



# Working with children and families

**Y**ou probably already have an idea of the kind of service you want to provide. However, your needs assessment may have prompted you to look again at what's really needed locally, or you may want to be sure that you have considered all the options. This factsheet gives an overview of the main types of intervention that are being delivered across the Childhood Bereavement Network (CBN) and suggests useful resources for exploring the options in more detail.

There are many types of services for bereaved children and young people in operation across the country, offering a range of interventions (see **Box 1**). In deciding what to offer, organisations consider a number of factors, in particular their principles or philosophy regarding bereavement, the needs identified locally and the resources available. For example:

- a service in an area where few people are available to volunteer develops interventions led by paid staff
- a service in an area where other agencies provide one-to-one support for bereaved children and young people concentrates on providing group activities
- a service in a rural area with poor public transport establishes email and telephone support services.

Many services start small and add to their range of interventions as they build up experience and listen to suggestions from families, referring agencies and other childhood bereavement services. CBN subscribers advise new services not to worry about doing everything, but to go with what local children want and need, and build up over time. In the table on pages 2, 3 and 4,

we show some of the different models of intervention most commonly delivered by childhood bereavement support services, and highlight some of the practical issues, challenges and reasons why they are believed to be helpful. This information has been provided by CBN subscribers.

You will need to do further research to decide which of these interventions is appropriate for your service. You can find out more by:

- attending training offered by CBN subscribers (see [childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/events\\_subscribers.htm](http://childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/events_subscribers.htm) for more information)
- applying for a place on the undergraduate diploma and postgraduate certificate in childhood bereavement offered by St Christopher's Hospice Candle Project and Help the Hospices (see [helpthehospices.org.uk](http://helpthehospices.org.uk) for course details)
- following up the resources and further reading suggested on page 6
- contacting and visiting existing services to see the range of their interventions and the rationale behind them. If you do this, prepare the topics you want to cover in advance to make the best use of your host's time and yours.

**i** The Childhood Bereavement Network is a multi-professional, national federation of organisations that work in various settings with bereaved children and young people, their families and other caregivers. We provide information, networking opportunities and good practice guidance to our subscribers, and signpost bereaved families and others to sources of information and support. In this series of factsheets we have gathered information and practical advice on key topics, to support those interested in developing childhood bereavement support services.

## The national picture

- 95% of services offer information and advice
- 86% offer individual family support
- 74% provide a service to 'secondary users' such as schools and emergency services
- 64% offer pre-bereavement support
- 62% offer one-to-one work with child
- 53% offer group work with families
- 45% offer group work with children
- 32% offer training to other agencies

Source: L Rolls and C Burgess 2003. 'Childhood bereavement services: a survey of UK provision'. In *Palliative Medicine* 17: 423-432

