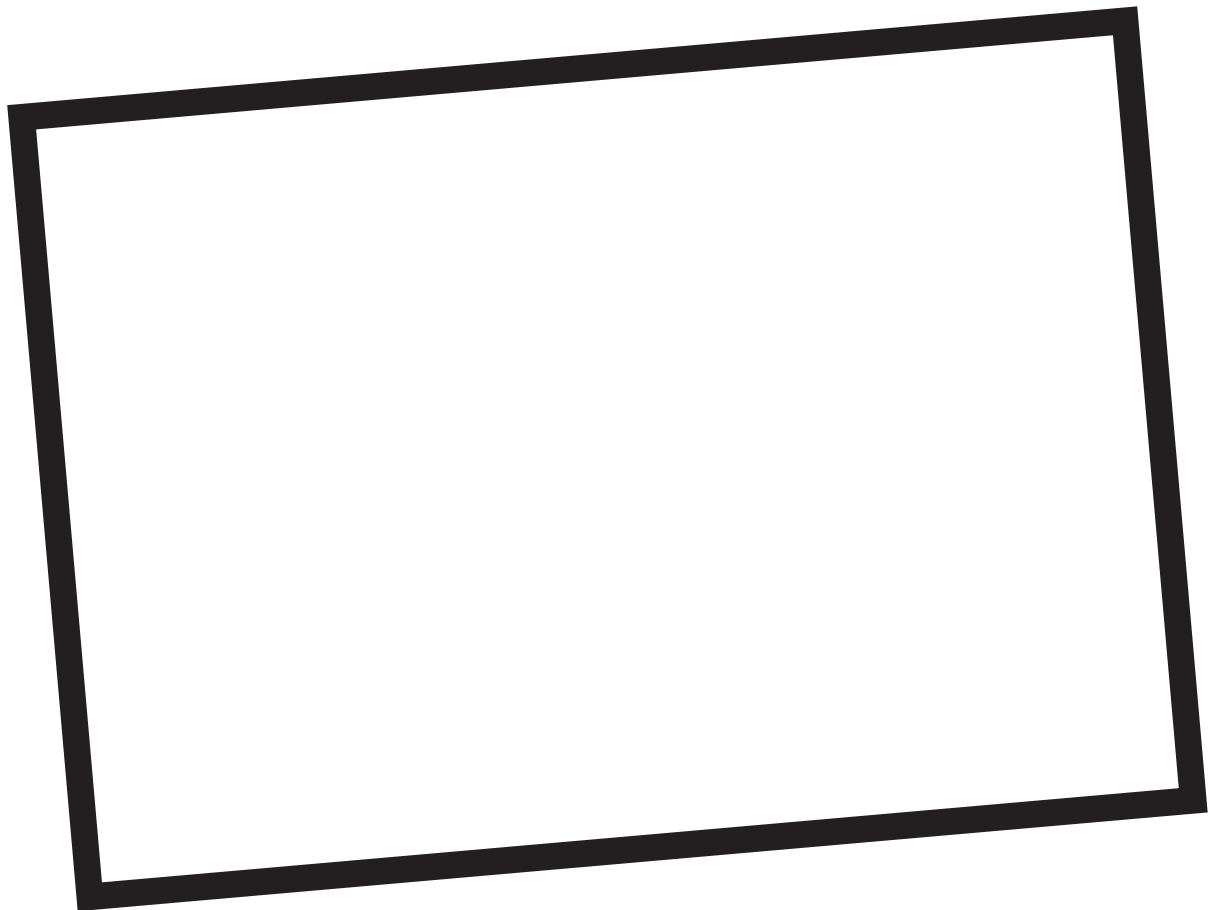


Not Too Young To Grieve



Training Materials



**University of
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Director
Professor Paul Cooper

February 2006

Dear Colleague,

We are writing to you as someone who is engaged in the initial or in-service training of practitioners working with young children and their families. We enclose complimentary training materials on the subject of childhood bereavement, in the hope that these may be useful to you when planning your courses.

The death of a close family member has a profound effect on the life of a young child. Every adult who has contact with that child can help them, but many people feel unsure of what to do or say. We hope this training package will raise people's awareness and increase their confidence in this area of work.

