

- Return questions e.g. “What happens when we die?” with “What do you think happens. Accept the young person’s views or bring it round to more pleasant possibilities.
- Help the young person to remember the person who has died:
 - What do you remember?
 - What did you like about him/her?
 - What will you miss about him/her?
- Allow them to remember things they did not like too.
- Let the young person be encouraged to take part in the planning for ‘remembrance’ of the person who has died.

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COPING WITH LOSS AND BEREAVEMENT

**GUIDANCE FOR PARENTS/CARERS OF SECONDARY
AGED CHILDREN**

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Useful Local/National Contact Telephone Numbers

- Childline (24 hrs) - 0800 1111
- Cruse - Bereavement Care - 0844 477 9400 / Cruise Helpline - 0808 808 1677
- Family, Adolescent and Child Team (FACT) – Woodroffe House, Tolworth Hospital, Tolworth KT6 7QU, - 020 8296 1381
- Kingston Bereavement Service - 020 8547 1552
- Samaritans (24 hours) - 08457 90 90 90
- Saying Good Bye Project (KBS) 020 8547 1552
- Winston’s Wish – 08452 03 04 05

Children's understanding and responses to death develop according to their age, cognitive development, experience, temperament and family circumstances. From the age of ten years, young people understand that death is final and irreversible, that it happens to everyone and will happen to them and those they love. Young people in this age group may display strong reactions to the loss of someone they love or know including shock, denial or depression.

The young person's may focus on practical/financial issues and they may be anxious about having to assume adult responsibilities. They may try to hide their feelings and be angry at being "left". They may also feel anxiety about how they will cope in the event of a loss in practical terms e.g. who will look after them in the event of a loss of a parent or who will be there to listen to them in the event of the loss of a friend? The bereavement may threaten the young person's view of life as secure and continuing and may lead to a strong rejection of previously held values and to possible "punishing" behaviour towards others.

- Young people may have feelings of guilt about things they may have said or done or not done, with consequent reactions of guilt and anger.
- They may feel isolated by the grief but irritated by attempts to support them.
- Boys in particular might find it difficult to express their grief and may need encouragement and activities to enable them to do so. They may otherwise seek refuge in alcohol or substance abuse.
- Young people may experience anxiety about their own mortality
- They may begin to question spiritual, ideological and moral issues previously accepted.
- They may want to postpone their grief to support others and delay their own grieving process
- If they witnessed or were involved in a fatal accident they may experience survival guilt or experience flashbacks and wish to avoid revisiting the scene or similar places. They may not wish to leave safe places (home) to go to school.
- School performance may suffer in terms of inability to concentrate, increased states of arousal and irritability, loss of

motivation and rapid swings in emotional state. Performance in exams is likely to be particularly adversely affected.

Coping with loss when a child has died – some suggestions for parents/carers

- ✓ Acknowledge your own feelings – it is important for children to know that it is natural to be upset and to cry – for adults and children. It is better to share feelings than to deny them.
- ✓ However it is important to understand that grieving is a normal part of life but that everyone will respond differently to loss.
- ✓ Recognise that the death of a child may make you more aware of your own child's mortality. It will not be unusual to find yourself constantly checking that they are OK.
- ✓ It may be helpful to talk to the young person about what (s)he thinks has happened and to give informed information where misconceptions have occurred. Give as much accurate information as the young person asks for but do not try to explain the unexplainable or the unknown.
- ✓ Active listening is the best support that can be given to grieving people but it can be difficult if supporting adults are also struggling with their own emotional response to the loss.
- ✓ Remember that there are others who can help.

Talking to young people about death

- Tell them the truth as far as you know it. It's OK to say "I don't know".
- Talk about death and the person who has died – don't avoid the issue and don't use terms like "passed away" or "gone to sleep".
- Don't worry if your child repeats questions as they may need time to "take it all in" and may need to continue to ask questions.