# Interventions with bereaved children and families

Name of intervention and brief details	Why do it?	Staffing implications*	Other things to think about
<p><b>Closed groups for children or parents/carers</b></p> <p>Runs over a set number of sessions with a set group of children or parents/carers. Generally aims to provide opportunities for peer support, remembering and sharing experiences and issues. Some follow very structured programme (e.g. for younger children). Others are led by what participants want to do and talk about. Parent groups often run alongside children's, so that experiences are shared.</p>	<p>Therapeutic and practical benefits:</p> <p>Access to peer support is widely held to be an important way of helping children manage their bereavement.</p> <p>Tends to be cost effective and can be a vehicle for involving parents simultaneously, so that they can support their child better.</p>	<p>Depends on level of support you want to offer. Some involve just a few workers. Others have high ratio (e.g. one adult to 1.5 children) to ensure that someone is always on hand during small group work to encourage and support the child when they start talking about their feelings.</p> <p>Parent groups require fewer workers – typically two facilitators and one person to provide administrative support.</p>	<p>Appropriate venue, refreshments and equipment for games and activities.</p> <p>Organisation: need to ensure that all resources are prepared in advance, there is a list of attendees and volunteers and a timetable setting out expectations of volunteers and staff.</p> <p>Safety: have a first aider and first aid kit to hand. All staff and volunteers need to be police-checked. Need a confidentiality policy and clarity on safeguarding children.</p>
<p><b>Family days / remembrance events</b></p> <p>Social therapeutic event to which parents and children are invited. Can take a variety of forms. Some are annual, some held more frequently e.g. at Christmas and in the summer. Usually held at a family-friendly venue with different areas and activities which are conducive to developing social networks and remembering the person who has died.</p>	<p>Opportunities for remembrance and communication with others are an important part of bereavement support.</p>	<p>For remembrance events, lots of preparation work is required, often requiring one dedicated administrator plus a planning team. On the day itself, most staff and volunteers tend to get involved. Some organisations look to bring in volunteers from local companies to help out. Staffing requirements for trips and days out will be lower.</p>	<p>Cost may not be that great if you can leverage support from local companies – e.g. getting venue free or reduced rate, getting a sponsor, etc.</p> <p>Get the balance right: between remembering those who have died, and providing opportunities for fun and socialising. Sometimes it helps to have different areas clearly dedicated to each.</p> <p>May need to help shy families meet others, without appearing to interfere.</p>
<p><b>One-to-one / family support</b></p> <p>Support delivered by a skilled practitioner to an individual child or family.</p> <p>Aims to provide opportunities for child or family to share their feelings and develop strategies for managing their bereavement. Content and structure varies significantly depending on age of child, skills base of the practitioner and organisation's philosophy – can range from in-depth counselling to befriending.</p>	<p>Opportunity to meet the unmet need of bereaved children who, for whatever reason, are not adequately supported by their existing networks.</p> <p>Helps enable children to manage significant life events, so that they can achieve their preferred outcomes.</p>	<p>One worker per child or family, with administrative support to manage referrals.</p> <p>Training and regular, quality supervision required for staff and volunteers. Workers need to be sure they can make the commitment, as work is demanding and needs regularity. Workers need to feel and be safe, so important to have emergency contact number for visits at evenings/weekends.</p>	<p>Referrals: need clear process for managing these.</p> <p>Space and privacy: support may be delivered in child's home, at school or in a therapeutic setting, depending on organisational approach.</p> <p>Assessment procedure: may be informal or formal but very important in identifying what kind of support is most appropriate in that child's particular circumstances.</p> <p>Resources: either well-stocked playroom, or if delivered on an outreach basis, the worker needs to be able to transport appropriate equipment, for example drawing and writing materials, dolls etc.</p>