The professional skills and understanding developed by this training have also proven useful for those working with children affected by other losses (for example, children going into care, or affected by divorce or separation) and across all ages.

This project has been supported by a wide range of individuals and organisations. Our thanks go to everyone who has given their time and encouragement, especially the Sure Start centres in Leicester, the Childhood Bereavement Network, and Leeds Animation Workshop.

Our grateful thanks go to the Parenting Fund for financing the DVD, "Not too young to grieve" and this training package. We hope you find the materials thought-provoking and useful.

Yours sincerely,

Rose Griffiths
University of Leicester

Sacha Richardson
The Laura Centre, Leicester

P.S. If you use these materials before December 2006, we would be pleased to hear your views on them. Please e-mail Rose Griffiths: rnag1@le.ac.uk

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All the printed materials included in this pack are also available on the Childhood Bereavement Network website (which is hosted by the National Children's Bureau).
www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

The website has a "Powerpoint" version of the presentation slides, which you can download if you have Powerpoint on your computer.

Tutor's Notes

Preparation

These notes are provided as a guide. They give you a pattern for a two-hour training session that we have used with groups of participants from a variety of professions, both with people at the beginning of their professional training, and as in-service training for experienced staff. Please adapt the session as appropriate, for your own context.

Group size

This session has been used successfully with group sizes from 4 to 35 participants. We feel the ideal group size is below 24, in order to provide the most opportunities for discussion, but we appreciate that initial training courses may need to use larger groups.

Tutor

We hope that the notes and materials we have provided will make it possible for any experienced tutor who has a background in work with young children, or in health, teaching, social care or other work with families, to deliver this session. You do not have to have a background in bereavement support.

Before you deliver the session, you will find it helpful to watch the DVD at least once, and read all the notes (including the booklet in the DVD itself). You will also need time to print handouts and materials. If you are commissioning someone to run this course, we suggest you allow 3 hours for preparation time, the first time they run it.

If your organisation would like to find someone who could deliver this course on your behalf, you could contact the Childhood Bereavement Network (www.ncb.org.uk/cbn) who will help you find a local tutor.

Materials

You will need:

- A copy of the DVD "Not Too Young To Grieve" (If you do not have a copy already, you may be able to borrow it through your local library, or you can buy it from Leeds Animation Workshop: www.leedsanimation.org.uk).
- DVD player (or laptop computer with speakers, for a small group)
- Overhead projector or data projector
- Overhead transparencies or Powerpoint presentation (the latter is available on the Childhood Bereavement Network website: www.ncb.org.uk/cbn)

Materials

You will need:

continued

- Enough copies of the 3 handouts:

Sheets for note-taking while watching the DVD

The Needs of Bereaved Children

Useful Organisations (*N.B. Before you copy this handout, fill in the contact details of a local bereavement support organisation if you can. Contact the Childhood Bereavement Network for help with this if needed*).

- Spare pens and paper for note-taking by participants
- One set of "Frequently Asked Questions", printed on card and cut up, per 8 to 12 participants. (*N.B. Before the session, choose which 12 questions out of the 16 provided are most useful for your context. See the notes on page C4 below*).

You may sometimes wish to provide copies of the complete notes from the DVD. These are provided in booklet form in the DVD case, but they can also be printed as A4 sheets, from the DVD itself.

As with any training session, you may wish to have a register, name labels, and refreshments (available at the beginning and in the break).

Structure of the training session

The pattern we have found most successful is as follows:

1. **Introduce** the topic, and the aims of the session. **10 – 15 minutes**
2. **Show the DVD**, "Not Too Young To Grieve" and give people time to discuss it.
Approx. 35 minutes
3. Talk through the **Needs of Bereaved Children** using OHTs and notes.
Approx. 15 minutes

Coffee break **10 – 15 minutes**

4. **Frequently asked questions:** discussion in pairs or threes, then feed back to whole group. **30 minutes**
5. **Summary:** information about further help and resources. **10 minutes**

N.B. In the notes that follow, the sections in speech marks are not a script, but just suggestions of the kind of thing you could say. Please use your own words to convey these ideas.

