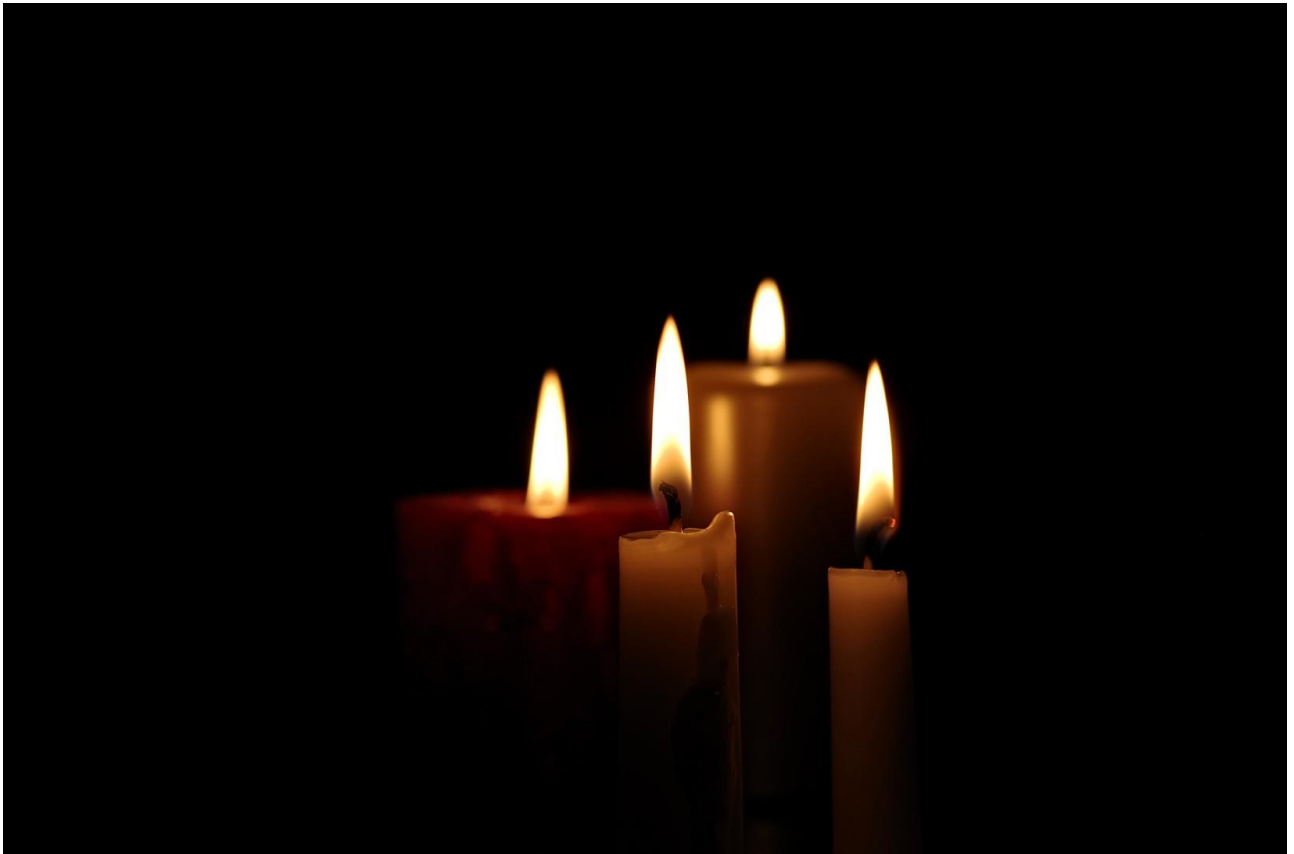


# **Bereavement Resources for Children and Young People**



# Supporting Children

It is important to recognise that every child and young person will grieve differently, there's no one-size fits all.

In this booklet we have attempted to provide some assistance for those wanting to support children and young people through bereavement and grief. We are not experts; however, we have attempted to suggest some places and resources which may be helpful and some may also provide more specialist help and information.

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## Explaining Death

Early on for a child, how a person died is usually less important than it is for adults. No means or cause of death is better or worse than another for a grieving child. They are all overwhelming. If a death is expected (for example, through cancer or other illness), the family may have had time to prepare for the loss. They may have begun to adjust to the future without the person, to make sure that photographs have been taken, letters to open in the future have been written, goodbyes said. It is also likely that the family will have received help – and will continue to receive help – from a hospice-based service or other support service (such as Macmillan nurses). However, the family may also have suffered through a prolonged period of stress in which the children felt unable to undertake normal activities or to rebel or have fun; a period when the family focused on the person who was dying in a way that the children found extremely hard.

If a death is sudden (for example, through a heart attack or road accident) there is no chance for goodbyes and no chance for preparations or adjustment. The last conversations linger in the memory. There is no professional whose role it is to support these bereaved families (although police family liaison officers and hospital-based bereavement services make valuable contributions). However, for some people, a sudden death may be seen more positively (for example, of a frail grandmother).

