my county council

Helping you to cope

An information booklet for children and young people about bereavement during COVID-19

Northamptonshire County Council

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a big impact on everyone's life and unfortunately, has led to some people becoming seriously ill. You may have a loved one who has become seriously ill with COVID-19 and who may have died.

This booklet has been written to help you understand some of the thoughts and feelings that you might have after someone you care about dies. It will help you get through this difficult time.

The booklet may also be useful for you if you have friends who have had this experience, in order to understand what they may be going through, and decide how you can best help them.

No-one is ever prepared for all the feelings and reactions that take place when a loved one dies.

This booklet is made up of lots of different questions and answers. Use it to look for the questions that you are thinking about.

Remember, you will be able to get support from family, friends and school and you can always make contact with others who have been through a similar experience through websites or support groups.

Questions you may have …

Everyone feels different – most people are experiencing strong feelings that they have not had

Why do adults find it difficult to talk about a death?

Remember that the adults around you may feel very upset themselves and might not believe what has happened at first. Some will be confused by their own feelings and may not be reacting in the way you expect. Most adults will also be unsure about how to break the news and what to say to help.
As they are struggling to handle their own thoughts and feelings, they may be afraid that they will be unable to cope with your reactions as well. This will get better.

Do all children and young people feel the same when they find out that someone has died?

Everyone reacts differently when they hear the news. Some refuse to believe it and feel numb and shocked. Others become really upset and cry for ages. Some behave as though nothing has happened and carry on with what they were doing.

There is no right way to react – everyone is different and you may have little control over your reactions initially. It is common to feel frightened that something else could happen to you or those close to you.

What sort of feelings will you have in the days and weeks after the death?

Everyone goes through different feelings at different times when someone dies. There is no right or wrong way to feel. At first it can be a shock and be hard to take in the news.

You could feel scared, angry, calm, anxious, ok, worried, helpless, sad, numb, confused, and tired. You could just feel weird and not be able to explain how you feel or feel nothing at first. These feelings may be new or stronger than anything else you have felt so far in your life.

The difficult thing is that these emotions can come and go in waves, suddenly washing over you when you feel better, then going away again. This is a common reaction. You may find that you feel angry at people or things, or feel ‘moody’ a lot. This does not usually last very long.

How long will you feel upset?

This changes from person to person. It depends on how prepared you were for the death or whether it was unexpected. Sometimes how the person died can be upsetting. It varies from hours to days to weeks, but it will gradually get less intense over time. Those feelings might resurface

later when you remember your loved one. This is normal.

Feeling more worried about things

Children and young people can become more anxious and worried than usual, and you will find that you need reassurance from family, friends and teachers.

You might feel more worried about the welfare of your family and other loves ones, as well as yourself.

Changes in behaviour

Some children and young people's behaviour changes and they might not want to do some of the things they are asked to do. They might find it harder to concentrate. Some children and young people may want to do more than usual to help out; they may

become serious and feel 'grown up'. Some children and young people may not want to interact with others and may prefer to keep to themselves. Some young people may try to hide how they are really feeling from their family, to protect them and might try to keep busy to push away those difficult feelings. These are all normal reactions but it is important to talk to those you trust.

Feelings of guilt

It can be very common for children, young people and adults to feel guilty. They might feel that they were somehow responsible or wish that they had done or said something differently. Remember that this is not your fault.

You should have a break from social media if you are finding it too intense

Feeling unwell?

Some children and young people develop headaches, stomach aches or feelings of sickness. You might find that your appetite is affected. These are likely to be a result of your body reacting to the upset, rather than having a physical cause or being due to being ill.

Problems with sleeping

Some children and young people have trouble going to sleep or wake up more often than usual. Some may have nightmares or fears of nightmares for a little while.

Vivid memories

Some children and young people can have very vivid day or night dreams about the person who has died and about the events at that time. You may find that these can be very 'real' and upsetting – but they will gradually fade with time.

What about the funeral?

Due to the situation with COVID-19, things might be done differently. There are restrictions in place around attending funerals. You may want to attend the funeral of your loved one but you may not be allowed to. There are still things you can to do say goodbye, to remember your loved one and to share your grief. For example, you could:

- Write a card or choose an important object to be placed next to them at the funeral.
- Write a poem or tribute for somebody else to read out at the funeral.
- Ask to be involved in planning the funeral, such as choosing the music or the flowers.
- Hold a service at home with your family on the day of the funeral (or later).
- Collect and share happy memories as a family.
- Remember your loved one on important dates such as their birthday or the anniversary of their death.

You might be able to go to the funeral but might be feeling worried if you don't know what to expect. You could talk to someone about what will happen and this will help you to decide if you wish to go and to feel prepared.

