

## Further Information

The book "Somebody has Died Suddenly" is available from the website [www.amyandtom.org.htm](http://www.amyandtom.org.htm). This website also has useful information for bereaved families and carers.

There is information on a number of websites, which you may find helpful. These include:

[www.gcbn.org.uk](http://www.gcbn.org.uk)

[www.cruisebereavementcare.org.uk](http://www.cruisebereavementcare.org.uk)

[www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)

[www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk](http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk)

Grampian Child Bereavement Networks website lists books for children about bereavement.

### Grampian Child Bereavement Network

C/O MHA

1, Alford Place

Aberdeen AB10 1YD

[www.gcbn.org.uk](http://www.gcbn.org.uk)

Telephone 01224 594099

*Our answering machine is available at all times.*

*The telephone is manned on a part time basis.*

Email: [gcbn@mhberdeen.org.uk](mailto:gcbn@mhberdeen.org.uk)

Website: [www.gcbn.org.uk](http://www.gcbn.org.uk)

Facebook [www.facebook.com/grampianchildbereavement](http://www.facebook.com/grampianchildbereavement)

**"Grampian Child Bereavement Network  
is a dedicated resource offering a range  
of services to support bereaved children  
and young people"**

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**mha**  
Mental Health Aberdeen



Supporting Bereaved Children and  
Young People in Grampian

Information for Parents and Carers

Supporting a Child

This leaflet aims to provide information and guidance for parents and carers of a bereaved child.

Common reactions to the loss of a significant loved one may be that the child becomes unsettled and insecure. This can lead to the child not eating or sleeping and becoming clingy.

Very young children can be affected by the impact of the parent's or carer's emotional availability and how this affects their ability to respond to the child's needs so it is really important that parents and carers are able to be supported with regards to their own loss and grief issues.

### **Common reactions of children who are bereaved**

#### **Babies**

Babies may be more fretful and unsettled so continuation of established routines will help them to feel secure along with secure, safe care from significant adults.

#### **Pre-school children**

Toddlers and pre - school children are unable to understand the permanence of death and may continue to ask when the deceased person is coming back or why they have disappeared. This may be difficult for the parent or carer.

The child may search for the person who has died, and appear to have forgotten that you have told them that the person is dead. They will not understand why significant adults are behaving differently.

Children of this age can be involved in magical thinking - they may believe that it is have been something that they have done or said which has caused the loss and need reassurance that this is not the case. They may also believe the person will come back if they do certain things and again need reassurance about this.

Behaviour can often regress to an earlier stage of development and some common reactions may be:

### **Where to seek professional support**

Arranging an appointment with your GP can be the trigger for a referral to an appropriate agency. The wait for an appointment to a specialist service may take time, and it is important that you seek advice on how best to support the child or young person and manage their circumstances.

#### **Counselling**

Some child and young people's counselling services are available within Grampian. These are specialised services and there can be a waiting list. Organisations such as CRUSE Bereavement Care Scotland, CLAN, and ACIS (Aberdeen Counselling and Information Service) accept direct referrals from families, and their contact information is:

CRUSE: Telephone 0845 600 2227  
Email [aberdeen@cruseScotland.org.uk](mailto:aberdeen@cruseScotland.org.uk)

CLAN Telephone 012224 647000 – for enquiries  
Telephone 0800 783 7922 – for support  
Email [enquiries@clanhouse.org](mailto:enquiries@clanhouse.org)

ACIS Telephone 012224 573892  
Website [www.mha.uk.net/acis/](http://www.mha.uk.net/acis/)

#### **Childline**

Some children and young people may wish and find it easier to talk to a trained counsellor on the telephone, and Childline offer a 24 hour confidential service. Childline will not pass on information to a child's parent or carer as they operate a code of confidentiality.

One of the most difficult tasks for parents or carers can be to not get stressed and this can be particularly difficult when they are grieving themselves. Try to find peaceful and relaxed time in the day to sit with the child, to read, play, share news, interact and just be together.

If, as a parent or carer, you feel unable to respond to the child as you would want to due to your own grief, then arrange for a close friend or relative who knows the child to spend time each day with them. Don't feel guilty about this, you too need support and time to grieve.

### **When you may need to seek professional help**

In some circumstances children may be traumatised by the death. This may be due to the nature of the death or the child being a witness to the death, or a survivor of the event that led to the death.

