

## Insight into...



# Supporting Loss & Bereavement During Self-Isolation

Health &amp; Wellbeing Series: 4

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@WL\_EPS

*"No-one ever told me that grief felt so much like fear" C. S. Lewis*

During the Coronavirus pandemic we are facing a tragic loss of lives, often under very difficult circumstances. Many aspects of our children's normal routines have been disrupted and they are socially isolated from their wider family, friends and teachers. This is a difficult time for everyone, but if you are also grieving the loss of a loved one, this can be even more challenging. The purpose of this insight is to empower adults in supporting young people with bereavement and loss during these particularly challenging times.

*This Insight document has been designed to be read alongside the West Lothian "[A Whole Community Approach to Supporting Children and Young People with Loss and Bereavement](#)" guide, which also contains details of a number of helpful resources and websites.*

## Grieving in exceptional times

During these exceptional times some families will sadly experience the loss of a loved one. This death may be due to COVID-19 or may be unrelated. Regardless, the news that someone has died may come as a huge shock to a young person and they may struggle to manage their overwhelming feelings of grief and loss.

As a parent/carer, your job is not to try to fix the difficult emotions that your child is experiencing but to help them work through the grieving process, to understand why someone has died and that grief is normal and can not be avoided.

- ◆ **Talk to your child:** don't be afraid to talk about death. Provide them with factual information and be honest if there are things you don't know yet, but explain you will look into and get back to them later.
- ◆ **Be honest & open:** give factual information using language appropriate to their age & stage of development
- ◆ **Address their fears and anxieties:** it is important to take time to talk about what has happened and help them make sense of the events and feel less afraid. Do your best to be available, loving & predictable to allow your child to feel safe and secure
- ◆ **Reassure them:** children may be fearful about spreading the virus, reassure them that they are not to blame
- ◆ **Listen carefully:** reassure them that whatever is on their mind, you are there to listen & support them
- ◆ **Acknowledge their feelings and emotions:** ask them how they feel and reassure them that it is ok to feel that way. Help them to understand and safely express overwhelming feelings & emotions.

Remember, the way each child reacts to death is different and will depend on their relationship to the person who died, the child's age and stage of development and their network of support. Being together in isolation may allow more time to support each other with your emotions and feelings around the loss of your loved one.

## Funerals

The current restrictions during the Coronavirus outbreak mean that many people are unable to attend funerals, cremations and wakes and so are unable to say goodbye in the way they had expected. It is still important to explain to your child what a funeral is and that while it is a way of saying goodbye to a loved one, together you will find other ways to do this. Even with physical distancing, it is still possible to involve children in some way to help them feel involved and included:

- ◆ Ask the funeral director if the service can be recorded or live-streamed
- ◆ Have your own private service at home with the same music & readings, light a candle, share special memories
- ◆ Encourage children to contribute to the service by drawing a picture, writing a letter or writing a poem which could be read out at the service or put in the coffin
- ◆ Ask those who have been able to attend to call afterwards to hear their account of the service
- ◆ Plan a memorial event for the future when restrictions have been lifted
- ◆ Share stories and photos of your loved one and make time to talk about & remember them
- ◆ Set up an online memorial with favourite pictures and/or stories
- ◆ Connect virtually with family and friends to share memories by telephone or videocall



## Stay Connected

Feelings of isolation may intensify as a result of the restrictions on visiting extended family members and close friends. Even though you may be physically separated from others you can create the type of connection that happens at funerals or ceremonies in different ways:

- ◆ Make contact with family and friends by phone or video call for support and to share memories
- ◆ Write a letter to pass on supportive thoughts and messages
- ◆ Share memories through social media sites
- ◆ Set up a memorial page on-line



## Remembering

Children can be encouraged to share their memories and express their feelings and emotions in a number of ways:

- ◆ **Artwork:** draw or paint a picture .
- ◆ **Music:** create a playlist of the person's favourite music & songs.
- ◆ **Poetry/Creative Writing:** create an acrostic poem or write a story of the person who has died.
- ◆ **Memory box:** create a special box containing special items that remind them of the person who has died and times shared with them.
- ◆ **Memory book:** containing photos/pictures of the person and their favourite places/ people etc. This could be done electronically and shared with others.
- ◆ **Family Record:** can help the child or young person gain a sense of where they and the person who has died fits into the family. Family photographs, documents, certificates & mementos can be included or this could be expressed through a family tree.
- ◆ **Perfume/Aftershave:** sprayed on a scarf or hankie can be a source of comfort.
- ◆ **Comfort cushion:** made from an item of clothing belonging to the person who died.
- ◆ **Memory Jar:** Some children can find it difficult to express their thoughts and feelings around a bereavement so creating a memory jar with different colours of sand or chalk mixed with salt can be a visual way of helping them to represent their memories. Objects with significant meaning can also be added.
- ◆ **Grief mask:** Children can often hide their grief for a number of reasons including not wanting to add to the pain of an adult in their life, or not wanting to appear like they're not coping. A grief mask is a creative tool that can help children to express the feelings they show to the world compared to hidden emotions they feel on the inside.



## Further Supports and Information

Child Bereavement UK

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

Child Bereavement Network

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

Winston's Wish

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

Grief Encounter

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

Cruse

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



If you are a **parent/carer**....take care of yourself. Allow yourself time and space to grieve for your own loss. The more you look after yourself, the better able you will be to support your child

If you are a member of **staff**....see [A Whole Community Approach to Supporting Children and Young People with Loss and Bereavement](#)" for a number of safeguarding procedures that can help staff avoid becoming overburdened or distressed.