

Loss and Grief

Grief is like the ocean; it comes in waves ebbing and flowing.
Sometimes the water is calm and sometimes it is overwhelming.
All we can do is learn to swim.

Vicki Hansen

Bereavement Support Pack

The death of someone close is one of the hardest things anyone has to face. It can be especially difficult to help a child manage their grief while you're dealing with your own. Although you can't protect a child from the pain that follows a bereavement there are things you can do to help them come to terms with their loss.

At Shefford Lower School we are committed to supporting both you and your child during this process. With that in mind I believe the process of grief has to be led by the person grieving, it can't be second guessed, planned for or have a particular time frame and the need for comfort and talking about your feelings cannot be pencilled in the diary. Support has to be available at the point of need. We acknowledge that sometimes two children from the same family might need completely different types of support. There is no one right way to grieve

We cannot protect our children or ourselves from difficult events. Grief and loss evoke difficult and painful thoughts and memories. Some may be obvious such as Christmas, birthdays and anniversaries, others less so, a colour a smell, or just because the sun is shining. Unfortunately this is part of the process and at those times for the most part we just need someone to acknowledge that it's hard and then learn how to move on with our day. It's almost impossible to predict when this will happen and again it can change daily, what makes us smile and laugh one day, reduces us to tears another.

As a school I believe we are incredibly good at supporting our children when they need it. We have many children, who for a diverse range of reasons, of which there is no hierarchy, are suffering trauma, and loss and we, as skilled staff manage and meet those needs daily. We do this by making sure it is child led. There is always someone available to listen when the need arises and in the large part, it is who the child has built a relationship with. The child usually chooses us and not the other way round.

We can all obviously continue to examine our procedures and learn and evolve as each new interaction or experience teaches us something new. We will however, be confident that the child will always be at the centre of all we do and that we all spend huge amounts of time thinking, talking and most importantly caring about what is best for the children in our care.

It is hoped that the following information will help to support families so that they feel more confident in helping a child who is going through a period of grief and loss. Please don't hesitate to contact school if we can offer any further support.

Useful contacts in school:

Polly Ross	Head Teacher
Julia Parry	Designated safeguard lead & Family Support Worker
Amber Cooper	Family Support worker.

Do young children under 5 understand death?

Children under the age of five will not understand the finality of death. Very young children often think that death is reversible and that a loved one can come back. That's why it's important to use clear and simple language like 'dead' and 'died'. At this age, children have a very literal understanding so, if we say "we've lost Granny", children under five will think "where can we find her?"

Young children won't understand the difference between dead and alive unless we show them – maybe you could go out into the garden, find some dead and alive bugs and compare them with your children.

It's important to give clear and concise information, answer young children's questions and make sure that they have understood what you say. It is not uncommon for young children to repeat the story of the death or ask lots of repetitive questions – this doesn't mean they haven't listened or that you haven't explained it well enough, this is just how they work out what's going on.

Do children aged 5-8 understand death?

Children who are aged 5-8 are starting to understand that death is something that is final, however, this can feel spooky or frightening. It might help to use books that explain death and the life cycle as a natural, normal thing.

At this age, children are starting to think about themselves and how that fits with the death – what is called 'magical thinking'. For example, they might think that it's their fault that the person has died – "I didn't eat my breakfast and therefore mummy has died". It's important to give them clear information about the death and to help them understand that it's not their fault.

Children aged 5-8 will be beginning to think and feel strong emotions but they won't have the vocabulary to understand them or to explain them to us. You can help them to understand that the funny feeling in their tummy might be called 'worry', or that clenching of their fists and gritting of their teeth might be called 'angry'.

Do children aged 9-12 understand death?

At this age, children understand the finality of death and that the person is not coming back. They are also more aware of the impact the death has on them, for example, that special person won't be there for important birthdays or milestones like moving to secondary school.

Talking to Children about Death

The following are some simple tips for speaking with young people about death.

Realise that grief is an ongoing process. Trust your instincts.

Children will need extra love, cuddles, reassurance and attention

Recognise that every death and every reaction to it is unique. The way in which a child reacts to a death is dependent on their relationship with the person who died, the time of death in that child's development, the nature of the death (was it expected after a long fight against an illness or was it sudden?), the child's understanding of death, their support network and many other factors.