1. Introduction 10 - 15 minutes Using four OHTs/ Powerpoint slides

OHT1: title of session

If you are working with a group of participants who do not already know each other, start by giving people the chance to say their name and where they are from (for a small group), or (if it is a larger group) tell everyone which organisations people have come from, and ask them to introduce themselves to anyone they work with during the session.

“Our main focus during this session is on young children and bereavement, but you will find many of the things we discuss are relevant to people of all ages.”

OHT2: aims of session

Start by saying something like: “The topic of this training session is not an easy topic to deal with, and it may feel especially hard for any of you who have suffered from the death or loss of a parent or carer yourself, especially as a child. It is important to look after yourself, and pay attention to your own feelings. If you feel very uncomfortable at any point, do feel able to step outside for a while. This is a sad topic; but I hope that this session will help you feel that you are better able to help children who are having to cope with the death of someone close to them.”

Then briefly point out aims, as listed on the OHT.

OHT3: Everyone has to cope with change and loss

“To set the scene: every one of us learns to deal with change and loss in our lives. There are some examples on this overhead. Sometimes the changes are positive – but they can still feel stressful. Sometimes the changes are ones that we did not want to happen – and we have to come to terms with them.

Children’s lives, too, are full of changes and the feelings of loss (small and large) that come with change.”

OHT4: Young children and loss

“Here are some examples of the changes which all or many children will go through, and they are also changes which will result in some feelings of loss.

Statistics suggest that between 2% and 3% of children under 5 in Britain will lose a parent, main carer or sibling through death; the figure may be much higher in areas of high economic and social deprivation. Our main focus in this session is on loss through death – but you may find that many of the things we talk about, will help you think about other situations where children will grieve because they have lost contact with someone who was important to them.

We’re going to watch a DVD now, which will tell you the stories of ten children and their experiences.”

2. Not Too Young To Grieve DVD Approx. 35 minutes

Give out the sheets for making notes about the stories on the DVD. Explain that participants may want to jot things down whilst they are watching the DVD, and they may want to add further notes when they are discussing the stories afterwards.

Play the DVD (approx 15 minutes).

Afterwards, ask people to get into pairs or threes (no more), and say you are going to give them between 5 and 10 minutes to talk about the stories and the things they had found helpful or thought-provoking in the DVD.

Take turns around the room, asking people to contribute thoughts on what they felt were important things to remember from the DVD, and from their own professional setting if appropriate (remembering the need for anonymity when describing particular children's circumstances).

The things which people contribute during this section will bring up many of the issues summarised in section 3, so a useful discussion here, even if it uses extra time, will mean you can move more quickly through the "Needs of Bereaved Children".

3. Needs of Bereaved Children Approx. 15 minutes

Using ten OHTs/ Powerpoint slides

Give out the handout of notes on the "ten needs". Talk through each need, using the numbered OHTs, and your copy of the handout. Remind people that even though we are concentrating on the needs of young children, these are common to bereaved people of all ages.

COFFEE BREAK 10 - 15 minutes

4. Frequently asked questions Approx. 30 minutes

Use your choice of question cards, and the tutor's notes provided later in this pack.

We have provided 16 different FAQs, and some blank speech bubbles so that you can write questions of your own if you wish. In the time available, we suggest you use just 12 questions. The first eight questions (a to h) are "core questions"; please use those, and then choose 4 further questions that are appropriate for the context in which your participants are working.

One set of the question cards is enough for 8 to 12 people. Make duplicate sets for further participants.

Ask people to get into pairs or threes. Give each pair 3 questions to discuss, and explain that they will have about 10 minutes to talk about their questions, and then you will ask people to take turns at feeding back their thoughts.

Go round the room, asking each group to choose just one question to feed back on. Use the tutor's notes on the FAQs (see later) to help you add any extra comments. If you are working with a smaller group, you may be able to go round a second time, or even a third, until you have had comments on all twelve questions, or as many as you have time for.

Collect the question cards back, to use another time.

5. Summary **Approx. 10 minutes**

"We have covered a lot of issues in a very short time. I hope you have found it worthwhile. There is obviously a great deal more to learn than we could possibly cover in such a short time, but there are many organisations which can help."

Give out the handout, "Useful Organisations". These organisations' websites provide information about training, useful books and resources, and support for children and families who have been bereaved. Winston's Wish have a national telephone helpline. Practitioners can play a useful part in making sure families know that there are many people who can help them, and many people who will understand what they are going through.

