ☼ Death of a child / friend
- ☼ Death of a teacher / T.A. / etc
- ☼ Death of a group of children (eg minibus crash)
- ☼ Deaths in the news (especially those affecting children)



Deaths affecting an early years' setting

- ☼ How children make sense of what has happened will depend on a number of factors, including their stage of development
- ☼ Note other developmental factors



What children need

- ☼ To have their loss acknowledged
- ☼ Information and understanding
- ☼ To explore and express their feelings and thoughts
- ☼ Memories and the opportunities to remember
- ☼ To say goodbye/ 'rituals'
- ☼ A continuing bond – over time
- ☼ 'Coping strategies'



What children need

- ✧ To have their loss acknowledged



What children need

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- ✧ Information and understanding



Developing concepts of death

- ✧ Immobility
- ✧ Non-functionality
- ✧ Insensitivity
- ✧ Irreversibility
- ✧ Causality
- ✧ Universality
- ✧ Appearance
- ✧ Separation



Concepts of death

- ✘ The hamster isn't moving
- ✘ The hamster is this thing called 'dead'
- ✘ Grandpa is this thing called 'dead' but will he still take me to football?
- ✘ Grandpa is dead and he'll never take me to football again
- ✘ Grandma is old and will die
- ✘ Mum and Dad will die
- ✘ Everyone dies ...
- ✘ ...and not only when they're old
- ✘ I will die
- ✘ I can kill myself



Up to 6 months

Concepts:

- ✘ withdrawal of care and nourishment from a familiar person
- ✘ aware of emotional withdrawal of key carer
- ✘ loss and abandonment synonymous



Likely feelings and behaviours:

- ✘ abandonment
- ✘ insecurity / being unsettled
- ✘ fretful
- ✘ cries in protest
- ✘ disrupted sleep and feeding routine



Up to 6 months

Ways of helping:

- ✘ A surrogate carer to maintain basic care and 'holding' to give continued sense of security
- ✘ Maintain routines as much as possible
- ✘ Some physical, comforting link to the person who has died



6 months – 2 years

Concepts:

- ✧ Developing 'object constancy awareness'
- ✧ Begins to have mental image of person when absent and can 'miss' them
- ✧ Loss and abandonment feel the same
- ✧ Acquisition of language



Likely feelings and behaviour:

- ✧ Protest and distress
- ✧ Withdrawal
- ✧ Separation anxiety
- ✧ No/little interest in food or toys
- ✧ Searching behaviour
- ✧ Sleeping difficulties



6 months – 2 years

Ways of helping:

- ✧ Maintenance of daily routine
- ✧ Reassurance from other adults
- ✧ Warmth and cuddling from other adults
- ✧ Some physical, comforting link to the person who has died



2 – 5 years

Concepts:

- ✧ Establishing that he/she is a separate person
- ✧ Interested in the idea of death in birds, animals etc
- ✧ Understands that death is a part of natural order but lacks ability to appreciate its finality and irreversibility
- ✧ Expects the person's return
- ✧ Beginning of 'Magical thinking'
- ✧ 'Puddle jumping'



2 – 5 years

Likely feelings and behaviours

- ✧ Repeated questions
- ✧ Can be fearful of being left alone, even for very short periods
- ✧ Being especially 'good' to compensate for sense of badness, which they believe contributed to the death
- ✧ Or sometimes testing loving relationships / temper tantrums
- ✧ Confidently talks about death but without understanding
- ✧ 'Puddle jumping'



2 – 5 years

Ways of helping:

- ✧ Gently repeat the fact that dead person will not return
- ✧ Use clear, straightforward language
- ✧ Answer their many questions honestly, however many times
- ✧ Do not protect them "because they don't understand"
- ✧ Continue to make links with dead flies, flowers etc
- ✧ Maintain daily routines
- ✧ Be patient with 'accidents', temper, disturbed sleep etc



5 – 8 years

Concepts

- ✧ Age of magical thinking
- ✧ Believe they can influence events with thought and behaviour
- ✧ Developing 'conscience' so can feel guilt about what their supposed power brings about
- ✧ May think independent events at time of death 'caused' it
- ✧ Fuller understanding of concept of death, therefore more anxious about other deaths
- ✧ Death may still be thought of as reversible



5 – 8 years

Likely feelings and behaviour

- ✧ Can fear death of others
- ✧ Especially 'good' to compensate for sense of badness, which they believe contributed to the death
- ✧ Behave badly and, therefore, incur the punishment they 'deserve'
- ✧ Or to 'reset reality'
- ✧ Compulsively caring towards surviving adults or siblings
- ✧ Cover up sadness by behaving as if nothing happened
- ✧ 'Is big now' and fears behaving in an infantile way



5 – 8 years

Ways of helping:

- ✧ Honest, open, matter-of-fact information about death and dying
- ✧ Make clear that the child was in no way responsible
- ✧ Provide opportunities for open communication within the family
- ✧ Provide opportunities for the expression of thoughts and feelings
- ✧ Lots of reassurance
- ✧ Ways to feel connected when apart



