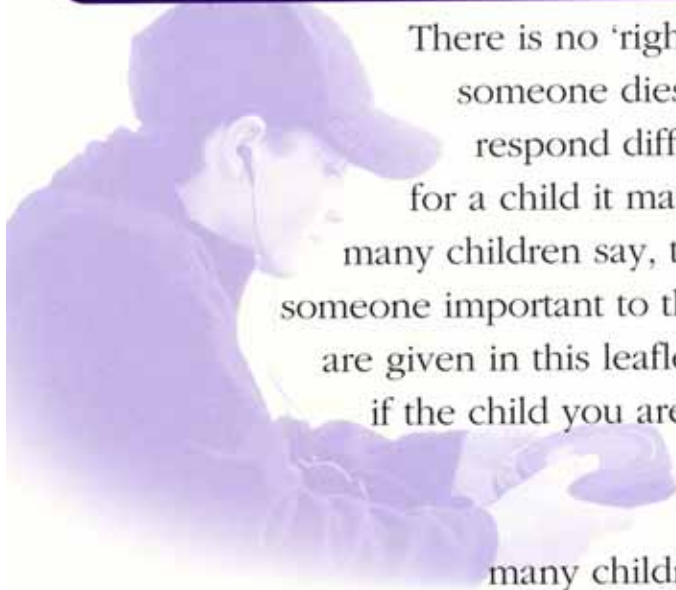




**Has
someone
died?**

Helping children

How do children react when someone dies?



There is no 'right way' to react when someone dies and every child will respond differently. If you are caring for a child it may help to know what many children say, think and feel when someone important to them dies, and examples are given in this leaflet. But don't be surprised if the child you are caring for finds it difficult to express how they are feeling – remember that many children cope remarkably well.

Dad didn't die. When is he coming back? Whatever your age, it can take a long time to believe that someone who matters very much to you is not coming back.

Why did it have to happen? Explanations are very important but children may need to ask the same questions over and over again. It will take them time to accept what has happened and the death may seem very unfair to them. They may be very angry that someone they care about has left them.

It was my fault. However far-fetched this may seem to you, many children worry that something they said or did, or didn't say or do, caused the death.

Will you die too? It is difficult for children to understand why someone dies and they may become frightened about their own death or worry that someone else close to them will die soon.

Where has she gone? Younger children may find it more difficult to grasp that a dead person is not coming back and may ask repeatedly 'Where have they gone?', expecting to be told of a place that they know about.

I wish I was dead. Like adults, children may sometimes feel it is not worth living without someone they love. They may imagine that if they die they will be reunited with the dead person, or if they die the dead person will come back to life.

I don't want you to be sad. It is difficult for children to see people they care about cry and suffer, but it is also important for them not to be shut out and to see that people can survive the sadness. There may also be great comfort in shared grief.

What happens to his body? Young children may need help to understand that when someone is dead the body no longer works and must be buried or burned.

Will it hurt her when she is burned? Children may think that being dead is like sleeping. They may need to be told there is no feeling or pain after death.

Other things you may notice about a child who is grieving

Mood swings - one minute a child can be happy and the next very angry or distressed.

Not able to concentrate - many children cannot focus on school work or any activity for some time after a death.

Quiet and withdrawn - some children will find it difficult to share their thoughts and feelings, preferring to be alone.

Sleeping patterns disturbed - some children may find it difficult to settle to sleep for a while or may also wake in the night.

Behaving like a younger child - many children may start doing things they did when they were younger, like sucking their thumbs, wetting themselves or clinging to you.

Difficulties with friends - the death may make a child feel different from their friends and less sure of themselves with other people. They may be bullied or even bully others.



Breaking the rules, stealing, playing truant from school - a child may feel there is no point in behaving well. They need firm and loving control to show them that the world is still a safe place for them.

Being very good - some children will be frightened to cause further upset, especially if they feel they did something to cause the death. They may hope that if they are very good the dead person will come back.

Some children will work very hard or behave like an older child, trying to take care of the adults around them.

For most children these behaviours will pass in time but if you are worried and they are still struggling more than a few months after the death, do ask your GP for help. Do ask for help urgently if a child persists in talking about wanting to be dead.

What can I do to help?

Shall I tell him what happened?