Point out that many bereavement support organisations will offer support to people who need help, even if their bereavement was a long time ago. This may be helpful to practitioners who find a child's bereavement raises issues for them personally. Similarly, many doctors will be able to refer their patients for help.

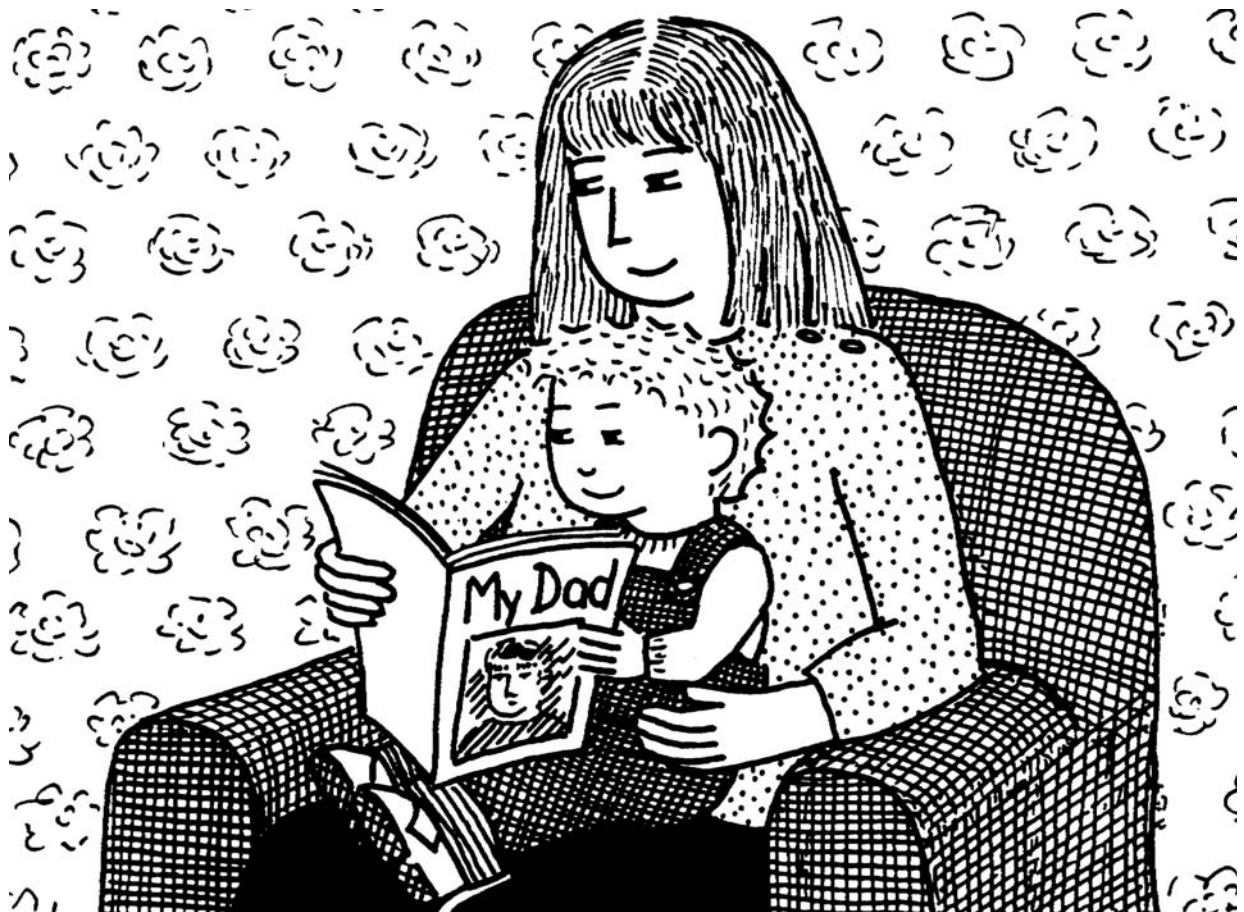
Say that if they would like to watch the DVD again, or lend it to families affected by bereavement, it can be borrowed through most public libraries. (If your organisation has copies which you can lend out, explain what the arrangements are.) The DVD can be purchased from Leeds Animation Workshop (contact details are on the bottom of the note-taking sheet which people used when watching the DVD).

