

Supporting Bereaved Children

Paediatrics – CDR Service

Supporting Bereaved Children

Children are often referred to as the ‘forgotten grievers’. Parents and carer’s understandably want to protect children from the pain of grief but in trying to do so children can be left feeling isolated and confused. It is important to support children age appropriately through their own grief, accessing specialist advice and support as needed. Children need to feel able to talk about their grief, feelings and emotions, and may need encouragement to do so. Many children fear adding to their parent’s burden by seeking support from them. It is also important to reassure children that they are not responsible for their loved one’s death, as they often blame themselves for one reason or another. It can be helpful for some children to involve them in funeral arrangements, memorials and memory making.

Children’s Understanding of Death

Children’s understanding of death changes as they get older. Young infants will have a sense of loss and may be more fussy or clingy than usual.

Between the ages of 2 years and 5 years, children begin to develop an interest in death but can’t understand the permanence of it. They may show a lack of emotion or ask lots of questions, including when the person will return. It is important to provide honest answers that cannot be misinterpreted by the child. Children in this age group may experience disrupted sleep, changes in behaviour or developmental regression.

Primary school aged children begin to understand the irreversibility of death and may ‘fill in any gaps’ in information with their imagination. They may become anxious about the safety of themselves or others. It is important to offer honest information and a supportive setting for them to ask questions. Children of this age benefit from ‘normal routine’ including attending school.

Teenagers often have strong beliefs about death, but struggle to access support and feel isolated in their grief. Some teenagers become withdrawn; others may increase their risk taking behaviours. Peer support and maintaining a ‘normal routine and boundaries’ is beneficial to bereaved young people.

Where can I access support for my child or young person?

There are a number of local and national organisations that support bereaved children, young people and families.

Your family GP

Your GP can support you and can refer your child to your local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Team if needed

Your Health Visitor or School Nurse

Can offer advice and support to you with managing any changes in your child's behaviour. They can also offer support to your child's education setting.

Jigsaw4U

Bereavement support for children 5-18 years living in Sutton, Merton and the surrounding areas.

www.jigsaw4u.org.uk

0208 687 1384

(Family's able to self refer)

Child Bereavement UK

National charity supporting bereaved children, with printable guidance on their website for children, families and schools, and a national helpline

www.childbereavement.org

0800 02 888 40

Grief Encounter

Supporting bereaved children and young people

www.griefencounter.org.uk

0808 802 0111

Hope Again

Support for teenagers and young people

www.hopeagain.org.uk

Winston's Wish

Support for children and young people after the death of a sibling or parent

www.winstonswish.org/

0808 802 0021

Support for those supporting a bereaved child

Supporting a bereaved child is challenging for everyone, but particularly so when you are trying to process your own grief for a loved one. It is important that you also look after yourself whilst supporting a bereaved child. Your GP and the Organisations above can give you advice and signpost you to support for yourself should wish to access it.

Contact us

If you require more information, please contact the CDR Service on esth.spoc-cdop.sutton@nhs.net