



Diocese of Durham

Blessing our communities in Jesus' name



## Support for Children – Loss and Bereavement

When someone who a child knows well dies, their world changes in an instant. The temptation is to try to protect children from the effects of grief and facing the stark reality of death. However, the reality is that children need to know about death and to be supported in helping them work out responses and to deal with their own grief. This is complicated by the fact that those who care for children are grieving themselves at the same time as trying to support children.

**Talk** - Ensuring that children are told about the death using the correct language is important. 'death' and 'died' are stark words, but using terms as 'passed', 'passed on', 'passed away', 'fell asleep' are very unhelpful because they suggest that the person is only temporarily gone – or that they may wake up. Saying that someone is 'asleep' is also unhelpful because children can associate sleeping with dying and it can create fear for themselves and others. Children need to know that sadness and crying are ok and that talking about how we are feeling and asking questions are good – even if we don't have all the answers.

**Listen** - really carefully to the question the child has asked, if you are unsure of what they are asking get them to repeat it, then answer it. If a child asks 'what happens when someone dies' we can give them a full, detailed answer, explaining about the body, funerals, the home, and a hundred other things, but the child may simply want to know that the person who died is safe and that someone will be looking after them.

**Include** - Children need to feel part of the family – in age appropriate ways. The danger of excluding children from grief and funeral planning is that they

can feel pushed out, excluded and go on to have a lack of trust in adults ‘why did you stop me from going to grandad’s funeral? He was my grandad!?’

For children of Christian families, there are some helpful Biblical ideas that we can use. Revelation tells us that in heaven there are no tears, sadness or pain (Revelation 21:4).

In John’s gospel Jesus tells us that his Father’s house has many rooms and that Jesus is going ahead to prepare a place for us (John 14:2-3).

So, asking ‘I wonder’ questions can be a good way of exploring this, e.g. “I wonder what granny’s room in heaven would be like? Applying the same idea to the child can be helpful too. ‘I wonder what your/ my room in heaven would be like?’

**Explore** - Talk about them, draw pictures, look at photos, make things in playdough. Helping children to remember the person who has died by talking about them, looking at photos and remembering good times can help with the grieving process. Maybe make some of the following suggestions:

- **Memory Box** – Decorate a box and allow the child to gather together some items that belonged to the person who has died – a book, magazine, a mug, jewellery etc.
- **Memory Book** – Make a scrap book and include photos of the person who has died, include photos of the child and other family members to help remember happy times. The child can add their own drawings and can write messages and letters too.
- **Memory Jar** – Find a clean jar and write memories and little anecdotes on small pieces of paper, roll the paper up and place in the jar – this can be added to over time and then, when the family are feeling sad, or on a special occasion such as a birthday, open the jar and take out a memory to read out and share.

All of these activities provide lots of opportunities to talk while making. Space to talk about everything is the most important thing for children.

**Involve** – At the current time, the number of people attending funerals is limited, so this might add additional pressures and challenges for families. However, finding ways to include children in any type of service or special time of remembrance can be helpful.

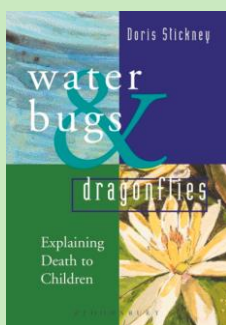
Children can be involved by lighting a candle at the beginning of a service or special time, a reading from the Bible such as John 8.12, 'Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.'

Words such as: 'This candle reminds us that ..... shone as a light in this world, that s/he now shines among the lights of heaven and will shine forever in our hearts.' Can be read by children.

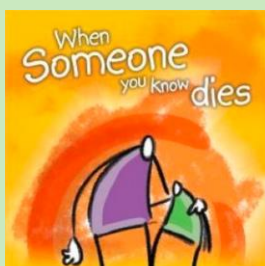
Children need to feel part of their family, to be involved and to be able to contribute, they may have ideas of music, poems, special readings etc. that they'd like to share at a service, or special time together.

## Resources

There are resources to help when talking about loss and bereavement with children, however you may not be able to access them all during this time, at the time of writing 07/04/20 these are currently available to purchase from [www.eden.co.uk](http://www.eden.co.uk)



Waterbugs and Dragonflies by Doris Stickney – a short story explaining death through the fable of the transformation of the dragonfly.



When Someone You Know Dies by Jonathan Carswell and Tirzah L. Jones is a booklet for 6-11 year olds which seeks to address some of their questions whilst comforting them with Biblical truths.

**Pinterest** – Boards on supporting children through loss and bereavement can be found here: <https://pin.it/5HnCgbY>

## **Websites**

**Child Bereavement UK** [www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org) A charity that supports families when a child is facing bereavement. Short guidance films available to watch, plus helpline. Excellent downloadable resources to help parents/adults talk about death with children, including children's understanding of death at different ages.

**Winstons Wish** [www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org) A charity supporting bereaved children and their families. Website with helpful resources, plus helpline available. Includes a page all about how to say goodbye when a funeral isn't possible.

Resources for use with children from **Youth For Christ** - three videos each week for children, families and young people to help you stay in continuous communication and togetherness. All the content produced for you in this time of uncertainty is completely free: [yfc.co.uk/youthworkonline](http://yfc.co.uk/youthworkonline) and sign up to the mailing list. They will send new videos directly to people on this mailing list once a week as soon as they are released.

Week 1, Fear and Anxiety: <https://yfc.co.uk/week-1-session-3-7-11-fear-and-anxiety-around-the-corona-virus/>

Week 2, Living Wisely: <https://yfc.co.uk/cr-week-02/>