Thank everyone for their participation in the training session.

1.

Not Too Young to Grieve:

thinking about bereavement
and young children



The aims of this session...

- to increase your awareness of the issues surrounding bereavement in young children.
- to help you feel more confident about supporting bereaved children and their parents or carers.
- to tell you about where you can go to get additional help.

Everyone has to cope with change and loss...

For example:

- Moving - house and friends
- Starting school, college, work
- Examinations; job hopes
- Serious illness or disability
- Relationship breakdowns
- Redundancy
- Bereavement

Young children and loss

For example:

- Weaning
- Parent going to work
- Birth of a sibling
- Sibling starting school
- Starting playgroup, nursery, with childminder, or starting school
- Parental relationship breakdown
- Parental illness (eg post natal depression)
- Bereavement

"Not too young to grieve"

Please use these sheets to make notes while you are watching the DVD. You may also want to write down questions you would like to discuss.

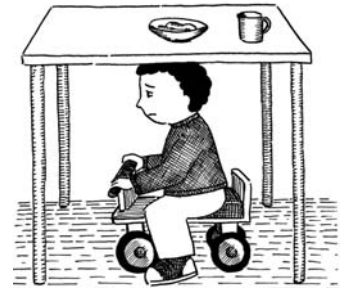
1. Amy - a baby whose mother dies.



2. Harvi - a toddler whose father dies



3. Robert - who is taken into foster-care.



4. Sunita - who goes to her baby brother's funeral.



5. Michael - who is angry because his parents have "lost" his sister.



6. Natalie - who behaves badly after her brother dies.



7. Jacob - whose dad doesn't want him to be upset.



8. Josie - whose mum is putting on a brave face.



9. Megan - whose dad isn't used to looking after her.



10. Daniel - who has no direct memories of his father.



If you want to watch this DVD again, it can be borrowed through your local library, or purchased from Leeds Animation Workshop, www.leedsanimation.org.uk

The Needs of Bereaved Children

The following notes draw heavily on the work of **William Worden** as well as our own experience of working with bereaved children. In *"Children and Grief"*, (Guilford Press, New York, 1996) Worden summarises the findings of the two year long Harvard bereavement study, which charted the impact of the death of a parent on children.

Worden states that children have ten needs.

1. Adequate information.

Children need clear information, given in age-appropriate language, for instance, "He's died", rather than phrases such as "We've lost him". It is important to give enough information without overwhelming a child. Sometimes the honest answer to a child's question may be "I don't know", or "I can't tell you just now".

Sometimes with traumatic death (e.g. suicide or murder) it may help to provide information in stages over weeks, months or even years. Giving simple facts at first (e.g. "Daddy died last night"), can be followed with more information later, perhaps prompted by the child's questions.

Some key aspects of death may need to be repeatedly explained to younger children. It is important that they are helped to understand about the physical reality of death, that it is an irreversible transition from one state to another, and that people who are dead feel no cold, hunger or pain.

Some families have spiritual or religious beliefs about death. If talking about these matters, it is helpful to separate out what happens to someone's body and their soul or spirit. It is important to respect the child's and family's views.

If at all possible, it is helpful for children to be given some preparation if someone close to them has a terminal illness.

2. Fears and anxieties addressed.

It is a natural reaction to feel frightened following a death. Children may particularly fear that a surviving parent (or carer) will die or that they may die themselves. Sometimes lack of understanding about a particular death, or death in general, may exacerbate fears. Fears are often worst at night, especially at bedtime or at other times of separation (e.g. going to school, staying at someone else's house). Giving the child something to look after, or something to look forward to, helps them to understand that the separation will be short.

It is important to reassure wherever possible, but equally it is important to be truthful. For example, a bereaved child who asks a surviving parent, "Will you die?" will not

easily accept a statement which offers false certainty, such as, "No, of course not." This child already knows that parents can die, maybe in sudden and shocking ways. However, a suggestion that the surviving parent will probably live a long time ("Look at Grandma, she is 87!") and sharing plans about who would care for them in the unlikely event of early death can be reassuring.

