



Guy's Gift

**Support for children and young people
in Coventry and Warwickshire**

• bereavement • change • loss • separation

Call **0845 467 3035** or email info@guysgift.co.uk



Role of the School

Supporting Bereaved Pupils in School

These notes are intended to highlight some of the points that can help when a bereaved pupil returns to school.

Returning to school

- Gather as much information as possible about the circumstances.
- Contact the child/family prior to their return to school. Discuss how they want their peers to be informed and how much it is appropriate for others to know.
- Ask the child how they would like to be treated.
- Ask the child how they are feeling when they arrive at school. This is likely to change. You could establish a system that allows them to let you know at the start of the day and again after lunch for example.
- Inform all members of staff, individually or in groups. Remember to brief new staff members.
- Discuss with the child's peers - about the death (in appropriate detail for the children) and how they can express their sympathy.
- Provide extra support for close friends. Give accurate and appropriate information according to the age and understanding of the children. Incomplete or inaccurate information can lead to rumours or children will imagine and fill gaps for themselves.
- Identify a place and a person where the bereaved child can go for 'time out' during the day if needed.

Ongoing support

- Be aware of anniversaries and other sensitive dates that might impact on the child such as Mother's Day, Father's Day. (Agree with the family how they would like the child involved in activities for Father's Day, Mother's Day,... if these are connected to the bereavement)
- Look out for changes in behaviour that may suggest problems or indicate the need for additional support.
- Give time to hear their concerns.
- Answer questions as honestly as possible.
- Remember that each child's reaction will be different, including reacting differently to a sibling.
- Be aware of faith and cultural identity. Spiritual values, belief, race and cultural heritage will affect the grieving process.
- Maintain normal routines and realistic expectations for behaviour.

What to look out for

Bereaved children are likely to display some, or all of these signs and emotions:

- | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| - Shock | - Confusion | - Lack of self confidence |
| - Sadness | - Relief | - Social withdrawal |
| - Anger | - Tearfulness | - Regression |
| - Guilt | - Aggression | - Lack of emotion |
| - Denial | - Irritability | |
| - Anxiety/panic attacks | - Loss of concentration | |

Their reaction to the bereavement may not be immediate, but can occur weeks, months or even years later. It may also recur when additional stresses are present or as their understanding of loss changes with developmental stages. Remember, there is no time limit to the grieving process!

Self Care

- Don't underestimate the emotional demands experienced by those supporting a family at this time.
- It is only natural to want to make things better. It is not about taking away the pain but working through the emotions to help them adapt to the loss.
- This can create stress for the staff in the following ways
 - They may well be grieving themselves
 - Previous personal losses may resurface
 - Not everyone is comfortable talking about emotions
 - Watch for signs of burnout or stress. (Anxiety, feelings of helplessness, guilt...)
 - Let staff know who they can talk to about their own emotions
 - It can be difficult for staff to request support for themselves and can be perceived as a sign of weakness or not coping. If support is a matter of course for everyone it is easier for individuals to address their personal needs. Most people will be the best judge of what they need for themselves.

It is helpful to talk things through as much as possible with individuals and in staff meetings. Remind staff that sometimes it is helpful for children to talk to someone detached from their normal routine and situation, especially if the grieving is difficult or prolonged.

Guy's Gift can be accessed at any time for direct support for children and young people, and advice and support for schools.