Use clear age appropriate language. Try to avoid using phrases such as, 'gone to sleep' or 'lost' these can frustrate older children and confuse or even frighten younger ones. A six year old who hears that her Grandad has been lost will try to find him, because that is what you do when someone is lost. Use the words 'dead' or 'died', explaining what these words mean if necessary. For instance, a dead person's body no longer works, their heart no longer beats, they no longer feel pain and they will not come back to life.

Expect questions, but don't feel pressured to provide immediate answers. Death often throws up many questions for us all. Some of these may seem straightforward and obvious under the circumstances, such as 'How does smoking cause cancer?' to the more complex 'Why do some people die so young without warning?' If there are questions that you are unable to answer, feel able to say so, (even adults aren't expected to know everything) and promise to look into providing an answer at a later point. There may be other questions where you have to admit total defeat...this is ok too.

Enable young people to be included.

Children need to feel involved. Try not to shut them out believing this is helping them. Plan how would like the person who died to be remembered. Let them be part of the planning. Discuss what to do on special days.

Encourage routines and boundaries.

Try to keep to their normal routine - it helps children feel safer. Involve them with special tasks. Allow for some regression in behaviour, it is quite normal. However, remind them that some behaviours are still not acceptable.

Encourage others, especially at school, to be a support.

Keep schools informed, help them to understand what would most help the family.

Allow expression of feelings

Very new feelings can make us all unpredictable, irrational, angry and Confused. Being sad can really hurt.

We all experience different feelings at different at times and for different Lengths of time. There is no one right way to grieve. All feelings are normal. Remember that we are all individuals in our grief. Not wanting to talk does not does not mean a child is not grieving nor that the grieving process has has finished.

Be aware of anniversaries and create opportunities to commemorate the death.

Initiate discussion of what helps and what doesn't.**Allow them to remember the person who has died.**

Children need to remember the person who has died. Keep the memory alive by talking about the special person. What do they and their families remember, special stories. What will they miss

Signs and symptoms of a child's grief

When they learn of the death of someone close, children have many of the same physical and emotional responses as adults, but children mourn their loss in different ways. Adults need to be aware of these signs of mourning in order to best meet their children's needs.

When children's mourning behaviours are wrongly perceived as misbehaviour, the children's hurt and confusion may deepen.

Most children have neither the vocabulary nor the cognitive ability to express and share how they might be feeling following the death of someone close to them. A confusion of feelings can be overwhelming.

Changes in behaviour

School refusal, restlessness, inability to concentrate, slower to learn, irritability, bullying or being bullied, increased achievements, withdrawn, mood swings, avoidance or denial, no changes.

Anxiety

Children may lose their sense of security and fear another death or loss. Young children may become clingy or demanding.

Sadness and longing

Some Children cry. Some don't. Some are sad for a long time; some aren't. Some children try to hide their sadness to protect their parents. Children may long for the person who has died, become preoccupied with memories, or may carry an object that reminds them of the deceased.

Anger and acting out

Children may become very angry at death, God, or adults in general. Or they may be angry with themselves and somehow feel responsible for the death.

Changes in sleep patterns

Fear of the dark, fear of sleeping alone, nightmares and bad dreams, tiredness, lethargy, not wanting to sleep, bedwetting, no changes.

Vivid memories

Real or fantasised images related to the death can intrude on other thoughts.

Changes in health

Headaches, general aches and pains, depression, imaginary illness, imitation of the dead person's illness or symptoms, vulnerability to infection, panic attacks.

Changes in eating habits

Loss or gain in appetite, weight loss or gain, comfort eating, not conforming to family mealtimes, snacking.

Changes in self-care/self esteem

Regression, loss of previously learned skills, dependence on others, lack of attention to personal care, minor accidents, no motivation.

Thought patterns

Inability to concentrate, difficulty making a decision, self-destructive thoughts, low self-image, preoccupation, confusion, anxiety, rage.

Feelings

Anger, guilt, sadness, mood swings, depression, hysteria, relief, helplessness, fear, loneliness, intense feelings, feeling unreal, anxiety, rage.