Clear accurate information helps to reduce fears - for example, talking about dad dying from a brain tumour and explaining how this is different to feeling poorly and having a headache.

3. Reassurance they are not to blame

Young children are still learning the difference between things that they caused to happen and things that had nothing to do with them. For example they naturally experience extremes of emotion and may connect an earlier angry tantrum with someone's death. It may be necessary to give them clear, repeated messages that they are not to blame.

4. Careful listening and watching

We all show our thoughts and feelings in many ways, not just by what we say. Children may express their feelings through their play, behaviour and the way they relate to others. Maybe they do not do things they always used to enjoy, or it seems very important to do something that Daddy did. Children may go very quiet at a particular time, or make a big fuss about something that might appear insignificant.

Sometimes it can be helpful to find out what is behind a question. For instance, if a child asked: "What happened to Sharon when she died?" it might be worth saying: "I wonder what you think?". The child's answer to this question may reveal more precisely what he wanted to know as well as helping him to find his own answers. This question might be about what caused her death, the physical changes in the body following her death, a spiritual question about her soul or something else entirely.

5. Validation of Individuals' feelings

The Harvard bereavement study found that 2 years after death one quarter of the children had been admonished for not showing enough feeling, whereas another quarter were told they should have finished grieving. This latter group included children who reported high levels of crying into the second year (Worden).

Allow for individual differences both in feelings and in the expression of feelings. There is not one way to grieve; in fact there are as many ways to grieve as there are people.

It is important to let a bereaved adult or child know that the death, however painful, is something they can talk about. However, it is not helpful to make comments like: "I know how you feel", "You've got to be brave", "You should try and forget it", or "At

least you've got another sister". These all have the effect of stopping any real conversation about what has happened, and denying the reality of the loss.

Sometimes validating a feeling, especially feelings of despair or deep pain, helps us to move through those feelings, at least temporarily. When we believe it is not OK to feel something our feelings can get locked away inside us. This can make them harder to deal with and may lead to difficulties in later life.

6. Help with overwhelming feelings

We all sometimes need to protect ourselves from difficult or painful feelings.

Sometimes young children want to pretend that something awful has not happened, or at least forget about it for a while. It is important to respect this need at the same time as providing an environment that encourages confidence in our natural capacity to deal with difficult emotions.

Sometimes children will feel very angry, destructive, anxious, or withdrawn.

Carers need to balance children's need for consistent boundaries and expectations about their behaviour, with an acceptance that they may be less capable than you would ordinarily expect from a child of their age. For instance they may temporarily go backwards with potty training or dressing themselves.

Being alongside a child in play or other activity may provide opportunities to help them express their feelings. For example, "Teddy's feeling really angry because his mummy's died and he can't see her again."

7. Involvement and inclusion.

It is important to involve children in acknowledging and commemorating a death. This may include visiting a sick person before death, seeing the body after death, their involvement in the funeral and their opinions about memorials. Seeing how the death affects their family and friends will help children to feel less alone.

Even where families have clearly defined choices or traditions around death, a child may still be able to contribute something to a funeral or memorial.

8. Continued Routine Activities

Children benefit from being able to continue routine, previously enjoyed activities and interests. It is sometimes hard for adults to see children wanting to carry on with things so soon after a death. It is natural for children to dip in and out of grief, and just as adults need to carry on with the normal routines of daily life (making meals, cleaning the house etc.), so children need to play. Play may naturally include re-enactment of events surrounding the death or illness.

It is especially important following traumatic loss to provide as much stability and continuity as possible. The death of someone close is often very frightening. The child needs familiar activities and people to help them realise that, though life will never be the same, there are still many things that remain constant.

9. Modelled grief behaviours

“Children learn how to mourn by observing mourning behaviour in adults.”
(Worden p. 145).

Through sharing our own experience we can provide repeated opportunities for a child to make sense of and share their own feelings. It is important to be true to ourselves and open about our own feelings, but we must also be sensitive to a child’s needs when talking to them. There may be information that it is not appropriate for a child to know at this time.

Adults can promote an environment where it is easy to talk about the deceased and to acknowledge good and bad memories.

When talking about such things it is natural to feel sad. It is also important to acknowledge anger, guilt and fear, but to do this in a way that does not overwhelm the child.

