

Recommended Books

- Waterbugs and Dragonflies* (under 10 years)
Doria Stickney, Mowbray
- When Dinosaurs Die* (under 10 years)
Laurene Krasny Brown and Marc Brown
- The Secret C* (under 10 years)
Julie A. Stokes, Winston's Wish in assoc. Macmillan Cancer Relief
- Badger's Parting Gifts*
Susan Varley, Harper Collins
- Straight talk about death for teenagers* (11+)
Earl A. Grollman, Beacon Press, Boston M.A.
- Talking to Children when an Adult has cancer* (Adult advice) Macmillan Cancer Relief/Cancerlink

Useful Hints

- Find out how much children and young people know and include them from the beginning.
- Never force children or young people to do anything they feel uncomfortable with.
- Give explanations according to age and understanding. Speak clearly and simply.
- Answer questions truthfully, sensitively and avoid mistrust and/or misunderstandings.
- Do not be afraid to admit you do not know the answer.
- Prepare children and young people for seeing the body, attending a funeral.
- Give information in gradual steps – do not overload.
- Give children and young people permission to be sad and tell them why you are feeling sad – it's okay to cry together.
- Avoid euphemisms and fairy tale explanations.
- Repeat and reinforce information.
- Acknowledge their feelings but reassure them that it is NOT their fault – children and young people may blame themselves for the death.
- Maintain some routine, children and young people need stability.
- If a Parent/Carer has died – reassure the child or young person that they will be cared for, and by whom.
- Be patient and understanding.
- Inform the school.
- Advice and books (on loan) available from staff.

Recommended Websites

- www.winstonswish.org.uk
- www.childbereavement.org.uk
- www.rd4u.org.uk (for young people)
- www.riprap.org.uk
(for young people when a parent has cancer)



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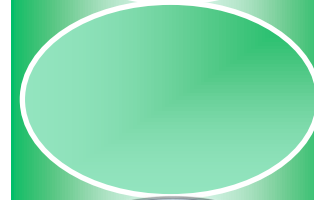
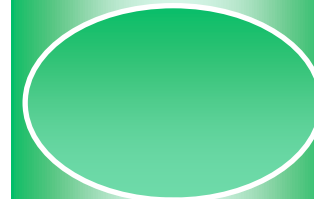
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'Lukes' Counselling Service for children and young people



**What do
we say to
children
and young
people
when
someone
has died?**



St. Luke's Hospice

When Someone Special Dies

Death and dying can be difficult subjects to talk about under any circumstances. When the person you need to speak to is a child or young person, explanations may be hard and you may find yourself at a loss for words. This is particularly difficult as you are trying to come to terms with your own loss. Instinctively as a parent/carer, you may want to protect your child or young person for the following reasons:

- It may feel it is better to protect them from what is going on so that they do not experience the worries, anxieties, hurt and pain that you are experiencing.
- You may not know how to approach the subject of the death or know the right thing to do or say.
- You may be uncertain of your child or young person seeing the body, attending the funeral, or knowing about the death as it may upset them.
- You may feel that you cannot support your child or young person with the rituals or the loss, as you feel overwhelmed by your own feelings.

Children and young people experience the same feelings as adults. They experience sadness, anger, guilt and frustration and are often anxious, confused or uncertain when someone has died. Sometimes children and young people are unable to verbalise their feelings and emotions resulting in changes of personality or behaviour.

Death is a natural part of the life cycle. When someone special has died, everyone that is close to the person, including babies, children and young people will grieve, and will experience a wide range of thoughts, feelings and reactions.

What to Do or Say?

Children and young people need an honest but sensitive approach according to age, development and understanding. There are no right or wrong ways but some approaches may prove more helpful than others.

- It is important to tell a child or young person when there is a death in the family as soon as possible.
- It is helpful if the news is given to children and young people by someone closest to them.

- It is helpful if information is given in an honest and straightforward way avoiding using common comparisons, for example, “has gone to sleep”, as this may cause sleep difficulties.
- It is helpful if children and young people are encouraged to ask questions or talk about the person that has died.
- It is helpful if children and young people are given choices about being involved in rituals, such as seeing the body and attending the funeral. It is helpful if they are prepared for what could be seen or experienced before the event.

Overall, where possible, it helps if children and young people are given information about a death and choices about being included and involved in rituals. Questions are healthy and ought to be answered truthfully. If a child or young person is not told what they need to know or given choices about being involved in rituals they may imagine frightening things that are not real or may feel excluded.

As adults grieve, children and young people grieve too. It is okay for them to know how you feel. The sharing (not burdening) of your grief will allow children and young people to be more open with their feelings. It will help to give them permission to cry and feel sad as long as they understand why you are upset. In time, the expressing and sharing of feelings will aid recovery.

How Children and Young People may react

Children and young people’s reactions may vary according to age, temperament and previous experiences. Sometimes when the death has occurred reactions may be delayed and not occur until 6 months or more following the death. It is instinctive to try and protect oneself from emotions that can feel overwhelming.

Children and young people may:

- Present with physical reactions/symptoms as a result of emotional pain and if this is on-going it is advisable to get this checked out by a doctor.
- Ask repeated questions that are difficult to answer. It is alright not to have the answer, but be honest and say “I don’t know” rather than guessing or making false promises.

- Change the subject, leave the room or pretend that they have not heard. If this occurs tell them that they can ask you questions or talk about it at any time
- Have strong emotional reactions such as anger, fear, guilt, or sadness.
- Have behavioural changes, such as being more attention seeking, more clinging, develop sleeping problems, develop a fear of the dark, return to bedwetting or thumb sucking.
- Become fearful about themselves or the adults around them becoming ill.

Most of these responses can be helped by keeping an open and honest communication with the child or young person. Also acknowledging your own feelings can reassure a child and young person that it is normal to feel the way that they do and that they do not have to feel ashamed or have to hide their feelings.

Unhelpful Terms

Some common comparisons have been found to cause more problems for children and young people and if possible should be avoided. Some examples are:

‘Daddy has gone to sleep’

The child or young person may be scared to go to sleep fearing that they will not wake up.

‘Mummy is going away’

This could be interpreted as she will be coming back or why isn’t she taking me with her.

‘Grandma is going upstairs’

The child or young person may think that she is literally going upstairs and that she will return.

‘Granddad has gone to a better place’

The child or young person may be confused by this – where is this better place?