

DEALING WITH BEREAVEMENT

This information is designed to help teachers, classroom assistants and even parents or family members in recognising the special needs that face a child suffering a recent bereavement.

With special thanks to Edwards Trust Sunrise for providing guidance.

Children find it difficult to express their feelings in words and most signs of how the child is feeling can be observed in his or her behaviour.

TYPES OF BEHAVIOUR

Sleep may become disturbed and the child may be unwilling to go down at night.

Eating may become affected and old habits return: maybe thumb-sucking/bed-wetting/clingy behaviour.

The child may become withdrawn and not want to go out to play or go to nursery or school.

Behaviour may become aggressive with violence or swearing.

Concentration and involvement may decrease.

Look for any of the following: anxiety, daydreaming, disorganisation, tearfulness, argumentative responses.

Not all of the signs are negative. A child may become more grown up or take more responsibility for others.

ANSWERING DIFFICULT QUESTIONS ABOUT SERIOUS ILLNESS OR DEATH

Use empathy and try to understand the anxiety being felt by the child.

You do not have to answer directly – ask the child where they think daddy is.

Be sure that you have a full family background information.

Answer honestly and in simple language.

Try to avoid NOT giving a response BUT you may have to say that you have to consult someone first (from the family).

THE NEEDS OF A BEREAVED CHILD

To know that they are loved and cared for.

To be listened to and understood.

To accept natural grief behaviour.

To tell their story.

To talk to someone who cares.

To have questions answered honestly and clearly.

A non-judgemental listener.

An opportunity to be involved in events like the funeral.

They need consistency, reliability and routine.

They need minimal disruption to day to day routine.

To be able to talk in normal conversation about the deceased person.

To see that adults around are able to show their feelings openly and still be around to care for them.

The younger the child, the more repetition and repeated explanations are necessary.

HOW TO SUPPORT A BEREAVED YOUNG CHILD

Ensure close liaison with school and family.

As children grow older their understanding will change and they will need to have information repeated.

You should allocate time to for private talk about a child's worries.

Encourage the child to express their feelings through talking, writing and even drawing.

Be watchful for behavioural triggers of distress and remember feelings can come out months or years later.

Continue to provide boundaries and rules. And show consistency.

Remember significant anniversary dates.

Watch for guilty feelings – 'was I good enough'?

Did the child get the chance to say 'goodbye', 'sorry' or 'I love you'?

Keep your words and ideas in concrete rather than an abstract form.

Children sometimes need to see the person (e.g. a baby sibling).

DON'T give too much information or try to justify the loss.

Consider whether specialist bereavement counselling or support is needed.