Developmental understanding

- ✧ Children and young people develop their understanding of death and dying...
- ✧ ...However, this means a child bereaved at a young age re-experiences / re-comprehends their grief at different ages



What children need

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- ✧ To explore and express their feelings and thoughts



Some responses to loss

- Fear
- Sadness
- Blame
- Withdrawal
- Numbness
- Confusion/bewilderment
- Arguing
- Drinking/drugs
- Powerlessness
- Anger
- Keeping busy
- Resentment
- Physical reactions
- Feeling detached
- Risk taking
- Shock
- Relief
- Yearning/pining
- Acceptance
- Questioning – why? what if?
- Avoidance
- Indifference
- Anything else?
- Exhaustion
- Anxiety
- Disbelief
- Silence
- Suicidal thoughts
- Hollow ache



Some responses to loss for younger children

Sadness
Fear
Blame
Withdrawal
Numbness
Confusion/bewilderment
Arguing
Drinking/drugs

Anger
Keeping busy
Resentment
Physical reactions
Powerlessness
Feeling detached
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Memories

- ✧ Preserving any memories
- ✧ 'Re-saving' memories by recalling them
- ✧ Memory boxes
- ✧ Salt jars for older ones
- ✧ Story telling
- ✧ Involving the family and friends
- ✧ Quizzes – what was Dad's favourite cake? Mum's favourite colour? Naughtiest thing they did?



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Funerals...

- ✧ Simple explanations of what happens ... and how people will feel / react
- ✧ If appropriate, offer a choice (but younger children might need decision taken for them)
- ✧ Have a special adult to be their support
- ✧ Memory cards
- ✧ Explanations about the 'wake'
- ✧ Consider taking photographs
- ✧ Alternative funerals / celebrations
- ✧ Culture and faith





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Secondary losses

- ✳ In addition to the death itself, a child may need to face a series of **'secondary losses'**
- ✳ moving house
 - 'losing' bedroom, den, garden etc
- ✳ moving school / nursery
 - 'losing' friends, teacher, corner of playground etc
- ✳ moving area
 - 'losing' clubs, neighbours, routine, park etc

Dear Mum
 How are you getting on? How's it if it's been how long? I think it is scary because I'm scared of heights. I've now got a bedroom of my own. I miss you and wish you was a little so I could move back home. I don't want to move school.
 I've got a play station and I will be taking a few station 2 for my birthday. I wish I could be with you again.
 From
 Ryan
 P.S. [unclear] [unclear]

How to confuse children

Some examples of the language we use:

- ✳ Heart attack



How to confuse children

Some examples of the language we use:

- ✳ Heart attack
- ✳ Stroke



How to confuse children

Some examples of the language we use:

- ✳ Heart attack
- ✳ Stroke
- ✳ Heaven



How to confuse children

Some examples of the language we use:

- ✧ Heart attack
- ✧ Stroke
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- ✧ 'Mummy's up in the sky'



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How to confuse children

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- ✧ 'Granny died in her sleep'
- ✧ 'We've lost your father'



How to confuse children

Some examples of the language we use:

- * Heart attack
- * Stroke
- * Heaven
- * 'Mummy's up in the sky'
- * 'Granny died in her sleep'
- * 'We've lost your father'
- * Seeing the body/burying the body



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- * Headstone



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- * Headstone
- * Organ donation



Deaths affecting an early years' setting

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Strategies

- Early Years' setting – some thoughts
 - Acknowledge



Things that might help...

- ✘ Use simple language – died, dead, death.
- ✘ Something very sad has happened... Alex's Mum has died.
- ✘ And when someone has died, they can't...
- ✘ This is very, very unusual. It's very rare for Mums or Dads to die until they are very old...
- ✘ Alex will be feeling very sad and might not want to...
- ✘ How can we help Alex?



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 - Individual support where possible



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 - Mother's Day/Father's Day/Easter





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 - Activities awareness
 - Mother's Day/Father's Day/Easter
 - Calendar of important dates





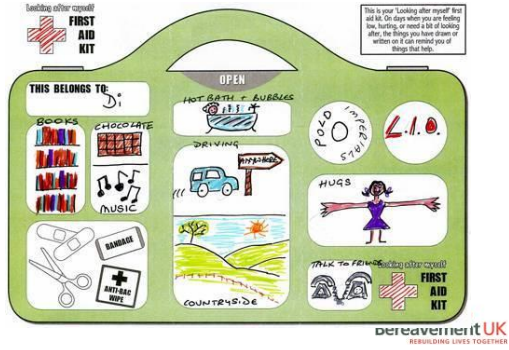
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 - Calendar of important dates
 - Emotional first aid kits, circles of support* etc

