



When someone you love dies...

INTRODUCTION

This booklet has been written to help children understand some of the feelings and other things which might happen to them after someone they love has died.

This upsetting experience only happens to some children and this means that no-one is ever prepared for all the strange feelings and reactions that take place.

There are special words used when talking about loss and people's reaction to it. A list of these words and their meanings are included at the end of this booklet.

The booklet may also be useful for children who have friends who have had this experience, in order to understand what they may be going through, and decide how we can best help them.

Remember that there is **no proper way** to feel when someone has died. Everyone reacts differently and this booklet gives an idea of some ways that people behave.

BCP EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE



1. What happens when someone dies?

All those people who love that person are upset in some way. Some feel hurt, some feel frightened, some very angry, some will be numb and others feel great pain.

Everyone feels different – most people are experiencing strong feelings that they have not had before.

2. How long will you feel upset?

This changes from person to person. It varies from hours to days to weeks, but it will gradually get less unpleasant and less hurtful in time.

3. How should you behave?

There are no rules of how to behave and so people often feel embarrassed, and their friends and family don't know what to say to them, and so they often avoid them altogether.

If you **do what feels right for you**, it will probably be the best way to behave.

4. Why do adults find it difficult to talk to you about what's happened?

Some children get upset when adults don't seem to be telling the truth.

Remember that the adults around you will be very upset themselves. Most adults also feel that they should soften the blow when telling others (particularly children) and may have decided to give you the information in bits and pieces.

As they are struggling to handle their own grief, they may be afraid that they will be unable to cope with your reactions as well.

5. What sort of feelings will you have?

Many people go through different feelings at different stages.

What is unusual is that these feelings may be stronger than anything else you have felt so far in your life.

They will be different from person to person but may include numbness, sadness, real pain in some parts of your body, anger at some person or something etc.

The other worrying thing about these emotions is that they come and go in waves, suddenly hitting you when you feel better, then going away again. It also gives you a feeling of being out of control.

Remember that the adults around you will also be feeling confused by their own feelings and may not always be able to support you in the best way.

6. Will it make you feel ill?

It may do. Some children develop headaches, stomach aches, feelings of sickness and pains in parts of their bodies. Although these pains are real (they can be painful and unpleasant) they are likely to be a result of your body reacting to the upset, rather than having a physical cause or being due to being really ill.

7. Do all children feel the same?

Everyone reacts differently when they hear the news. Some refuse to believe and feel numb and shocked. Others become really upset and cry for ages. Some behave as though nothing has happened and carry on with what they are doing.

There is no proper way to react – everyone is different and you have little control over your reaction and it is **not a measure of how much you care**.

8. Do some children begin to be frightened about dying and further loss?

Being part of a trauma, separated and losing everything may be the first time that you begin to think about death. The fact that everyone will die some time means that other people close to you will die someday.

This can be a very frightening experience, but it is a way of coming to accept that dying is inevitable for us all some day.

9. Why is it that parents and teachers sometimes get very anxious and fussy?

Teachers and parents expect to be able to care for and protect children so that when something unexpected happens, they may feel that they have failed in this task. Then they become more protective of the children, without really knowing why.

Some children have some or all of the following feelings

All these are normal feelings and are a reaction to the loss of someone close to you. Although they can be very strong, usually they lessen with time and with reassurance from adults.

1. Anxiety

Children can become much more anxious than usual and you find that you need constant reassurance from parents and teachers.

2. Vivid Memories

Some children can have very vivid day or night dreams about what has happened. You may find that this can be very real and upsetting – but gradually fade with time.

Some children can get very frightened as they have a really strong awareness of missing people (like ghosts). You can find that you can hear, see, smell, or even speak to people. This is due to the fact that some children have very strong imaginations.

3. Problems with sleeping

Some children develop disturbed sleep patterns, such as being unable to fall asleep, or nightmares or fears of nightmares. You may wish to have the light left on or the door left open, or even want to sleep with your parents or brothers / sisters for a while.

4. Feelings of sadness and longing

It is very common for children to feel deeply sad and have strong longings to be with the missing people. This sadness usually comes and goes and seems to hit us when we least expect it.

5. Naughtiness

Some children's behaviour changes and they become very naughty, either at home or, more usually, in school. This does not usually last very long.

You may find that you keep getting bad tempers and may start to throw temper tantrums.

With patience from adults, this behaviour does not usually last too long.

6. Feelings of anger against people and things

Many children feel very strong feelings of anger.

These feelings may lessen with time.

7. Feelings of guilt

It is very common for children (and also adults) to feel guilty. You may feel as if you are to blame. But it is not your fault that the person died.

8. Regression behaviour

Some children may behave for some time as they did when they were younger. This is called regression and seems to help you deal with some of your strongest feelings. Children may need to be cuddled or comforted more from their family.

9. Changing personality

Some children may seem to change their personality in several different ways. These include:

- Isolating yourself and wanting to be alone.
- Becoming very grown-up, mature and overly serious.

- Beginning to feel that life isn't worth it and there is no point in thinking about the future.
- Retreating into a fantasy world and withdrawing from adults and friends.

Things you can do which may help you cope better with your feelings

1. Talking

It is very important to talk about your feelings (however silly you may think that they are) to friends, teachers and, most important of all, your family. This is the only way that they will be able to understand and possibly help you.

Sometimes it may be difficult to talk to those nearest and dearest to you, and it may be advisable to get the help of someone outside the family. This can be a professional counsellor or just an interested adult who is known to you.

2. Drawing and colouring

Some children find drawing and colouring can be very helpful. You may prefer drawing your friend doing the things you used to do together, fantasy pictures, or neutral themes that just give you pleasure.

3. Writing

Other children get a great deal of relief from writing stories or poetry about their friend or things that they remember doing together.

4. Playing

Sometimes playing can be enjoyable and also help you feel a little better. This can take the form of imaginary or fantasy play (like you used to play with your friend) but also other competitive or intricate games which allow you to lose yourself for a little time.

5. Physical exercise

Some children throw themselves into physical activity such as swimming or jogging and find that this gives them some relief for some time.

6. Hobbies

A hobby can be particularly helpful, particularly one which makes demands of you.

7. Music

Some children who can play an instrument, or like listening to music say that they find this very helpful. It is probably because music can affect our moods and can make us feel happy or sad, or simply produce nice feelings in us.

8. Personal belongings

It may help you to have something personal that the person left. Looking at the item may bring back nice memories.

DOING THINGS FOR YOURSELF

**What are you going to do to remember the person who died
.....?**

What positive things are you going to do to try to make things better for yourself?

Remember

If things keep looking black and you don't think they are getting any better, please speak to someone in your family who you trust and if they cannot help, ask them if you can speak to someone outside the family.

Memories

My personal memories – by

The person close to me who died was called

.....

They lived at

.....

They were born on

They were aged

I liked them because

.....

.....

I liked to do this with them

.....

I miss this mostly about them

.....

My favourite memory of them is

.....

.....

SOME WORDS PEOPLE USE WHEN TALKING ABOUT LOSS

Anxiety	being anxious about something
Bystander	a person standing near but taking no part in an event
Counsellor	a person trained to listen to and advise on problems
Depression	feelings of extreme sadness or hopelessness
Emotion	a very strong feeling
Fantasy	imagination
Grief	feelings of very deep sorrow
Grieving	all the feelings we go through after someone dies
Guilt	feeling that you are to blame for something (which may not be true)
Mourning	to feel or express sorrow after someone has disappeared
Regression	behaving like a younger child babyish, immature behaviour
Shock	A sudden violent effect on your mind or emotions which can make you ill or behave in very strange ways