

General links and support services

- **Child Bereavement UK**

The website provides useful links and resources for children, families and professionals to access.

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

- **Grief Encounters**

Child bereavement support to children and families.

<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/>

- **Winston's Wish UK**

Winston's Wish offers a wide range of practical support and guidance to bereaved children, their families and professionals who support them. The charity also provides a Freephone National Helpline (08088 020 021), for teachers or parents to call for information and advice about how to support bereaved children and young people.

<http://www.winstonswish.org/>

- **ChildLine**

A free and confidential services for children and young people where you can talk about anything, including bereavement. Temporarily counsellors will be available between the hours of 9am and midnight. Please check the website for the most up to date information regarding how to access support.

<https://www.childline.org.uk/>

- **Young Minds**

A national charity for children and young people to support their mental health and well being.

<https://youngminds.org.uk/about-us/>

Local links and support services

- **Warrington Bereavement Service**
- **St Joseph's Family Centre**
- **Warrington EPS Service**

Bereavement Support

Information for children, families and professionals during Covid-19



WARRINGTON

Borough Council

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Remember children and young people will revisit their grief as their understanding grows over time.

Things to remember:

- Don't be afraid to use the word 'dead' or 'death' ... *"I was very sorry to hear of the death of your..."*
- Children and young people need honesty. Although sometimes difficult, it is better to answer difficult questions truthfully.
- Recognise the full tragedy for the child. Do not try to comfort with comments such as, *"At least it is not as bad as..."*
- Reassure them they are not responsible.

For schools supporting bereaved pupils. Systems in school that might help a pupil return to school include:

- Time out cards/passes
- Offering a safe space to grieve and support the young people to express their grief if appropriate
- Access to a quiet space for time out and reflection if required
- More intensive support from pastoral care staff if appropriate
- Access to a school counsellor or local support services if appropriate

Grief is a very personal experience, and every child and young person will experience it differently, give them space to deal with their feelings in their own way.

It is important to remember to take care of ourselves when supporting bereaved children and young people, and seek support from our own networks as necessary.

Young people and adolescents are entering a time of great change. They are moving towards more independent adult lives, and developing their own ideas about who they are. Young people will have an adult's understanding of death, but may have not yet had the experiences to develop coping skills or behaviours as an adult. Developmental issues of independence and separation from parents can interfere with the ability to receive support from adult family members. Young people don't like to feel different to their friends, and being bereaved, may lead to feelings of isolation. Everyone will respond differently, but some behaviours that you might see among young people include:

- Becoming withdrawn
- Engaging in risk-taking behaviours
- Feeling a need to take responsibility for the caring of others around them
- Seeking support from their peers, rather than a family member

How to help:

- Ensure that teenagers have a chance to be teenagers, and not take on adult responsibilities where possible
- Some young people may benefit from speaking to other young people who have been bereaved
- Try to maintain regular boundaries for acceptable behaviour to help provide a sense of security and reassurance

During Covid-19, children and young people may experience heightened levels of anxiety, in relation to the situation or the safety of loved one. Please see the resource ***Coping and managing stress and anxiety. Information for children, families and schools during Covid-19*** for more information.

A note to those supporting bereaved children and young people during Covid-19

A bereavement is a difficult time for adults and children. We know that there may be many families affected in the weeks and months to come across our town and our school communities. We know that family members, colleagues, friends, and children may get ill and people will be frightened and need support. We are sharing this resource containing information and signposting to resources in the event of a death/s within the school community.

There is a focus on supporting children and young people to understand and manage during this sad time, but we also need to support each other and ourselves so that we are able to support children and young people. This will be very difficult and although a bereavement is not a critical incident in typical times, with school communities coping and supporting each other as they do so well, we know that these aren't typical circumstances. The LA's Critical Incident Team and Warrington EPS are able to support by offering practical advice and guidance, and emotional support to aid coping among staff and the wider school community.

Most grieving pupils do not need a 'bereavement expert', but instead support from familiar adults in a safe and secure environment. Familiar and trusted adults can support bereaved children and young people by simply:

- Acknowledging the bereavement
- Understand that feelings of grief are natural, and personal to the individual
- Reassuring children and young people
- Keeping to routines and structure where possible, to help provide a sense of safety and security

It is hoped that this resource will help families and schools to feel enabled and empowered to support bereaved children and young people.

Children and young people's understanding of death

Children and young people mature and develop at different rates, however, their understanding and responses to bereavement are likely based on their development and maturity, as much as their personal life experiences. As children grow and develop:

- They may need to look again at the details surrounding a death and will need time and space to explore its impact.
- Feelings they had when younger will be different, as their understanding develops and the meaning of death changes for them as they move through life.

Children's understanding of death varies based on their stages of development. It is also important to note that children do not move abruptly from one stage of development to the next, and that characteristics from each stage may overlap. At any age, one's reaction to death is very personal and unique. We should always allow others to grieve in their own way, and avoid assuming we know how a bereaved person is feeling.

Children under 2 are not likely to have a conceptual understanding of death, but are likely to react to changes in their environment. Some of the common behaviours that might be seen in children under 2 are:

- Increased crying,
- Withdrawal
- Disrupted sleep or feeding

How to help:

- Reassure children
- Keeping to routines and structure where possible

Between the ages of 2 and 5, children can become curious about death, they might begin to use the word 'dead', and develop an awareness that this is different to being alive. However, they do not grasp that death is permanent, and can often think the person will return.

- Try to avoid phrases implying death, such as, "passed away" or "lost" to help avoid confusion or misunderstanding.

Children at this age are naturally egocentric, and see themselves as the cause of events around the world. They may feel guilty and believe that they are responsible for the death of a loved one. They might also worry about being abandoned, or worry who might take care of them. At this age, children struggle to put their feelings into words, and will tend to react to loss through behaviours, such as:

- Physical symptoms, for example an altered appetite or disrupted sleep
- Separation anxiety
- Irritability or aggression
- Seemingly disinterested in play
- Language and toilet training may regress
- Repeat questions frequently

How to help:

- Show patience and tolerance
- Give honest answers, but do not feel you have to tell them everything in detail. Sometimes it can be helpful to give them bits of information that can accumulate over time—not everything at once.

Primary school age (between the ages of 5 - 12), begin to develop a sense that death is permanent, and irreversible. As they become more aware of this, and become aware that death is a natural part of all living things, they may become anxious about their safety, or the safety of those close to them. Children may experience a range of emotions (guilt, anger, shame, anxiety, sadness, worry about their own death), and react through behaviours such as:

- School phobia or poor school performance
- Physical symptoms or regression
- Becoming withdrawn from friends
- Aggression
- Worrying who will take care of them, and becoming 'clingy'
- Worrying that they are to blame for the death

How to help:

- Reassure children that the death is not their fault
- Provide opportunities to explore their feelings, and be able to ask questions frequently or repeatedly
- Provide honest answers that can be built on over time