Physical symptoms

Headache, tiredness, shortness of breath, dry mouth, dizziness, sensitive skin, increased illness, emptiness, tightness of chest, muscle weakness, tightness in throat, stomach aches, pounding heart, hot or cold flushes, heaviness of body.

Common feelings, thoughts and behaviours

Needs to re-tell events of the death and funeral. Dreams of the person who died. Idolises or imitates behaviours of the deceased. Feel's the person's presence. Speaks of the person in the present tense. Rejects old friends and seeks new friends. Wants to call home. Can't concentrate on school work. Very emotional outbursts. Seeks medical information on cause of death. Worries about own health. Sometimes unfeeling about the loss. Attention-seeking behaviour.

Suggestions from young people

A group of bereaved children and young people working with [Seasons for Growth \(Scotland\)](#) have come up with a list of suggestions about how parents and carers could support their bereaved child. Your child may find some of these approaches helpful: you could print them off and talk about which ones might work.

To my parent or carer, please...

- Talk to me honestly and explain about what has happened in a way I can understand. I may need more information and reassurance.
- Talk to me about the funeral and how I can be included. It will help me to remember and say goodbye. Try to include me in decisions and give me choices.
- Inform the school about my loss and find out who I can talk to in school if I need some help. Help me get back into school by talking to me about what additional support I may need. It may be difficult for me to leave home.
- Notice if I am feeling lonely and find out about groups for children and young people coping with loss and change.
- Remind me that I am not to blame and that it's not my fault although I may need to talk about this.
- Help me keep memories alive by talking and remembering, especially on anniversaries. There will be things I need to remember and others that I want to forget.
- Let me keep something that belonged to.....[the person who has died].
- Give me a hug.
- Help me to have fun and laugh sometimes. This does not mean I am 'over it, have 'forgotten' or 'couldn't care'.
- Give me space but talk to me if you are worried I am not eating properly or having sleep or other problems, so we can do something about it together.
- Arrange for me/us to get extra help if I am feeling stuck and overwhelmed.

Keeping memories alive

There are many ways of helping children celebrate the life of their loved one. These suggestions may help:

Let them keep something that belonged to the person who died, such as an item of clothing.



If the child is finding it hard to go to school, decorate a handkerchief with your fingerprints or handprints on it, and maybe even spray it with scent. This can help them feel that their carer is close to them and safe.

Share happy stories about the person who has died.



Look through old photographs or videos.

The child may like to design a pillowcase in memory of the person. This can help them feel closer to them at night.

Make a scrapbook together about the person who has died. This may encourage your child to open up about their thoughts and feelings.



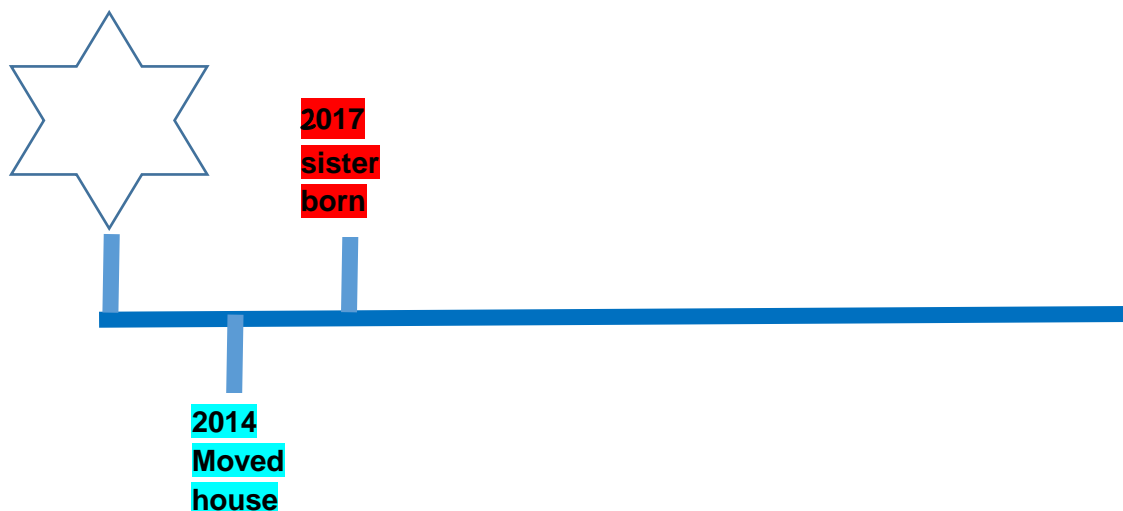
Start a journal of memories that can be added to by anyone at any time. This may help children who have lost someone at a young age to remember the person who has died as they grow up.