School

Some children and young people have temporary problems with being able to concentrate on their school work when they have experienced a bereavement. You may find school work unimportant. If you have had a break from school it can

be hard going back. It helps to talk this through and say how you want to be supported to return to school when you do go back. While schools are closed, you should still be able to make contact with staff there, if you need support.

What if everyone is talking about the person or COVID-19 on social media?

If you have social media accounts they can be useful for talking to your friends and sharing how you feel. Sometimes people set up an account where you can post and share photos and videos.

It is not easy to know what is true on social media. Some of the information about COVID-19 on social media is not true. There are lots of myths out there. It is not helpful to read about this. Make sure your information comes from trusted websites such as the NHS and government websites. You should have a break from social media if you are finding it intense or too much. You should talk to your parents or other trusted adults if you see anything upsetting.

Things you can do which may help you cope better with your feelings

Talking

It is very important to talk about your feelings (however “silly” you may think that they are) to friends, your family and other adults that you trust, such as staff in school.

Sometimes it may be difficult to talk to those closest to you and it will help to speak to someone outside of the family. Links for organisations you can contact are included at the end of this leaflet.

Talking over thoughts and feelings does help. If you understand what has happened it can help to accept the reality of it. If you have unanswered questions that are worrying you it is good to talk about them.

Stay in touch with your friends and other loved ones even though you may not be able to spend time together in person at the moment. Technology can help with this.

Keeping well

It is important to try your best to eat well and sleep. Physical activity can really be helpful such as running. If you can’t do this just getting outside for a short walk will help. Going back to an activity that you have enjoyed before can be good for you.

Limit the amount of time you spend watching the news and reading about COVID-19.

Continue to follow official guidance about how to stay safe and well, such as by washing your hands regularly and socially distancing.

Reading

There are lots of books available that can help you. You might want to join an online forum to read about others who have had a similar experience and read about how they have coped.

Writing

Other children and young people like to write stories or poetry about the person and things that they remember doing together. You could write a journal or a blog and include your feelings.

Music

Some children and young people who can play an instrument, or like listening to music say that they find this very helpful. It is probably because music can affect our moods to feel happy or sad, or simply reflect our feelings.

Photographs or videos

Having a photo or video of the person who’s died means that you have a

permanent record of them. It can be a good way of thinking of the past. You could print off some pictures or make a photo book.

Drawing/Art

Some children and young people find drawing and Art can be very helpful. You can make a card or draw a picture for a memory box.

Playing games/computer

Sometimes playing games or watching things online can be enjoyable and also help you feel better. This can be a break or a challenge which can be fun. It is important not to use gaming too much as a distraction without talking or doing other things

When a person has died, a memorial may help

Creating a permanent memorial in memory of the person is often seen as a very helpful and positive action. Elaborate forms of this are plaques or memorial stones, but it is much easier for small groups to buy a bench or seat, to plant a tree or bush, to create a memorial flower-bed or pond. This might be something you and your family could consider in the future.

Remember

If you continue to feel upset and you don't think you are getting any better please tell your parents or carers and ask them if you can speak to someone outside the family.

These are some people who could help. These are not in any order of importance, but you should decide who you'd like to speak to:

Your Friends

Your Family

Adults at School

Your Doctor (GP)

Winston's Wish: Offering advice on supporting a bereaved child or young person. Tel: 08088 020 021, Monday to Friday, 9.00am – 5.00pm. Alternatively, email ask@winstonswish.org. There is also an online chat facility available on the website (www.winstonswish.org.uk) and a Crisis Messenger service available 24/7 for urgent support (Text WW to 85258). There is also lots of useful information and resources on the website.

#help2makesense website: Offers information and support to young people https://help2makesense.org/

Hope Again website: Offers information and support to young people. Young people can email a trained volunteer on hopeagain@cruse.org.uk or can call 0808 808 1677 free, Monday - Friday, 9:30am - 5:00pm.

The Mix website: Offers information and support to young people under 25 years old via telephone (0808 808 4994, open daily, 4.00pm – 11.00pm), email or webchat https://www.themix.org.uk/

Child Bereavement UK: Tel 0800 02 888 40. You can visit the website (https://www.childbereavementuk.org/get-support), use the live chat function, or email for support (support@childbereavementuk.org),

Childline: Tel 0800 1111. Due to COVID-19, currently the helpline is open 9.00am – midnight. You can also visit the website for information (https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/) and use the online chat function to speak to a counsellor.

If a person has died, recording memories can help

My personal memories – by _____

The person close to me who died was called _____

They lived at _____

They were born on _____

They died on _____

They were aged _____

I first met them on _____

I like them because _____

_____

_____

I like to do this with them _____

_____

_____

I miss this mostly about them _____

_____

_____

My favourite memory of them is _____

_____

_____

This information can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

Email: educpsychology@childrenfirstnorthamptonshire.co.uk

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Northamptonshire County Council

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