



PATIENT SAFETY TOOL BOX TALKS®

EFFECTIVE CARE & SUPPORT

END OF LIFE CARE CHILDREN AND LOSS

v1.0



Children experience similar feelings to adults following the death of a significant person in their lives. These include shock, denial, anger, guilt, sadness and fear. However, they often express their feelings differently to adults and can move in and out of grief quite quickly.

Children's understanding of death at different ages

A child's understanding of death and bereavement will be different at different stages of their development. Although a child's grief is individual, their understanding of the loss of a loved one progresses as they mature.

0-2 Years: It is common for a baby to become withdrawn or display outbursts of loud crying and angry tears. Maintaining the child's routine is important.

2-5 Years: Children still do not understand the finality and universal nature of death. They need to know the dead can not come back. They worry they may have caused the death and need reassurance to know that they are not responsible. Their questions should be answered openly and simply.

5-8 Years: Children accept that death is final and universal. This understanding can increase a child's anxiety regarding the imminent death of other people they are close to. Sometimes they can feel that they need permission to talk about their feelings.

8-12 Years: They understand that death is irreversible, universal and has a cause. Grief can express itself through physical aches and pains and challenging behaviour. Reassurances about changes in lifestyle such as money and whether they can remain in the family home, should be given.

13-18 Years: Teenagers are particularly vulnerable to grief and try to solve everything on their own. They understand the concept of death but do not have the emotional maturity to deal with it. They should not be burdened with adult responsibilities.

Preparing children for death



Children need everyone to be open, truthful and honest with them and to give them an opportunity to ask questions.

They must be prepared for what is inevitable to help them to handle it better when the time comes.

Use clear language like "death" and "dead" instead of "lost", "gone away" or "sleeping".

Children need to hear that nothing they say or do can cause a death. Often children blame themselves when someone special dies. It is important to reassure them that it is not their fault.

Should children attend the funeral?

Children should be given the choice to choose if they want to see the dead body. To make their choice, they should be told clearly what is involved and receive detailed information about each part of it. It should be made clear that they can change their mind if they want to, at any stage

Children and young people often appreciate taking something of meaning to leave with the body e.g. a card they have made. Give assurance that they can still say good bye even if they don't attend the funeral.

Traumatic deaths

When someone dies in traumatic circumstances there is no time to say good bye. Children can sometimes witness such traumatic deaths and it is important that they receive specialist help in dealing with their grief. These include 1-6-NSS.

National Support Services:

Barnardos: Tel. 01-4732110, www.icbn.ie
Rainbows: Tel. 01-4734175, www.rainbowsireland.com
ISIDA: Tel. 1850 391391, www.isida.ie
Console: Tel. 01-8574300, www.console.ie
Family Support Agency: Tel. 01-6114100, www.fsa.ie
ICBN: Tel. 01-6793188, www.icbn.ie To be confirmed



References:

www.winstonswish.org
www.barnardos.org.uk
www.cruise.org.uk

PYRAMID OF BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN

Level 3

Supports Psychotherapeutic Services

Required by a small number of children. May include psychology, mental health, specialist bereavement counsellors, social work.

Level 3

THERE ARE A FEW OF US

that need professional support.
Look out for Red Flag behaviours.

If my behaviour is out of character, persistent and does not pre-date the death.

Level 2

Supports

Listening services: May include Voluntary Bereavement services, Self-help groups (e.g. Rainbows), Bethany Groups.

Level 2

SOME OF US

benefit from further help

It helps to talk to people my own age, in groups and online.

Its good to know im not the only one feeling like this.

Level 1

Supports

Natural Support Networks: family, friends, school, workplace and community.

Level 1

MOST OF US

Cope with good support from family and friends

A book for my age group can help you explain death to me.

I need you to remember my loss is forever. Remember with me on special days.

Talk to me about whats happening!

Include me in whats going on

Poster by Smith, Tara (2010) MSc Bereavement Studies. IHF/RCSI Ireland

For further information contact: Nicola Jordan, ICBN Co-ordinator. E-mail: nicola.jordan@hospicefoundation.ie

When does a child need Level 3 support?

- Persistent anxiety;
- Persistent aggression;
- Social withdrawal, lack of interest in friends and activities;
- Self-blame or guilt about the death, believing they were at fault through something they said, have done or thought;
- Self-destructive behaviour, hurting themselves or expressing a desire to die or to be with the person who has died.

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