Personal history time line

One common feeling children may experience after a death of someone close is to worry about the future. They may be concerned about what is going to happen to them and if their lives will ever be normal again. Creating a time line can help children put the current events of their lives in perspective. It can help them see that they have experienced many good things in the past, and that they have many years ahead of them to have fun and happy times with their families.

Younger children will need help with this activity but will enjoy thinking of events for their parent to put on their time line. Discuss your child's time line with them when it is finished. Point out that they have experienced many different events throughout life, some good and some bad. Help them to understand that they can get through the difficult time of grief and loss and that there is happiness and good times ahead.

- Draw a long horizontal line on a sheet of paper
- Label your birth at one end with a star.
- Label the present time somewhere in the middle.
- Mark significant events that have occurred in your life between the "birth" star and the "present" mark. Possible ideas include births of siblings, getting pets, starting school, moving, learning to read, learning to ride a bike, divorce, remarriage, joining a team or club, death of relatives and special holidays.
- Mark events that you hope will happen in the future



Memory Box

After someone important in your life dies, there will be lots of things that you want to remember about them. As time passes though, you may find it harder to recall some of these different memories.



In a memory box you can keep and treasure all kinds of things that remind you of the person who has died. You can customise it to make it more personal, and fill it with photos, letters and objects that remind you of your experiences together.

Fill your memory box with items that remind you of them, and times you spent together. It could be their watch, or tie, maybe a scarf or their purse.

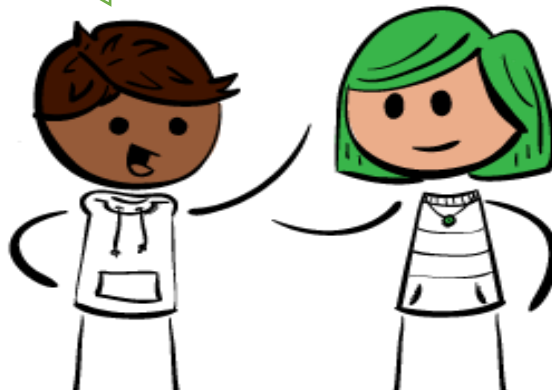
Then, when you want to remember...you can simply look through the wonderful collection of memories in the box!

Try not to simply fill your memory box with random bits and bobs... instead, make sure that each object has a story or memory attached to it.

It can really help to write a note for each object to explain the memory it gives you. Some people like to keep their memory boxes private, others like to show them to friends and family, it's totally up to you.

Me and my Uncle Bob once went to watch England play football. The ticket and programme from the game, as well as a photo of us by the pitch, remind me of what a great day that was

Granny used to always wear the same perfume - it was her smell. Now I keep a bottle of it in my memory box. When I miss her I spray it into the air and the smell brings back memories of her



Memory Jar

Along with a memory box which can hold physical items, a Jar of Memories can be a really special activity to make with your child, (or the whole family).

Children sometimes worry that they are going to forget the person who has died or not remember special times they had together.

This is where a Jar of Memories can really help a child keep those special times in mind.

Simply find a jar with a lid and anytime a memory is shared, write it down, fold it over and put it in the jar. Then, when your child feels ready, open the jar and share a precious memory of time spent together.

Try to always keep the memories positive. If a negative or upsetting memory is shared, let them know that is fine too but that you will keep them in an envelope somewhere else. If memories shared are always negative and/or distressing, it might be worth considering getting some further advice about helping your child manage their grief.



Memory Stones

The concept of memory stones is a very simple one, yet it is a great tool to help children to speak honestly about their feelings and their memories.

First, hold a jagged, rocky pebble. Then either you or your child should describe it. It is rough, and has sharp bits. Ask your child to hold it tightly and squeeze it in the palm of their hands – how does it feel? Not nice, it may even hurt a little. Use this pebble to explain that there may be some difficult memories or feelings that they have right now. They may be struggling with the way in which the person died, or they may be feeling guilty that the last words they shared, were ones which they now regret.



