Bereavement

Approximately 1 in 25 children and young people have experienced the bereavement of a parent or sibling, the loss of a loved one may have a substantial impact on children’s mental health and well-being. The loss of other important relationships e.g. the bereavement of a grandparent, or even a pet can also have a huge impact upon a child’s life.

When supporting a child who has experienced such a loss, it may be helpful to consider the following points:

- Young people grieve too, they may just show it in different ways.
- Try and keep the channels of communication open between children, young people and adults.
- Give them honest, clear, appropriate and open information as their fantasies are often more frightening than the truth.
- Listen and respond appropriately.
- Try and maintain structures and routines so they feel safe again.
- Give them choices and opportunities.

There are several useful websites and online resources for supporting children and young people with bereavement. These can be found within the resources section of the website and several key links are listed at the foot of this page.

Loss

Children may also experience the loss of a loved one through circumstances such as parental separation or divorce. Nearly half of all marriages end in divorce. From those marriages involving children, 80% of young people go on to become productive and well-adjusted adults. However, 20% of these children are likely to experience on-going mental health and well-being concerns as a result of parental separation.

Separation can impact upon a young person in a number of ways, called ‘risk factors’, such factors may include:

- Parental conflict
- Separation from a sibling
- Change of home and/or school
- Some children may taken on added responsibility within the family following separation
How can school support?

Children and young people experiencing bereavement or loss often report receiving more support from non-professionals (i.e. family and friends). However, school staff and staff from external agencies have an integral role to play, and there are a number of ways in which you may provide support.

These may include:

- Follow the child's lead and go at their pace.
- Don't assume that you know what the child may be feeling.
- Listen with your full attention.
- Ask open-ended questions, that is; questions that allow the children to freely express how they may be feeling, in their own words. For example, an open-ended question would be ‘...and how did that make you feel?’ whereas a closed question might be ‘...and did that make you feel sad?’
- Where possible and appropriate, disclose anecdotal information from your own experiences that the child may be able to relate to. Self-disclosure can be reassuring for a child and can give them the confidence to discuss their feelings further.
- Summarising - recap the key points of the child's comments, doing shows that you are listening and that you interested in what they have to say.

Resources

www.rcpsych.ac.uk - for resources relating to mental health problems or bereavement and loss.

www.childline.org.uk - for general online guidance for supporting children through the above mentioned issues.

www.cruse.org.uk - for resources specific to bereavement:

www.rd4u.org.uk - interactive site allowing children and young people to find their own way through bereavement

www.winstonswish.org.uk - Winston’s wish is specific to supporting bereaved children, this website contains information for schools and interactive resources for children and young people.

www.griefencounter.org.uk

www.childbereavementuk.org - Buckinghamshire based Family Bereavement Support Service providing specialist support, information and training to all those affected when a baby or child dies, or when a child is bereaved. For resources specific to divorce see the following links:

www.actionforchildren.org.uk
www.cafcass.gov.uk

http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/specials/the_worst_thing_ever - for specific advice for children and young people when they are going through the family court process:

Or alternatively visit www.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews and search for 'divorce'.