

# INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

A bereavement in a school is a very sad and traumatic event for students, staff, parents and the wider school community.

This leaflet aims to give you information to help you support your child and manage your own feelings during this tough time. Samaritans has many years' experience of supporting people through difficult times. We hope that by sharing what we have learned with you, you will have the knowledge and support you need to help you and your child cope with what has happened at their school.

## How do people respond to bereavement?

People respond to bereavement in different ways and many different reactions are possible and normal. **Your child may be feeling:**

- 🕒 Confused
- 🕒 Angry
- 🕒 Fearful
- 🕒 Disbelieving
- 🕒 Hurt
- 🕒 Guilty
- 🕒 Withdrawn
- 🕒 Abandoned
- 🕒 Betrayed
- 🕒 Numb
- 🕒 Tearful
- 🕒 Nothing

However your child is feeling, they need to be able to express their feelings in a safe way. Reassurance and attention are important. Your child will probably have many questions and might find it difficult to understand what has happened. They might think and talk constantly about the person who has died.

Some young people might find it harder to cope than others. This is especially true for young people who have experienced other stressful situations in their lives. Talk to someone if you are worried about your child's reaction or behaviour.

## How can I help my child?

**Listen carefully to what they say**, and ask about how they feel. Give them the time to talk about what has happened. Steer conversations to positive coping methods: talking about their feelings, supporting friends and building a stronger school community.

**Try to be accepting and open-minded.** Let your child know you are there for them, whatever the circumstances, and reassure them that they are loved. Assure them that it's good to talk about how they feel, and that they have your support.

**If necessary, offer to help them get support** by contacting a teacher, GP, school counsellor, bereavement specialist or talking to us at Samaritans.

Try not to take it personally if your child seems unwilling to talk to you about what has happened. That's not unusual and they may look to friends or mentors for support or simply carry on as normal. There are no right or wrong ways of coping. They just need to know they have support if and when they need it. Encourage your child to seek help if they are worried about a friend.

**Be aware of your own feelings.** Be honest with yourself about how your child's reaction is affecting you. If you are struggling with your feelings, talk to us at Samaritans or seek other help.

## **The media**

Be aware that your child may be affected by the media. It might help to watch the news or read articles together so that you can talk about any concerns that are raised. Sometimes parents are approached directly by journalists for comment – you are under no obligation to speak to them. If you do comment, it's important to focus on how everyone is feeling and how others can seek help if they need it. You can seek advice from your child's school.

## **Sharing the news**

Your child may wish to join or comment on online memorial pages. Remind them of the importance of expressing feelings in a safe way and supporting others, while being respectful to the school and the bereaved family.

Remember that although your child's school will be trying to keep school life as normal as possible, many people, including staff, will be managing difficult emotions. When talking to others, the best approach is to be respectful of the wishes of the bereaved family and follow the school's advice.

## **Are there warning signs that someone is struggling to cope?**

It can be very difficult to tell if someone is struggling to cope, especially if they find it hard to talk about their feelings. People in crisis react in different ways. But there may be clues in behaviour changes, such as if someone is unusually withdrawn or animated.

Other signs that someone might be struggling to cope include:

- 🕒 Talking specifically about taking their own life
- 🕒 Seeing no future for themselves
- 🕒 Giving away their belongings
- 🕒 Seeing no way to resolve their fears or anxieties
- 🕒 Not wanting to talk with or be with people
- 🕒 Unusual displays of anger or impatience towards those close to them
- 🕒 Being tearful for no obvious reason
- 🕒 Not being able to cope with small everyday events
- 🕒 Increased risk-taking

If you are concerned about your child, encourage them to talk to someone. If someone is talking about having suicidal thoughts and feelings, always take it seriously.

Supporting someone in distress can be difficult. If you need to talk about how you are feeling, you can contact us at any time.

## Where else can I go for support and information?

**British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)** can provide information about counsellors in your area. **Tel: 0870 443 5252** [www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk)

**Child Bereavement UK** provides support to families grieving the loss of a child, and advice for professionals working with bereaved families. **Tel: 01494 568900**  
[www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)

**ChildLine** provides support services to children and young people. Tel: **0800 1111**  
[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

**Winston's Wish** provides practical support and guidance to bereaved children, young people and their families. **Tel: 08452 030405** [www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)

**Young Minds** offers advice and support to parents worried about their children's emotional or mental wellbeing. **Tel: 0808 8025544** [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

**Breathing Spaces Scotland** is a free, confidential phone and web-based service for people in Scotland experiencing low mood, depression or anxiety  
[www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk](http://www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk)

People talk to us any time they like, in their own way,  
and off the record – about whatever's getting to them.



[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)