10. Opportunities to remember.

When someone who played a significant part in a child’s life dies there will be countless moments when the child is reminded of their absence. When a family is able to speak about the deceased naturally, it helps a child to make sense of their own reality. At the same time it is important to respect that any individual may sometimes need to protect themselves from pain, and there may be times when a child does not want to talk about the deceased.

Sometimes when significant events are coming up, like anniversaries, Christmas, or other festivals, it is useful to plan in advance how the day will be spent. Families have found it helpful to do something in memory of the deceased at the beginning of special days, for example, looking at photos (or other items which have significance) and talking about the person who has died. Such times can also be a good opportunity to remind children that it is OK to have fun, perhaps by saying something like: “I’m sure Mummy would want you to enjoy today as much as possible, though we are bound to feel sad when we are missing her.”

Very young children who never met their deceased parent or sibling may not feel the need to ask questions about them – but older ones will. And as teenagers develop their own identity, it is helpful for them to have a sense of where they come from. It is much less painful for children to grow up with this knowledge than for them suddenly to find out later on.

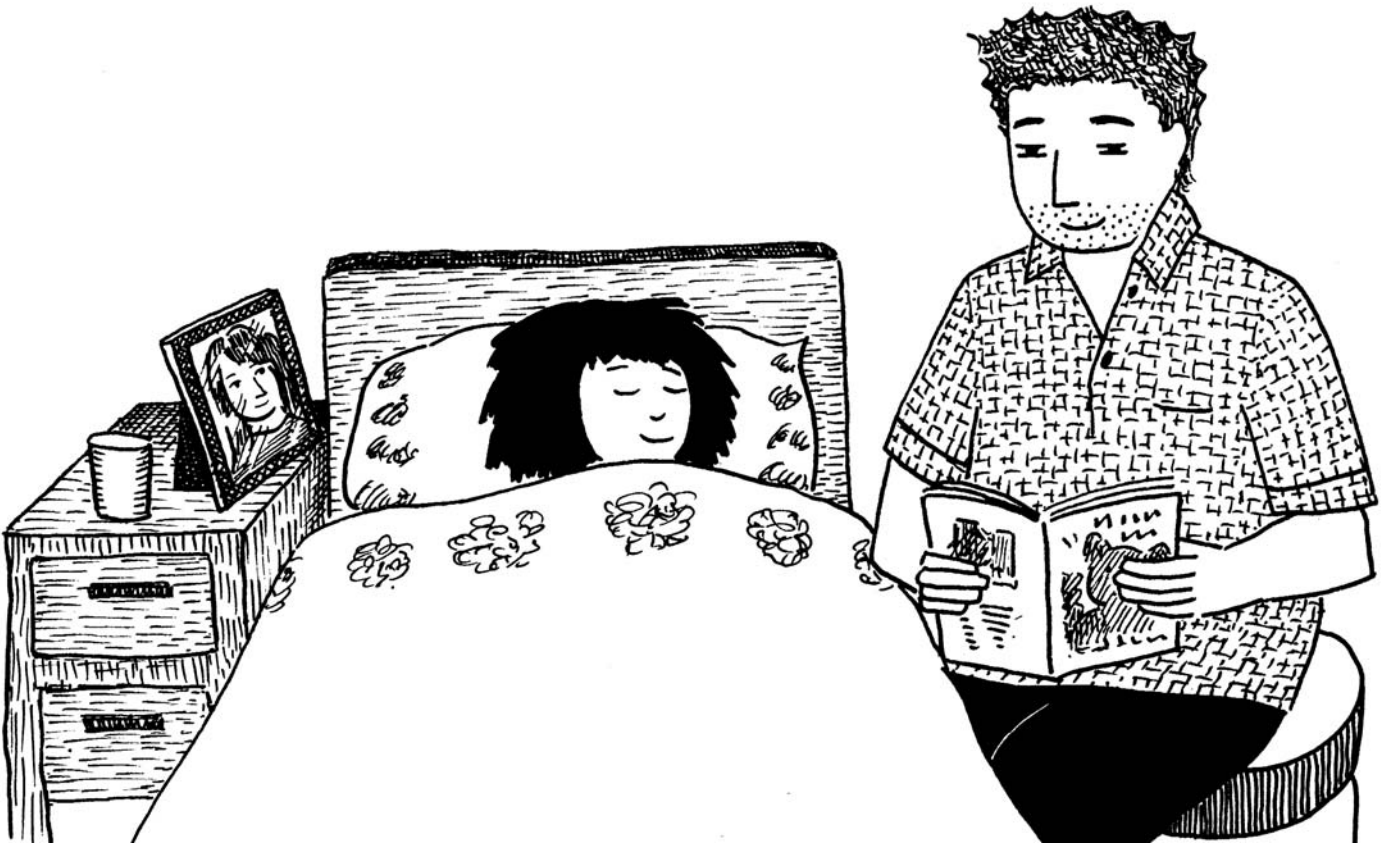
Sacha Richardson, the Laura Centre, Leicester.
Rose Griffiths, University of Leicester School of Education.