## Interventions with bereaved children and families (continued)

Name of intervention and brief details	Why do it?	Staffing implications*	Other things to think about
<p><b>Open door policy</b></p> <p>An 'open access' bereavement support service which takes referrals from professionals, as well as families and children who have been bereaved. May deliver support in a number of ways, depending on the needs of the child or family.</p>	<p>Encourages inclusivity and accessibility. Offers the opportunity for service users to make further contact if required, particularly after short-term interventions have come to an end.</p>	<p>Staffing model depends on range of support offered. Helpful to have staff on hand to answer phones and provide a quick response to families who might be in distress.</p> <p>Returning families may need to see a different worker, so need to be clear that the agreement for follow-up support is with the service, not the individual worker.</p>	<p>Access: need to help families access the service, e.g. by providing transport, so that their first impression of the service is welcoming.</p> <p>Communication: make sure families are aware of the offer of additional support should they need it – this kind of information is not always taken in at first.</p> <p>Assessment: all re-referrals should be considered and assessed. Sometimes the reason for referral might be outside scope of service, so need supervision opportunities to discuss this.</p>
<p><b>Open groups for children and parents</b></p> <p>Provides a forum for children and young people to meet on an ongoing basis and discuss issues as they arise. Often follows from a closed group. Group sessions can have specific themes (e.g. the changing demands of parenting) or be focused on having fun.</p>	<p>Reflects the reality that grief is ongoing and can take different forms over time. Provides ongoing support for children and parents who can dip in and out as required for as long as they need.</p>	<p>Need a team of workers plus a trained facilitator with ability to follow up and provide support on areas of concern.</p> <p>Numbers can vary considerably so need to have staffing to cover differing levels of attendance.</p>	<p>Venue and activities: need to be appropriate to all likely attendees – e.g. younger/older children; boys/girls.</p> <p>Attendance: find out what times are most appropriate to accommodate different commitments of attendees. Do regular checks to see whether families wish to remain on the contact list. Use a range of invitation methods (e.g. letters, texts, email).</p>
<p><b>Pre-bereavement support</b></p> <p>Support for children before someone close to them dies, to prepare them for bereavement.</p> <p>Traditionally offered through hospices, though being run as a community service in some areas.</p>	<p>Enables the child and family to be better prepared for the bereavement.</p> <p>May reduce need for services post-bereavement, as child already has support systems and strategies in place.</p>	<p>Depends on the model used. Can be run like one-to-one work (see above).</p> <p>Practitioners may also work with other agencies to help them improve their pre-bereavement support.</p>	<p>As per one-to-one support (see above).</p> <p>Be clear about the scope of your service – for example is it for those affected by terminal conditions or more broadly for life-limiting conditions?</p> <p>If you plan to offer pre- and post-bereavement support, think about how these two service models fit together.</p>
<p><b>Residential groups</b></p> <p>Organised groups over one or more days. Provide opportunities for children to gain increased self-esteem and the confidence to include their bereavement as a natural part of their life story. Can give adults increased confidence in parenting bereaved children and providing stability.</p>	<p>Helps to ensure child and family do not feel alone in their grief, and can give them confidence about making other overnight trips.</p> <p>Provides support and care in a safe and happy environment, and opportunities for developing social support structures.</p>	<p>Residential groups need high numbers of trained staff and volunteers as well as practical helpers.</p> <p>Need appropriate staff expertise for some events or discussion groups (this could include external professionals).</p>	<p>Staff and volunteer commitment: this is essential, particularly for overnight stays/residentials.</p>

## Interventions with bereaved children and families (continued)

Name of intervention and brief details	Why do it?	Staffing implications*	Other things to think about
<p><b>Telephone, email or web support</b></p> <p>Helpline, email facility or website providing opportunities for children and families to use electronic media to seek information, advice or support.</p> <p>Telephone and email services can provide individual responses from qualified or experienced staff or volunteers.</p> <p>A website can provide access to information and resources, as well as a message board function which enables young people to correspond with and support each other.</p>	<p>Can reach large numbers of people in an effective way.</p> <p>Winston's Wish and Cruse's RD4U service run national services, responding to thousands of calls or emails a year.</p> <p>Other services offer telephone support on a more local, informal basis as this is an important first port of call for many service users.</p>	<p>Depends on model used.</p> <p>Helplines and email support: some services are staffed only by clinical practitioners, to ensure a level of expertise, experience and continuity in support. Others are staffed by volunteers. Where both phone and email support are offered, these are often provided by the same staff.</p> <p>Website: also need an ICT team or external support to develop and maintain the site and ensure appropriate functionality – e.g. message boards.</p>	<p>Infrastructure: need space, privacy, good equipment and sufficient phone lines to offer professional helpline service. Similarly a good ICT set-up for email support. Need a system for people to leave a message if lines are busy.</p> <p>Funding: continuity and quality of service is important so need specific funding strategy.</p> <p>Supervision: calls can be as demanding as face-to-face work.</p> <p>Safety and quality: website messages need to be checked before they are posted, to remove email addresses and personal information, ensure that users are young people, and remove any obscenities etc.</p>
<p><b>Training, consultancy and supervision</b></p> <p>Working with other professionals in the private, public and voluntary sectors to help them develop their skills in bereavement support.</p> <p>Covers bespoke training, workshops, conferences, consultancy support to an agency/organisation, telephone support and supervision to individual practitioners.</p>	<p>Increases capacity of family and community-based services to understand bereavement and support bereaved children effectively.</p> <p>Helps to normalise bereavement, by promoting a social model.</p> <p>Can provide an income stream.</p>	<p>Generally carried out by paid staff with experience both in training and bereavement support.</p> <p>Good use of staff time as increases local capacity.</p> <p>Normal supervision arrangements apply. Some 'training the trainers' work required.</p>	<p>Preparation: becomes less onerous over time as materials are refined through ongoing evaluation and feedback. Remember there will be costs for development and production of course materials, as well as staff time.</p> <p>Training sessions can raise personal issues which trainer needs to be able to manage.</p> <p>Marketing: people need to know the training is available.</p> <p>When offering supervision, need to be able to see past the practitioner to consider what issues the child is facing and what is best for them.</p>
<p><b>Written information and resources</b></p> <p>Good quality, generic written material can help children and families to understand death and begin to think through practical and emotional issues.</p>	<p>Can reach a wide audience and provide a doorway to other services.</p> <p>Often it is what parents and carers say they want and need, particularly in relation to supporting their child.</p> <p>Some resources can be income generators.</p>	<p>Need people who can research, write and edit – these may be in-house or external.</p> <p>Designers and printers are also necessary to produce the materials to the desired quality and quantity.</p>	<p>Using staff to write literature is beneficial in terms of the expertise they bring, but it can be difficult to juggle writing time with other commitments.</p> <p>Need ongoing commitment to keeping resources up to date and relevant to as wide an audience as possible.</p> <p>Resources for young people benefit from being produced with the involvement of young people themselves.</p>

