



Children and Grief

A Teachers Guide to hospice care
and bereavement

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LOROS

Hospice Care for Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland

Being there for you
and *your family*

What is a Hospice?

A hospice is a special place which provides palliative care - care for people with life limiting illnesses, focussing on giving them the best possible quality of life. A hospice provides support for carers and family members, in the form of counselling.

Every year, LOROS Hospice provides vital care to over 2,500 people with terminal or life-limiting illnesses, as well as providing support for many of their loved ones. From managing someone's pain, to looking after their emotional, spiritual and social needs, hospice care supports the whole person, helping them to live their life to the full.



"You matter because you are you and you matter until the last moment of your life. We will do all we can, not only to help you die peacefully but to live until you die."

- Dame Cicely Saunders, founder of the UK hospice movement

Grief is a natural reaction to loss and each person has their own unique and individual experience. There is no right way to grieve. You may experience going through many different feelings or you find your thoughts and concentration fluctuate, leaving you feeling confused. You may feel some immediate relief. There can be good days and bad days and ups and downs. This is a normal response to loss.



How can we talk about grief and bereavement in school?

Bereavement is something that we all experience at some point in our lives. One study found 92% of young people will experience a significant bereavement before the age of 16 years.

The death of someone close to you is the most difficult experience anyone has to face. For children, who may not have had to face the death of someone close to them before, the strong feeling that they experience may make them confused, frightened, and lonely making them feel different from their peers.

Schools which are committed to being prepared, supportive and informed around bereavement can play a significant, positive role in helping children to learn about and deal with loss.

Talking about the feeling of grief and loss is a difficult but vital conversation to have with children. This conversation provides bereaved children with a better understanding of their own feelings and will help them to feel less alone. It will also help prepare any children who may experience loss in the future, and it will enable children to better understand and support their peers.

What do we do if our Parents/ Guardians don't want us to talk about death?

You may experience some resistance from the parents/guardians who feel that this topic of end of life care, death and dying to be too mature a topic for their children. This is common and we at LOROS want to support you to have these difficult conversations.

Our staff are trained to deliver talks in an age appropriate manner and always tailor what they are saying to suit the audience they visit. We can visit the school to talk to parents in advance of the fundraising events or assemblies if this will help to alleviate any concerns they have. Our staff are happy to also speak to individual parents via the phone or email prior to a visit.

We can offer teacher training sessions with our counselling team which will help to boost your confidence in discussing this issue.

These can be booked by contacting the hospice on **0116 231 3771**, and are free of charge.

Email carolinerogers@loros.co.uk to find out more.

What can you do?

1. Let parents/carers know in advance that children will be discussing the issue of loss and bereavement and allow them an opportunity to raise any issues or concerns they may have.
2. Ask parents/carers to alert the school to any experiences their child has that might make this area particularly difficult for them – for example a bereavement, or someone in the family with serious illness and anticipating loss.
3. Also ask children/young people themselves as they may not want to be excluded from activities with their peers. It can be helpful to sensitively check in with them how this can be possible.
4. Introduce mindfulness activities into your classroom. Meditation, colouring, or yoga are good examples. Check our Cosmic Kids Yoga on YouTube and Twinkl's vast array of mindfulness activities to help with this.
5. Encourage children/young people to talk about their own experiences.
6. Give children/young people information on what to do if they want to talk more about their feelings (e.g. Who to talk to, time out cards etc.).



How can I help a child or young person deal with grief?

It is crucial that a bereaved child has the support and understanding of a trusted, emotionally available adult, when grieving family members may not be available as they would normally be. Often a teacher is the person a child will confide in. Here, we will outline some common emotions and ways of grieving that a bereaved child, may experience, as well as some pointers on how to support a grieving child, to give you a starting point in helping pupils who may have lost a loved one.

- Children may ask you difficult questions about death and dying and about their feelings. Be honest, simple and direct.
- For younger children, talking to them through play can help.
- Answer what you can carefully, with words you know they will understand.
- Children will show their feelings in lots of different ways. If they are feeling upset and cannot talk about something, they might show this by acting younger than they are, not sleeping or in physical symptoms such as tummy aches and headaches. They can become clingy and worry about other members of their family.
- Avoid long explanations which can confuse children and don't be afraid to use words like death, as saying that somebody has 'gone to sleep' can create sleep problems in the future.
- It is ok to say 'I don't know'.
- Encourage them to express their feelings openly. Listen to what the child is trying to tell you verbally or through their behaviour and respond according to the child's need. Children often express their grief through play.
- Try to avoid telling them how he/ she should feel. You should accept the emotions and reactions the child expressed. Make sure they feel safe to cry and that they know it is perfectly normal.
- Children need reassurance about myths and fantasies they may have. They may not be able to express these, so need reassurance that death is not contagious and the death of one person does not mean everyone is going to die soon. They also need reassurance that there is nothing they have said, thought or done that could have caused the death.
- Routine gives children much needed stability in a huge time of change and school is a major part of their daily routine. Keep their school routine as consistent as possible, but also make sure there is somewhere quiet for them to go to in school if they need to. Remember to talk about the person who has died. Children may not take the lead and often take their cues from adults. They may need help keeping memories of the person, so encourage them to share memories of their loved one.
- It is important to remember that there is no 'right' way of feeling when someone close to you dies. Everyone feels their loss differently and not every child will react the same to a bereavement.