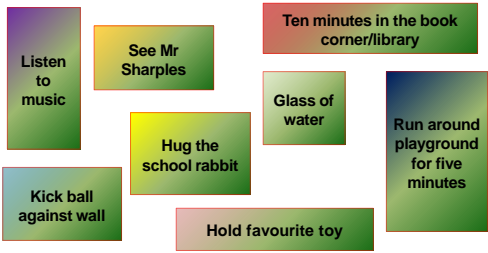




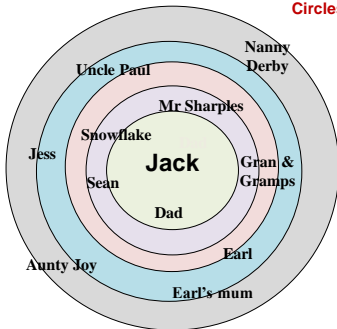
Emotional First Aid Kits

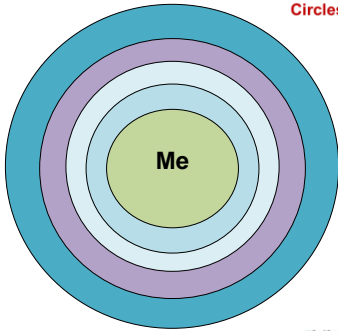


First Aid Kit for Alex



Circles of support





Circles of support



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- Mother's Day/Father's Day/Easter
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- Helping each other / Sharing information



Strategies



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- Information ahead to schools / school allocation



Strategies



- What can stop us helping...
 - "I don't know what to say..."
 - "I don't want to remind them"
 - "I don't know if he knows I know"
 - "It's the wrong time and place"
 - "It's not my role"
 - "I'm not trained"
 - "I'm worried it'll set off the others..."
 - "It also happened to me so I'm concerned I'll get upset"
 - "I'm scared of saying the wrong thing so I end up saying nothing"

In early years settings...



Some additional factors...

- Family's preferences
- Nature of the death – suicide, murder/manslaughter, armed forces, celebrity
- In context of other factors – media attention, staff changes/ill health
- Additional needs of children with special educational or developmental needs



Strategies

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Strategies

- **Child Bereavement UK**
www.childbereavementuk.org/Support/Schools
- **Winston's Wish**
www.winstonswish.org.uk/schools-information-pdf-page
- **Seesaw**
www.seesaw.org.uk/schools.htm

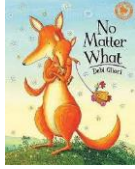


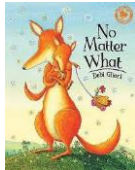
Good books!

- When Dinosaurs Die – Laurie Krasny Brown
- No Matter What – Debi Glori
- Always and Forever – Debi Glori
- Missing Mummy – Rebecca Cobb
- I Miss You – Pat Thomas
- Is Daddy coming back in a minute? – Elke Barber
- What happened to Daddy's body? – Elke Barber
- Dear Grandma Bunny – Dick Bruna
- Tenth Good Thing about Barney – Judith Voist
- Luna's Red Hat – Emmi Schmid / Little Flower Bulb – Eleanor Gormally
- Waterbugs and Dragonflies
- Lists on website of CBUK

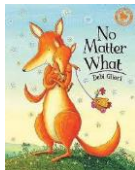








*'But what happens after we are dead and gone?
Does love go on?'*

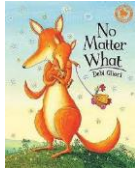
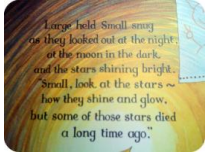


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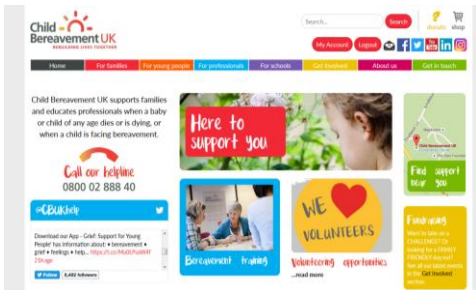
Helpline: 0800 02 888 40



Email: enquiries@childbereavementuk.org



Our website



www.childbereavementuk.org





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- ✧ practical guidance and information
- ✧ unlimited users per school.



Please visit:

www.childbereavementuk.org/onlinelearning

to view short film about the programme and to purchase online or email learning@childbereavementuk.org





Grief: support for young people app

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REBUILDING LIVES TOGETHER

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'Grief: Support for Young People'

An app designed by bereaved young people for bereaved young people. Can also be used by friends, parents and professionals supporting bereaved young people.

The app enables you to get the support that you want on your own space and your own time. Check, open it!

Includes:

- Information about bereavement, grief, feelings
- Shows how bereaved young people and their friends can help each other and cope
- Links to search for local support organisations

Available on the App Store and Google Play

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- helpline
- training
- publications and resources
- young people's support mobile app

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Call our helpline
0800 02 888 40

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The impact of bereavement in an early years setting

Di Stubbs

Thank you for listening!