



Bereaved Children's Awareness Week

18th- 22nd November 2024

#ChildrenGrieveToo



Bereaved Children's Awareness Week is an opportunity to become more aware of the needs of grieving children, to show our support to them and those supporting them. We know we cannot protect children from their loss, but we can support them in their grief.



Children's grief

Grief is a reaction to loss and what we experience when someone whom we know and care about dies. Grief is the mixture of feelings that loss brings: loneliness, pain, sadness, fear, anger, numbness. Grief can be a massive bundle of different emotions, thoughts and behaviors. It impacts our sense of who we are, and it changes our world. There is no magic cure for grief, and it is not something you just 'get over'. Everyone's grief is different and there are no rules about what we should feel or for how long. There is no one right way to grieve.



There are many factors to consider in a child's reaction to bereavement such as the child's age, their relationship to the person who has died, the way the person died, how the child typically expresses emotion and what supports the child has around them.

Children feel the loss over a lifetime as they grow and learn to understand the real meaning of death and loss. As they grow and mature, their understanding of death increases, and they may need to revisit their grief again over the years. Children express their grief differently to adults as they often don't have the language to express themselves and can act out how they feel through their behaviour. Children also experience 'puddle grief' as they tend not to be sad all the time, instead they dip in and out, getting diverted by playing with friends, activities or school.



Supporting children in their grief

Children process information differently depending on their age, and stage of development but all children need clear information.

Acknowledge the **TEARS**

- 1. Talk-** Tell them the truth, and have open honest conversations with them using clear language that they can understand
- 2. Explain-** explain things in a way that they can understand no matter how young they are
- 3. Acknowledge-** acknowledge the child's feelings and encourage them to ask questions to help them understand and cope with their emotions
- 4. Reassure-** reassure the child and be prepared to repeat yourself until they can get their head fully around the death
- 5. Support-** support yourself because you can't mind them if you don't mind yourself

(ICBN website)

Mind yourself so you can mind them

As a parent or guardian, it's important to find ways to look after yourself. This might be through exercise, connecting with nature, reading, listening to music, whatever that looks like for you. No one can fix or reverse what has happened but as an adult you can do your best to help children. This means knowing how to mind both your grief and theirs.



St Francis Hospice resources



The above books were written by Social Workers in St Francis Hospice in collaboration with bereaved families as a tool to support and guide children as they grieve. The book is available free of charge from www.sfh.ie/shop. St Francis Hospice also offers bereavement support counselling to the loved ones of those who have died under our hospice services.

Please contact us on 01-8327535 or at bereavement@sfh.ie if you would like more information. For more information on children's grief, go to www.childhoodbereavement.ie