## Service snapshots

### Website, email and helpline support

The Cruse website for young people – [rd4u.org.uk](http://rd4u.org.uk) – is visited by young people from all over the UK as well as internationally. One of the first services of its kind, it gives young people access to peer support (via a message board), a helpline and email support. It is staffed by a dedicated team in Manchester, including young volunteers who take calls and answer emails. A team of young people meet to guide the progress of the site. Some of them are trained volunteers and all have experienced bereavement. From a diverse range of religious and cultural backgrounds, the group meets on a regular basis, creating an open, friendly forum, where everyone has the right to a voice and an opinion.

### Remembrance events

Release is based at Nightingale House Hospice in Wrexham and offers an open access service to 0-19-year-olds in the area. Each year it holds a one-day event – the Beaky Bash – to enable children to meet up with one another and gain extra support. Craft activities are designed to help children share memories and discuss the person who has died. A balloon release takes place after lunch with parents and carers present. This is always one of the highlights of the day, and is both fun and intimate. The children and adults find that the day is relaxed and helpful and allows children who previously met on one of the social activities to develop their friendships further. The Beaky Bash takes place every summer holiday.

### Pre-bereavement support

SeeSaw in Oxfordshire is currently piloting a pre-bereavement service, offering one-to-one support to families as well as consultancy support to other agencies. It is delivered by one member of staff who initially spent a lot of time making links with relevant agencies in the field, helping them to support more children themselves, and also to know when to refer to See Saw. The approach taken with children and families is flexible, depending on their needs, but it seeks to offer a seamless service before and after bereavement. So far, SeeSaw has found that giving families the opportunity to explore feelings and put coping strategies in place before bereavement means that they are less likely to need additional support after bereavement.

### User-led services

Jigsaw4u, working in London and the South East, encourages its service users to fully participate in decision-making and delivering services. A good example of this is the magazine *Our Lives* which is designed, edited and produced by bereaved children and young people. It contains news, articles, stories and poems and is distributed to other bereaved young people and to schools, libraries and other services locally. In 2005, Jigsaw4u's child-led conference included workshops by bereaved children. One of the outcomes was a trip to Sri Lanka to encourage children who had experienced loss and trauma as a result of the tsunami. Those involved said it was amazing to watch bereaved young people linking with others across language and culture.

