



Nottingham University Hospitals **NHS**
NHS Trust

Nottingham Children's Hospital

Supporting children and young people when someone has died

Information for adults

This document can be provided in different languages and formats. For more information please contact:

Child Bereavement Team
Nottingham Children's Hospital
Tel: 0115 924 9924 ext 66276

or

Hospital Palliative Care Team
Nottingham University Hospitals
Tel: 0115 993 4977 / 0115 919 4402



We are here for you

Introduction

It can be difficult to know when and how to tell children that someone has died.

An adult's instinct is often to protect children and delay telling them. However, children tell us that they want to be involved as soon as possible as they often already know something is wrong.

It is usually better that they hear it from someone they know and trust, rather than hearing it second-hand or from someone else.

Aim

This leaflet is designed to give you some helpful advice and guide you to further information and support during this difficult time.

Where do I start?

Before having a conversation with a child it is important to think about who, where, when and how this information will be given.



Who will tell - someone the child knows and trusts.

Where to tell - if possible let the child choose, but it is important that both the person telling them and the child feel safe and comfortable in the chosen place.

When to tell - as soon as possible, particularly when a child is already asking questions.

How to tell - keep things clear, simple and honest eg. it may be helpful to begin with something like 'I have something sad to tell you'.

If you have more than one child, you can tell them together or separately, but try to make sure they all find out around the same time so that no-one feels left out.

Breaking the news

Check what the child already knows.

Go at the child's pace, using words they can understand.

Encourage the child to ask questions and answer as truthfully as possible and don't be afraid to say you don't know.

It can be helpful to use factual words such as 'died', rather than the temptation of saying they have 'gone to sleep' or 'gone away', which can be confusing for a child. You may need to repeat information and keep checking their understanding.

They may need time to take it all in.

What happens next?

It is really important to take into account the many different family, cultural and religious beliefs around death, particularly those about children seeing the person who has died and attending the funeral/memorial/ceremony.

These are just some ideas that may help you decide what is best for your child and family.

Seeing the body

Don't be afraid to give the child the choice to see the person who has died, particularly if they weren't there when they died or are asking to see them.

It can help their understanding of death and allow them the opportunity to say goodbye.

Children may want to see the person more than once. This could be where the person died, at the funeral directors or at home.

Some things that may help:

Let them know they can change their mind at any time.

Try and prepare the child for what they will see and feel, for example the person will probably be cold to touch and pale.

Give them choices of what to do once in the room, for example that they can wait by the door, touch the person or talk to them and leave when they wish.

The child may want time on their own with the person.

They may want to leave something with them such as a photo or a special toy.

Even if they choose not to see the person, they may wish to write a card or letter or give something special to stay with the person.

Funeral / Celebration / Memorial Service

For a child to make the right choice for themselves about attending the service, they need to know why it is taking place, what will happen at the service, when and where it will take place and who will be invited.

Children will need a simple explanation of what a burial or cremation is.

For children to feel involved they may like to choose a favourite song, reading, or create something of their own.



It can be helpful to ask someone that you trust and who knows your child to sit with and look after them during the service, so that you can grieve for yourself, knowing your child is being comforted and looked after.

If children choose not to attend, there are other positive ways they can be involved in saying goodbye.

Some things that may help:

- The service could be recorded.
- Photographs could be taken.
- Those attending could be asked to write down a special memory for the child.
- The child could have something read on their behalf or send in a picture.
- Holding your own special way of saying goodbye eg. lighting a candle or letting off a balloon.
- The child could attend the family gathering after the service.

On-going support

Children will need to know that life will carry on, although it may have changed.

Children need to be kept up to date with what is happening.

Where possible try to keep to a familiar routine, maintaining usual boundaries for acceptable behaviour.

Try not to make promises to the child that you may be unable to keep.

Children need to know who is there for them.

Children may feel anxious and have further questions about the death and how it affects them. Occasionally, they may blame themselves or others for the person's death.

At the same time as explaining everyone dies one day, they may need reassuring that you and they are not about to die too.

It is often difficult for adults to deal with a child's grief when struggling with their own grief, particularly as the child may need extra attention, comfort and reassurance. There are usually other familiar adults around who are willing to help and provide a break, but be careful the child is not passed around relations and friends all the time.

Some children and young people like to 'look after' the other children and the bereaved adults. This support and love should be accepted, but don't expect or tell them to be 'brave' or to be 'strong'.

Make sure that nursery/school/college and other important adults have been informed of the death so that they can offer ongoing support.

Don't be afraid to show your emotions, however try not to let them get out of control as this may distress the child.

Children need to know there is no right or wrong way to react.

It is not unusual for children to be very upset one minute and asking what is for tea the next.

Encourage children to express feelings and emotions. This may be through quiet time, sport, art, play or talking.

Allow them time to play and have fun.

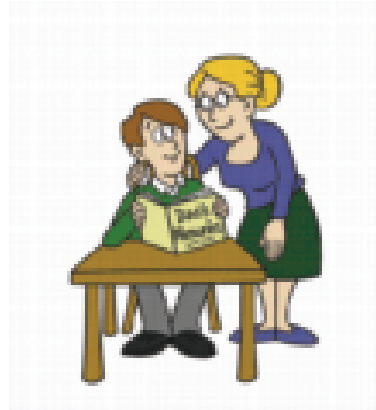


Remembering

It is important to provide children with opportunities to talk and think about the person who has died, but not to force them if they are not ready.

Some things that may help:

- Sharing memories to create a life story together.
- Making a photo album/scrap book/collage.
- Putting together a memory box.
- Having a special photo in a frame next to their bed.
- Choosing something that belonged to the person who died, to keep close to them.



When may professional help be needed?

