

'Lukes' Counselling Service

for children and young people is part of St. Luke's Hospice Services that provides holistic palliative care for patients and their families. The service is a community based children and young person's service that is located in Corringham.

The team are experienced in working with children, young people and families when someone important is ill or following bereavement.

'Lukes' believes that carers know their child(ren) or young person better than any professional. However there may be times when professionals can offer supportive alternatives or complementary strategies.

When working with families and/or children and young people on a one to one or group basis 'Lukes' aims to provide support and guidance through a difficult and often challenging time. Helping to promote an honest, trusting environment by encouraging communication can sometimes reduce the fear of the unknown. 'Lukes' aims to affirm, support and empower families at a time when it may be difficult coming to terms with what is happening.

'Lukes' incorporates a team of professionals that can work with families, or children and young people directly informing them about the 'now' and preparing them for the future through creative media and practical activities and play.

In making early contact with 'Lukes', the team are able to establish a trusting relationship working together to build important memories for the future.

**St. Luke's
Hospice**



Your Hospice - Caring for you when &
where you need it most

Reg. Charity Number 289466

If you would like any advice / information
or to make a referral to the service please
contact:

'LUKES' COUNSELLING SERVICE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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**Please let us know if you need this
leaflet in large print.**

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'Lukes' Counselling Service for children and young people

**What do
we say to
children
and young
people
when
someone is
seriously
ill?**



St. Luke's Hospice

When Someone Special is Seriously ill

When someone is seriously ill it may be difficult to think about telling a child or young person what is happening. Instinctively adults want to protect children and young people 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 the adult is experiencing.
- Adults may not know how to approach the subject of the illness or know the right thing to do or say.
- Adults may be uncertain of the right words to use especially if they are uncertain about what is happening or what the outcome may be.

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

If we think of a jigsaw puzzle, the puzzle needs all the pieces to create a picture. If children and young people have not been told about an illness, there are parts of the puzzle that may be missing and there may be assumptions, about the missing pieces which may be inaccurate or wrong. Assumptions about missing pieces of a puzzle may create a story that is more frightening than the truth.

What to Say?

Children and young people need an honest but sensitive approach according to age, development and understanding.

Depending on the stage or nature of the illness, it can be difficult to talk about what will happen, because in the early stages you may not know yourself. It is helpful if information is given in small chunks and added to as new information becomes clearer. It is helpful to begin the story and ask the child or young person if they would like to know more. To absorb information younger children may need to be told repeatedly. A few suggestions of what to say are:

In the early stages - “(person who is ill) has an illness called.....and the doctors are trying to make them better.” If the illness is progressing - “the doctors are still trying hard to make.....better, but at the moment they are not getting better.”

If it becomes evident that the illness is not going to be cured - “the doctors are not able to make better, they have tried everything, but they will carry on looking after them.”

If there are treatments given for an illness, that can cause physical changes or side effects, for example, tiredness or vomiting, it is helpful to explain this to the child or young person beforehand. Children and young people can be accepting of changes such as hair loss or swelling if they are forewarned before the event.

Overall, it is helpful to establish an open dialogue with a child or young person and give them choices about whether they want to know what is happening. Being prepared for any questions and allowing a child or young person expression may help to prepare them for the future.

How Children and Young People may react

Children and young people’s reactions may vary according to age, temperament and previous experiences. 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 okay 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.