### Residential groups

At the regular residential groups run by Winston's Wish in Gloucestershire area, children and young people have the opportunity to tell their stories, join in activities, explore difficult feelings and coping strategies, and begin to look to the future. Adults, working at a separate location, spend one day exploring their own responses to the death and the second on how to support their children. An overnight stay means that activities can be undertaken in depth, and facilitates friendships and sharing. The staff notice immense changes in those arriving on the first day and leaving on the second. Winston's Wish runs up to six groups a year, including a group for those bereaved through suicide and, on a pilot basis, a group for those bereaved through murder or manslaughter.

### Closed groups

Chums in Bedfordshire runs group sessions for children and teenagers alongside groups for their parents. This reflects its core belief that peer and family support is the best thing you can offer a bereaved child, as it gives them a secure environment for exploring emotions and lasts longer than external service provision. The group for younger children follows a very structured approach, based around, encouraging them to share their stories, thinking about memories and difficult feelings and developing strategies for coping with them. The teenager group covers the same issues but in a more informal, youth club-style environment. The parents' groups run at the same time and are well-attended. Both parents and children are keen to see each other afterwards to share experiences.

## One-to-one work

Barnardo's Orchard Project works in Newcastle and Northumberland. Its bereavement team provides a range of services including one-to-one support for three to 18-year-olds. It receives around five referrals a week, mainly from other agencies. Its paper-based referral system encourages practitioners to think about why support from the Orchard Project is needed, and helps to ensure that no-one's time is taken up with inappropriate requests for support. The Orchard team will provide one-to-one support in cases where the child or young person is not adequately supported by existing family, school or social networks. This is both pragmatic – given limited resources – and an important practice principle, as Orchard believes it is more appropriate to use existing and ongoing support systems where possible.

## Open door policy

In the years after bereavement, children often have to deal with a new school, new responsibilities at home or new step-parents and siblings. Adjusting to this might require further help and support, which is why the Candle Project at St Christopher's Hospice in London offers an 'open door' policy so people can, if necessary, return to the place that was able to offer help initially. If a child or family contacts Candle for extended support, the first step is to discuss it by phone. If it falls outside the parameter of bereavement-related issues, the worker will discuss it in supervision. All re-referrals are re-assessed. The numbers involved are not large – up to 15% of families each year. Often the initial phone call is itself sufficient to help the person move on, which is why Candle believes an accessible telephone service is important.

## Designing a training course

The Child Bereavement Trust helps professionals respond appropriately to grieving families' varied emotional needs. Part of this involves delivering training – one of their core charitable activities. Their approach has evolved by listening to professionals about their concerns, what they want to know and how they would like to learn. Consequently their training enables people to fill the gaps in their professional training around bereavement support, to have some theoretical basis to this new learning, to share with colleagues and to learn from families. There is a core training programme plus some bespoke training. Most courses are one-day workshops run by a sole facilitator for an optimum 14 participants. This means they can be interactive and responsive to participants' needs.

## Resources

### Books:

*A Guide to Developing Good Practice in Childhood Bereavement Services*, Childhood Bereavement Network, 2006. Available at [childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk](http://childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk)

*Brief Interventions with Bereaved Children*. B. Monroe and F. Kraus (Eds), Oxford University Press, 2004. Available at [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk)

*Interventions With Bereaved Children*, S. Smith and M. Pennells (Eds), Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1995. Available at [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk)

*Then, Now and Always. Supporting Children as they Journey Through Grief: A Guide for Practitioners*. J. Stokes, Winston's Wish, 2004. Available at [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk)

### Websites:

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

[crusebereavementcare.org.uk](http://crusebereavementcare.org.uk)

[rd4u.org.uk](http://rd4u.org.uk)

[stchristophers.org.uk](http://stchristophers.org.uk)

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

[jigsaw4u.org.uk](http://jigsaw4u.org.uk)

[seesaw.org.uk](http://seesaw.org.uk)

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