Many adults worry that they will frighten a child by telling them the truth. It can be hard to believe that a child's own ideas about what happened may be more frightening to them than the truth. Not all their questions will have answers. This may be frustrating for the child but you are being honest. Giving children the chance to ask the questions and tell you what they think and feel will be as helpful as providing the answers. It can be difficult to listen, especially if they are being very matter of fact about what has happened, but encouraging them to be frank is a way of showing them that you care.

What should I say about what happens after death?

There are many ideas about what happens to the essence of people after death and it may help to share your own ideas about death with a child. Younger children may find it harder to understand and ask more questions.

Should I let her see the body?

Seeing the body can help children understand that the person they knew or loved is gone. It can help them believe that death is permanent and give them the opportunity to talk.

Should I take him to the funeral?

Many children do attend funerals, burials and cremations. Telling them what to expect will help them, and you, to decide if they should come. If you are very distressed it can help to let someone you both trust take responsibility for them during the ceremony and explain to them what is going on. Occasionally children may laugh or giggle during the funeral, and this may be an understandable release of unbearable tension.

Should I let her see me crying or being angry?

If they see you cry it will let them know that it is all right for them to cry too. It will always help if you can explain what you are sad or angry about so that the child doesn't think it is their fault. If you are overwhelmed with pain and feel you are not able to care for the child, perhaps a close relative or friend whom you and the child trust and know well could take over for a while.

Should I let him stay up late?

You may not be able to keep to usual routines for some time but letting a child break all the rules may not help them, or you, in the long run. Routines provide a sense of security.

Should I tell the school?

Teachers will be able to be more sensitive to a child if they know about a death. It can be very helpful to talk together with the child and a teacher about what to say to the other children.

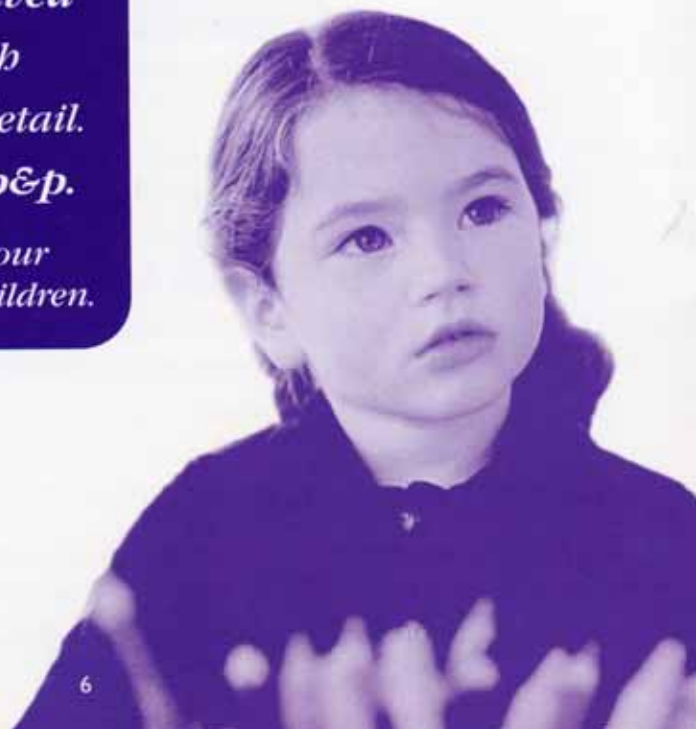
Is there anything else I can do to help?

Showing a child that you care and are interested in them is always helpful. Talking about the person who has died and bringing them to mind will often help both children and adults. Younger children may need your help to find their own ways of remembering. Looking at photographs, drawing and painting are all ways in which children can express themselves or remember times with the person they have lost.

If you want further advice or help for a child, you can contact Cruse Bereavement Care.

*If you would like to read more about helping bereaved children, Cruse has a 28-page booklet 'Caring for Bereaved Children' which explains in more detail.
Price £2.00 + £1 p&p.*

Please also ask for our publications list for children.



How Cruse can help carers and children

- advice and support for parents and carers through the Cruse Helpline and from local Branches
- books, videos and booklets for and about bereaved children and teenagers (see return slip attached)
- counsellors - in some areas Cruse has specially trained counsellors who can meet with children and young people. Some areas run groups for bereaved children
- training - Cruse provides support, information, publications and training sessions for teachers and other people caring for children.

What else does Cruse offer?

- someone for adults to talk to - the opportunity to talk in confidence, once or many times with a trained volunteer
- groups which offer bereaved people the chance to talk with others in similar circumstances
- information on many aspects of bereavement, including practical and financial matters



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Working towards equality