Most children and young people will be able to cope with their grief without professional help if;

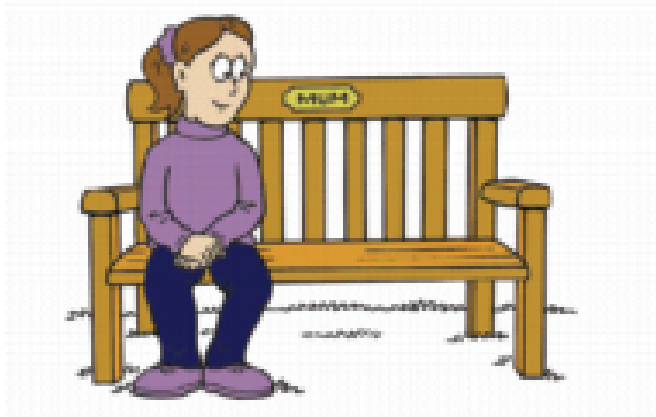
- They feel included and supported.
- They are able to talk about what has happened, if they want to.
- They are encouraged to express their feelings, if they want to.

All children and adults react differently at times.

There may well be changes in the child's behaviour such as sleep disturbances, changes in appetite, acting like a younger child, attention seeking or sadness and withdrawal.

Usually these changes will gradually disappear, however, it may be best to seek help and advice if:

- The changes persist or become severe.
- The child is asking to talk to someone else about their grief.
- Other adults start commenting about the way the child is responding.



The future

'Grief takes as long as it takes.'

There is no set time; grief does not go away, but most adults and children learn to live with it and adjust their lives around it.

Some things adults can do to help:

Be kind and patient where possible, while still keeping boundaries – this can help show children they are loved and can help them feel more secure.

Try to listen when children want to talk, however sad or busy you may feel, they need to know they are still important too.

Children will need to re-visit the details of the death at different ages and stages of their development, as their understanding and need for information changes.

They may need to meet and speak to other bereaved children. It can help them to know they are not the only ones it has happened to.

It will be helpful to remind staff at the child's school of the loss, particularly when changing from one school to another, as this information may not always be passed on.

It can help to plan and prepare for special days such as birthdays and anniversaries. It is important that all family members have a choice in how the day is recognised.



Continue to give them choices, where possible, involving them in any family decisions about the future.

Spend time with them, giving them individual attention where possible.

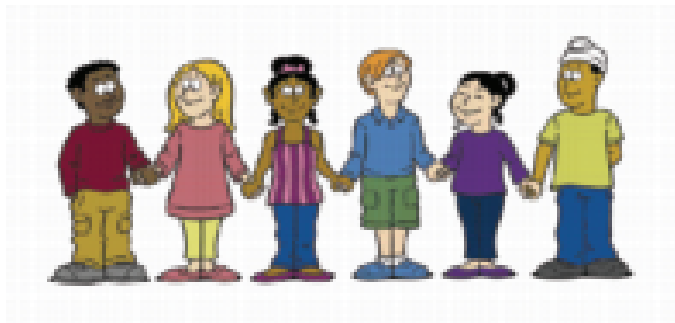
Encourage them to play, be happy and enjoy life.

Hugs and cuddles can really help with healing.

Try to be a good role model. In order to support children, adults need to support and care for themselves too.

Don't be afraid to ask for help from family, friends and professionals.

Be guided by the child and your own instincts.



‘Children do not need protecting from their grief, but need support in it.’

Resources

Local

Spiral at Family Care (Nottingham)
Tel: 0115 9603010
www.familycare-nottingham.org.uk

Child Bereavement Team
Nottingham Children's Hospital
Tel: 0115 9249924 ext: 66276

Sue's Place (Newark)
Tel: 01636 551739
www.sues-place.co.uk

Laura Centre (Leicester)
Tel: 0116 254 4341
www.thelauracentre.org.uk

Treetops Hospice (Sandiacre/Derby)
Tel: 0115 949 7354 / 939 6609 (answer phone)
www.treetopshospice.org.uk

Cruse
Nottingham: 0115 9244404
Rushcliffe: 0115 9825348
Mansfield: 01623 647645

Speakeasy Counselling Service
Tel: 0115 9926102
www.nottinghamyouth.co.uk

Lincolnshire Centre for Grief and Loss
Tel: 01522 546168
www.lcgl.org.uk

Safe speak (Derby)
Tel: 0800 093 5264
www.safespeak.org.uk



National websites and helplines

Childhood Bereavement Network (CBN)

Tel: 020 7843 6309

www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

Child Bereavement Charity

Tel: 01494 568900

www.childbereavement.org.uk

Winstons Wish

Helpline: 0845 030405

General Enquiries: 01242 515157

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care

Helpline: 0844 477 9400

www.cruse.org.uk

Resources for young people

Tel: 0808 8081677

www.rd4u.org.uk

Grief Encounter Project

Tel: 020 8446 7452

www.griefencounter.com

Muslim Youth Helpline (MYH)

Tel: 0808 808 2008

www.myh.org.uk

Youth Access

Tel: 0208 7729900

www.youthaccess.org.uk

Childline

Tel 0800 1111

www.childline.org.uk

Feedback

We appreciate and encourage feedback. If you need advice or are concerned about any aspect of care or treatment please speak to a member of staff or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS):

Freephone (City Hospital Campus): 0800 052 1195

Freephone (QMC Campus): 0800 183 0204

From a mobile or abroad: 0115 924 9924 ext 65412 or 62301



Minicom: 0800 183 0204

E-mail: pals@nuh.nhs.uk

Letter: NUH NHS Trust, c/o PALS, Freepost NEA 14614, Nottingham NG7 1BR

www.nuh.nhs.uk



The Trust endeavours to ensure that the information given here is accurate and impartial.