Next, hold a normal pebble. Again, you may want to ask your child to describe it. You are looking to find words such as “normal” “smooth” “ordinary”. State that this stone signifies the ordinary, everyday memories that they may have of the person who died; the fact that they ate cheese and onion crisps or liked gardening.

Finally, display a shiny, precious gemstone. The characteristics of this stone are that it is sparkling and precious, it looks great. Use this to explain that we will have some great memories of the person who died. It may be a best holiday, or a special trip to the theatre, or an evening spent watching DVD's curled up together on the sofa.

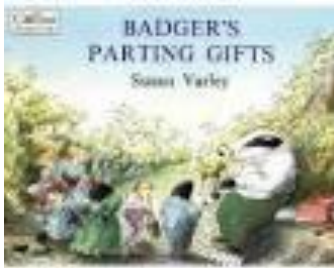


All three stones are important and the feelings and memories described by them are all true. The stones can all be held together in one hand, and the memories can all be held in our minds together.

Useful books

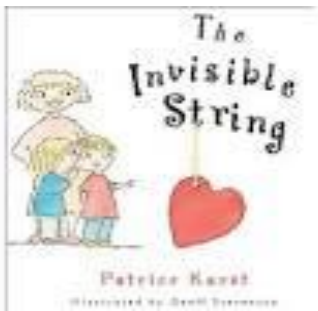
This is a selection of books available that explore the subject of loss and grief. It is by no means extensive and when choosing a book about such a sensitive and personal subject you should be guided by your own feelings and beliefs.

Badger's Parting Gifts. By Susan Varley



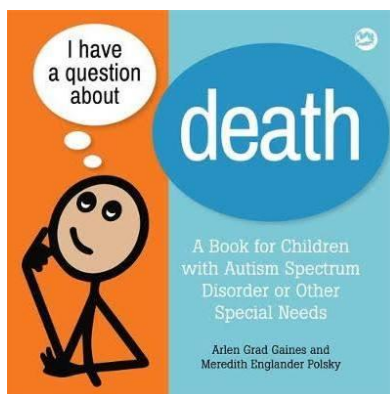
It firstly tells the story of Badger who was old and knew he must die soon. Badger was not afraid of death and one evening he falls asleep and then feels himself going down a long tunnel, as if he had fallen out of his body. The book then talks about Badger's friends who are very sad to be told of Badger's death and over the coming months they talk about their memories of Badger, the joys he had given them and the things he had taught them to do.

The Invisible String. By Patrice Karst



This book is appropriate in any situation where a child is separated from a loved one (death, a deployment, school separation, children being shuttled back and forth to divorced parents, etc.). The premise of this book is, "People who love each other are always connected by a very special String made of love." The string can reach anyone, anywhere...even loved ones in Heaven! The String can't go away, even when you're angry or upset.

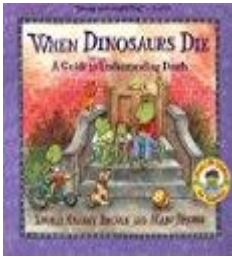
I have a question about Death. By Arlen Grad Gaines, Meredith Englander Polsky



Death is a difficult topic for any parent or educator to explain to a child, perhaps even more so when the child has an Autism Spectrum Disorder or other Special Needs. This book is designed specifically to help children with these additional needs to understand what happens when someone dies. The first book of its kind, I Have a Question about Death uses straightforward text and images to walk children through what it means when someone dies, as well as ways they might want to react or to think about the person. Using clear

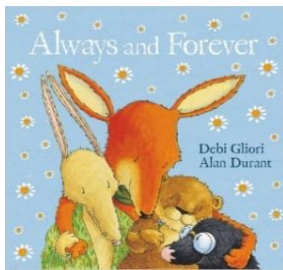
illustrations throughout and with information for parents and guardians, this book is essential for families with a child aged 5-11 with Autism Spectrum Disorder or other special needs

When Dinosaurs Die. By Laurie Krasny Brown, Marc Brown



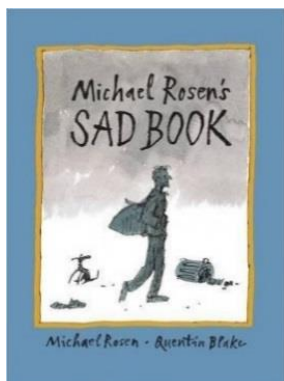
The authors explain in simple language the feelings people may have regarding the death of a loved one and the ways to honor the memory of someone who has died.