What are the common emotions children experience when grieving?

The feelings a bereaved child could experience may be like a rollercoaster of strong emotions. At first, they may feel numb and empty or even believe that the person they loved will come walking back through the door.

Anger – It is natural for a bereaved child to feel angry, they may ask “why has this happened to me?” They may feel that it isn’t fair that the person they love has died, they may even feel angry at the person who has died. This is a normal reaction.

Anxiety – A bereaved child may feel anxious about being separated from other people in their life. They might not want to be left on their own. Talking about this may help.

Relief – As part of the grieving process it is not unusual to feel a sense of relief that the person that they love has died. It may be that they were very ill and in a lot of pain.

Depression – The bereaved child might not see that depression is not a weakness. It’s part of saying goodbye to someone they care about. It may make them feel like there is no point in anything anymore.

Sadness – When an important person in your life dies you can feel overwhelming sadness. A sadness more painful and profound than you have ever felt before. Sadness is a normal feeling in the grieving process, part of learning to adapt to life without that person in it.

Loneliness – Grief can be very isolating. Even though the loss may be shared, each person’s grief is unique. It can be normal to feel alone even when surrounded by other people who care. You may feel nobody understands and feel different from others around you.

Guilt and blame – When someone dies a lot of people feel guilty and blame themselves for various reasons. It’s important that a bereaved child understands that they need to be kind to themselves.

Tiredness and physical symptoms – The whole process of grieving is emotionally and physically exhausting. A bereaved child may find that they sleep or eat more or less than usual.

What are some of the ways that will help children cope?

The funeral – Funerals play an important role in the grieving process. They let everyone remember and say goodbye to the person who has died. They are a time when family and friends can come together to share their memories and support one another. If a child has never been to one before and they don't know what to expect, it may help for them to talk to somebody about it.

Remembering – It's natural to spend a lot of time remembering the person who has died. These memories may be painful at first. It sometimes helps a bereaved child to write about the person who has died or make a memory box containing items such as letters and photos. This can help them at the time, and will become a treasured possession in the future.

Good and bad days – A child who has lost a loved one will probably find that they have good and bad days. At first, they will probably find there are more bad days than good, however with time this will change. Encourage them not to feel guilty when they have a good day. Special occasions such as birthdays can be a particularly difficult time and it would be helpful to see how they would like to mark those days.

Friends – Some of the child's friends may find it difficult to talk to them at first. They may be worried that they will upset their friend and won't know what to say. If possible, speak with the child's closest friends and invite them to come to you if they have any questions or want to know what to say or how to help.





What activities can we do in school to support the child / young person?

It is important that children and young people gain a clear understanding of what happened to the person who died. Younger children may appreciate using dolls, model figures or puppets to tell the story. Older children may prefer to use paper and pens, it can help them to tell what happened if they break the story into five or so pieces.

- What was life like before they died?
- What happened just before they died?
- How did they die? What happened?
- What happened immediately afterwards?
- What is life like now?

Where else can we get some support?

LOROS is always here for you. We have included some other websites that may help, especially with more specific support.

-  The Laura Centre
– For when a child dies or is bereaved
-  Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide
– Overcoming the isolation of people bereaved by suicide (uksobs.org)
-  Child Bereavement UK
-  Winston's Wish - giving hope to grieving children (winstonswish.org)

What else can we do?

Remember that this is difficult for all involved, and can be a very emotionally charged time for you as staff. Talk to each other, share experiences and ideas and ask for help when you need it. LOROS is always here to help, we are just an email or phone call away.

Contact details

For counselling team contact
Caroline Rogers
Caroline.Rogers@loros.co.uk
(0116) 231 3771

For fundraising contact
Emma Baxter
emmabaxter@loros.co.uk
(0116) 231 8431

LOROS

Hospice Care for Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland


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and your family

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REGULATOR

LOROS Groby Road, Leicester LE3 9QE

 (0116) 231 3771

 info@loros.co.uk

 @LOROSHospice

 /LOROSHospice

 @LOROSHospice

loros.co.uk

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