If a death is through suicide, there are particular difficulties for the families left behind. Those bereaved through suicide face especially intense feelings and thoughts, ask themselves more agonising questions and face more public scrutiny. For both children and adults, it can take a long time to dare to trust others again.

# Children and Young People attending the funeral

Deciding whether or not to let, or give the choice for children and young people to attend a funeral can be difficult for families, these are some things which may help them in the decision making:

- Talking to them about what is involved.
- People letting children know that they can change their minds about being there – at any time.
- Checking that they are happy with the choice they have made – but not too often, because children want to please and may say what they think others want them to say.
- Having someone with whom the child feels secure to function as their supporter for the funeral. This may be an aunt or uncle or one of their family's best friends. This allows parents/other family members to be fully present at the funeral for their own sake.
- Giving them clear and detailed information about what will happen, this will involve explanations about the difference between, for example, burials and cremations. If it fits with the family's own beliefs, it will help if the child has had some preparation about the difference between the body of the person and the part that made them who they were. Some people call this a soul, or a spirit, or love, or 'what was special about daddy' or 'what we will remember about daddy.'
- Reassuring them that it is all the body of the person who has died that is buried or cremated. Some younger children are confused and wonder what happens to their head, arms and legs.
- Giving reassurance that the person who has died can no longer feel anything, so they will not feel the flames, nor will they be scared at being buried.
- Offering clear and detailed explanations of what to expect from people at the funeral. Some children can be shocked that people seem to have a party after someone has died; others are upset when people say: 'How lovely to see you'. Explaining that this does not mean that these people are happy that the person has died – they are just the sort of things that adults say. Equally, seeing adults in deep distress may alarm children but preparation beforehand will help them understand that this is a reasonable response to the huge thing that has happened.
- Preparing them for some of the things that adults may say to them. For example, boys may be told that they are the 'man of the house now' and they will need to know that they are not.
- Creating opportunities to be involved. This may be in the planning of the funeral service. It may be through saying or reading or writing something about the person who has died. It may be through choosing a particular piece of music. They may wish for something special to be put in the coffin, for example, a picture or something linked to a memory.
- Giving plenty of reassurance that they can still be involved and participate in saying 'goodbye' even if they choose not to attend and that they will not be criticised if they don't go to the funeral.

# Help and Resources

**Winston's Wish** <https://winstonswish.org/>

'Winston's Wish is a charity that helps children, teenagers and young adults (up to the age of 25) find their feet when their worlds are turned upside down by grief.'

**Child Bereavement UK**

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>

'Supporting bereaved children and young people'

**NHS Children and Bereavement** <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/children-and-young-adults/advice-for-parents/children-and-bereavement/>

Provides information which could help if a child has lost or is about to lose someone, such as a family member or friend.

**Young Minds**

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/professional/resources/support-with-grief-and-loss/>

Resources for Community support, Youth workers, Schools to help a young person dealing with their feelings of grief and loss.

**MacMillan Cancer Support** <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/treatment/if-you-have-an-advanced-cancer/end-of-life/talking-to-children-and-teenagers> helpful information and contacts around supporting children and young people when someone close to them is not going to get better.

**Grief Encounter** <https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/>

Their mission is to give every child and young person access to the best possible support following the death of someone close.'

**Local Hospices**

If a family has been involved with a local hospice, they often provide ongoing support after the death of a loved one.

It can also be helpful to talk to the school or college a child or young person may attend, to find out about any support and resources they may have.

# Books

These books are not all written from a faith perspective; however they may be helpful for some people. Please do familiarise yourself with them and consider content and context before recommending anything:

**Always and Forever** by Alan Durant (Age 2-6)

Death is dealt with through a story about the grief of a group of animal friends.

**Water bugs and Dragonflies** by Doris Stickney (Age 3 - all age)

This story treats death as transformational and new life emerging from what seems lost and empty.

**Jesus still loves Joe** by Victoria Beech (Age 3-7)

Story about a little boy's grief at the death of his sister.

**Sad Isn't Bad** by Michaelene Mundy (age 4-7)

Information for children explaining the emotions they might encounter in the grief process.

**When someone very special dies** by Marge Heergard (Key Stage 2 age)

A workbook full of practical ideas and the opportunity to write, draw and make. Explains death as change and transformation.

**Alice's Dad** by Bill Merrington (Age 9+)

A story aimed at girls to be read with an adult. Follows the emotions of a young girl as her father dies of cancer.

## **The books below are for adults:**

**Children and grieving** by Janet Goodall

Covers babies through to 11 years old.

**Parenting a Grieving child** by Mary De Turris

Written for parents helping their children come to terms with grief.

**Naming the Child** by Jenny Schroedel

Deals with miscarriage, pre-natal and neo-natal death.