Always and Forever. By Alan Durant



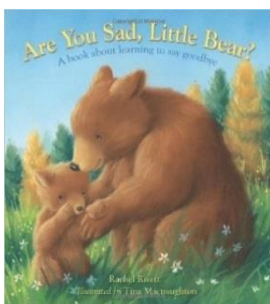
When Fox dies the rest of his family are absolutely distraught. How will Mole, Otter and Hare go on without their beloved friend? But, months later, Squirrel reminds them all of how funny Fox used to be, and they realise that Fox is still there in their hearts and memories

Sad Book. By Michael Rosen



A moving combination of sincerity and simplicity, it acknowledges that sadness is not always avoidable or reasonable and perfects the art of making complicated feelings plain. It wasn't made like any other book either; Michael Rosen said of the text, "I wrote it at a moment of extreme feeling and it went straight down onto the page ... Quentin didn't illustrate it, he 'realized' it. He turned the text into a book and as a result showed me back to myself. No writer could ask and get more than that." And Quentin Blake says that the picture of Michael "being sad but trying to look happy" is the most difficult drawing he's ever done... "a moving experience."

Are You Sad Little Bear? By Rachel Rivett



Grandmother Bear has gone for ever, and Little Bear is feeling sad. His mother wisely suggests that perhaps asking his woodland companions what saying goodbye means to them will help him understand his loss. Little Bear's day of exploring and asking questions brings him comfort and hope. For the swallows, saying goodbye means flying to warmer lands; for the leaves of the trees it is a chance to be free, leaving the tree at her most beautiful; for the moon it is to return to be with the Sun; and for the Sun it is to rise in another sky and just because Little Bear can't see him doesn't mean he isn't there. This charmingly illustrated picture book will help young children in times of bereavement, loss or change, gently exploring the reasons for saying goodbye and giving reassurance that goodbye doesn't mean the end of things.

List of bereavement-based websites

www.childberevementuk.org.uk
Charity

Child Bereavement

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Winston's Wish

www.chums.uk.com

CHUMS

www.uk-sobs.org.uk
Suicide

Survivors of Bereavement by

www.chldhoodbereavementnetwork.org.ok
Network

Childhood Bereavement

www.cruse.org.uk

CRUSE

www.tcf.org.uk

The Compassionate Friends

www.mariecurie.org.uk

Marie Curie



The Elephant in the Room

There's an elephant in the room.
It is large and squatting, so it's hard to get round it.
Yet we squeeze by with, "How are you?" and "I'm fine."
And a thousand other forms of trivial chatter.
We talk about the weather.
We talk about work.
We talk about everything – except the elephant in the room.

There's an elephant in the room.
We all know it is there.
We are thinking about the elephant as we talk together.
It is constantly on our minds.
For you see, it is a very big elephant.
It has hurt us all.
But we do not talk about the elephant in the room.
Oh please say her name.
Oh please say "Barbara" again.

Oh please, let's talk about the elephant in the room.
For if we talk about her death,
Perhaps we can talk about her life?
Can I say "Barbara" to you and not have you look away?
For if I cannot, then you are leaving me
alone.....in a room.....with an elephant.

Terry Kettering

Date.....

My name isand someone special has died.

They were my

Their name was.....

My special person died because:

.....

Do you know how old they were?

.....

I was.....Years old

People have lots of different feelings when someone dies.



What feelings do you have?

What things did you like doing together or remembering about them?

What things don't you like remembering?



What would you like your friends to know?

.....

.....

What would you like your teachers to know?



What kind of things might you find in a real first aid kit?

What things might help you if you have a bad day?

What dates or times would you like to remember your special person and please say if this is difficult for you.

January	February	March	April
May	June	July	August
September	October	November	December

