• Do allow children to move through their own individual process of grieving
• Do seek support for yourself if you need it
• Don’t use words that the child cannot understand
• Don’t discourage the emotions of shock or grief
• Don’t become upset if children do not want to talk about their feelings
• Don’t be too protective

Helping children cope when someone has died

If you require this document in an alternative format please contact the Educational Psychology Service in Aylesbury.

eps@buckscc.gov.uk
www.buckscc.gov.uk/schools/eps
Normal responses

This leaflet is intended to remind you of the possible range of feelings and reactions children may experience following a bereavement.

Because children often do not have the same understanding as adults they may have more difficulty talking about their feelings. However, the following responses are normal:

Shock - a child may be very quiet or they may cry uncontrollably

Denial - even though they know the person has died, they may think that the person will return

Searching - they may worry about losing other people

Anger - towards the people around them or the person who has died

Anxiety - about things they may or may not have done, or said, to the deceased person

Guilt - they may feel that in some way they caused the death or let the person down

Confusion - about what has happened to the dead person

Children may show their feelings through behaviour rather than words:-

- Behaving as a younger child (this is known as regression).
- Becoming naughty or aggressive.
- Becoming very withdrawn
- Sleep disturbance including bad dreams, fear of being alone or fear of the dark.
- Wanting to be with their parents, or a trusted adult, at all times.
- Difficulty concentrating, especially at school.

- Changes in appetite or eating habits.
- Fears for their own safety, or for the safety of family or friends.
- Reluctance to talk.
- Becoming easily upset.
- Unwillingness to go to school.

All of these can be normal reactions to a distressing event. They may last for some time. They can emerge later, unexpectedly, or be triggered by other events in a child's life.

How you can help

- Do try to answer questions as honestly and openly as you can.
- Do continue to do the things that you normally do. Familiar routines provide security.
- Do be patient and calm (as far as you can).
- Do be available to listen if children want to talk about their feelings.
- Do provide additional assurance and sensitive support.
- Do treat children in the usual way