If the death was caused by murder, the child is likely to experience a traumatic response. There may also be the added complexity of media involvement. In these circumstances it may help the child to have the opportunity to have some external support.

If the child was involved in the death, for example surviving an event that led to the death of others, it is likely that they will have a traumatic response.

They may benefit from having external professional support to address their individual needs.

Loss through suicide can be particularly complicated, leading to a heightened sense of guilt and uncertainty. In such circumstances the opportunity for the child to have professional support and reassurance would be helpful.

Traumatic responses are normal responses to an abnormal event. Trauma can increase the normal emotional response and lead to overwhelming feelings of distress. It is important to remember that, with support, children do recover from trauma and go on to lead healthy and successful lives.

- Reverting to baby talk
- Regression in toilet training
- Inability to get to sleep and nightmares
- Seeking constant reassurance and clinginess

### **Primary School aged children**

Children in this age group gradually develop an understanding that death is final. They move from magical thinking to a more concrete thinking stage, where they begin to gain an understanding that death does mean that the person is not coming back. They can flit between the different stages and this can prove scary and confusing for them.

Depending on their age, they may still struggle with understanding changes in the behaviour of significant adults around them.

Sometimes a child's play can become aggressive and he or she can seem to be preoccupied with death. Children may become fearful that the adult who is caring for them will also leave, and this can lead them to seek higher levels of reassurance. Anxiety about another loved one disappearing from their lives is not unusual and this can lead to greater fear about separation around normal activities such as going to school.

In the weeks or months following the loss, the child's behaviour can commonly include:

- Sleep disturbance
- Eating problems - over eating or loss of appetite
- Fear of the dark
- Anger and aggressive play
- Regression to an earlier developmental stage
- Difficulties with concentration at school
- Sore tummies and limbs
- Lethargy

## Some suggestions of what the Parent or Carer can do to help

- Try to keep the child in a routine, and to remember that, if the child is regressing, then this is a normal reaction and with reassurance and security they will recover.
- Remember that young children, like adults will go in and out of grief. Some days when they appear to have “moved on” and then the behaviour reappears.
- Return the child to school as soon as it is practical. School can provide routine and support that can assist children. Speak to the teacher so that the school know what has happened, it is important that there is understanding of this for the school to be able to respond appropriately to the child and support them.
- Provide a security item such as a cosy blanket or familiar cuddly toy. This can provide comfort and a feeling of security for the child.
- Use a night light for reassurance and keep bedtime to a routine. Warm milk and a bedtime story can help. If the child is experiencing nightmares then reassure them and encourage them to tell you about the dream.
- Be prepared for unusual and recurring questions. Try to answer honestly as children often are quick to know when something they are told is not right.
- Allow a child to act out their confusion or anger. While for adults it can be upsetting to observe a child to be playing ‘death’ or appearing to be acting aggressively with their toys, this can assist a child to process the information and begin to make sense of it. Often children will replay the same game over and over.
- Talk to your child or encourage them to talk about the person who has died. Looking at photos or DVDs, and remembering happier times reminds the child that memories are still special and that these have not been lost.
- Help the child to build a memory box, gathering special items which hold memories of the deceased person and their relationship to them.
- Help the child say their goodbyes to the deceased person in a way that is meaningful to them: writing a message put in a special place e.g. star and angel tree hangers, lighting a candle, planting a special tree or flowers, going to a special place together can all be helpful
- Don’t stop crying in front of the child: reassure them that it is okay to show emotion, and that it is your time to be sad. Reassure the child that, while it is okay to cry, it is also alright to laugh and be happy.
- Sometimes children will talk about ‘seeing’ the person who has died and ghosts can become a topic of interest. If the child says they have ‘seen’ the deceased person, don’t dismiss it, but reassure them that they will always remember the person in different ways.
- Include the child in arrangements and special anniversaries and encourage them to express their views about how they would like to remember the deceased person.
- Sometimes the child may want to keep an item of clothing of the person who has died or some perfume, or aftershave. Smell is an important sense and the reminder of the smell can provide children with comfort.
- Whilst the pace of grief will be unique for each child, remember that the impact of bereavement will have affected them in some way. Initially the child may show no reaction at all and it may come some weeks or months after the death. The timing for the process of grieving can’t be pressured or predicted and children need time, space and the opportunity to consider what has happened, the impact of this upon them and their feelings. Reassurance and encouragement to remember the deceased person in a way that they wish to and that is helpful to them is important.