1. Children need adequate information.



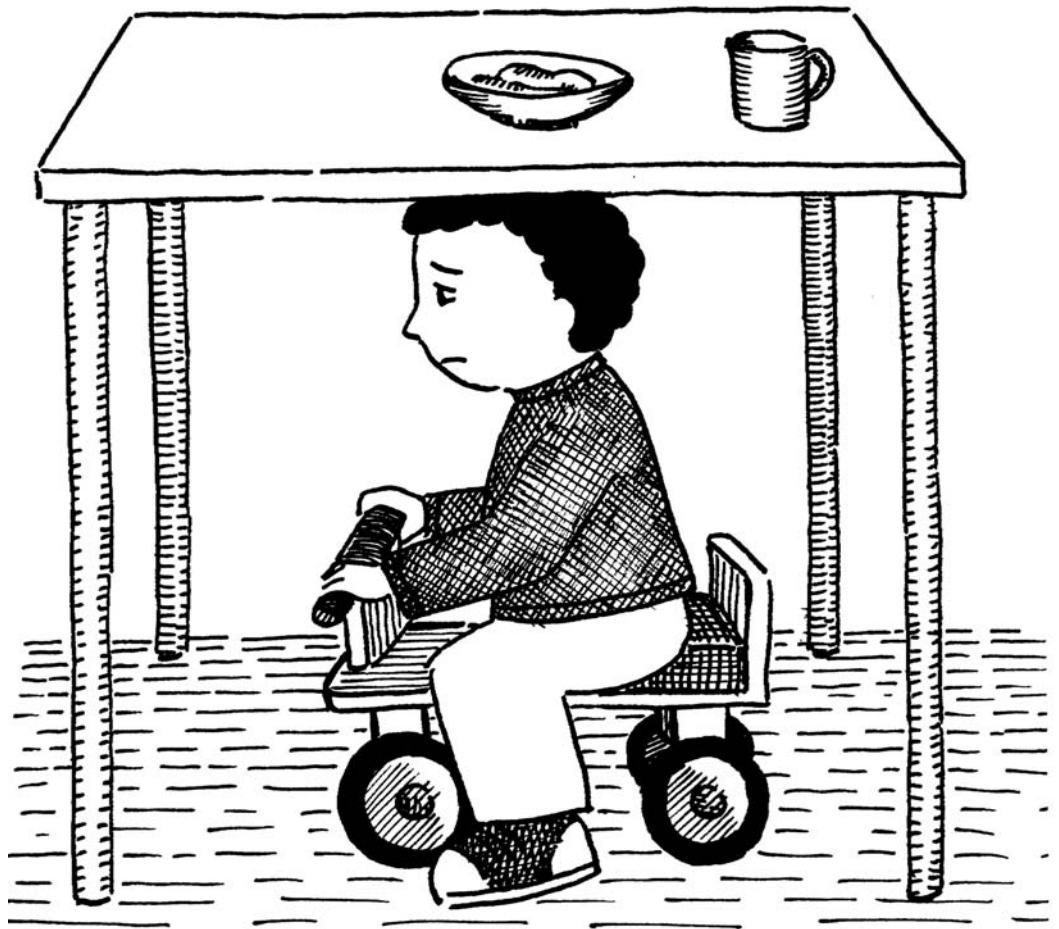
Michael

2. Children need their fears and anxieties addressed.



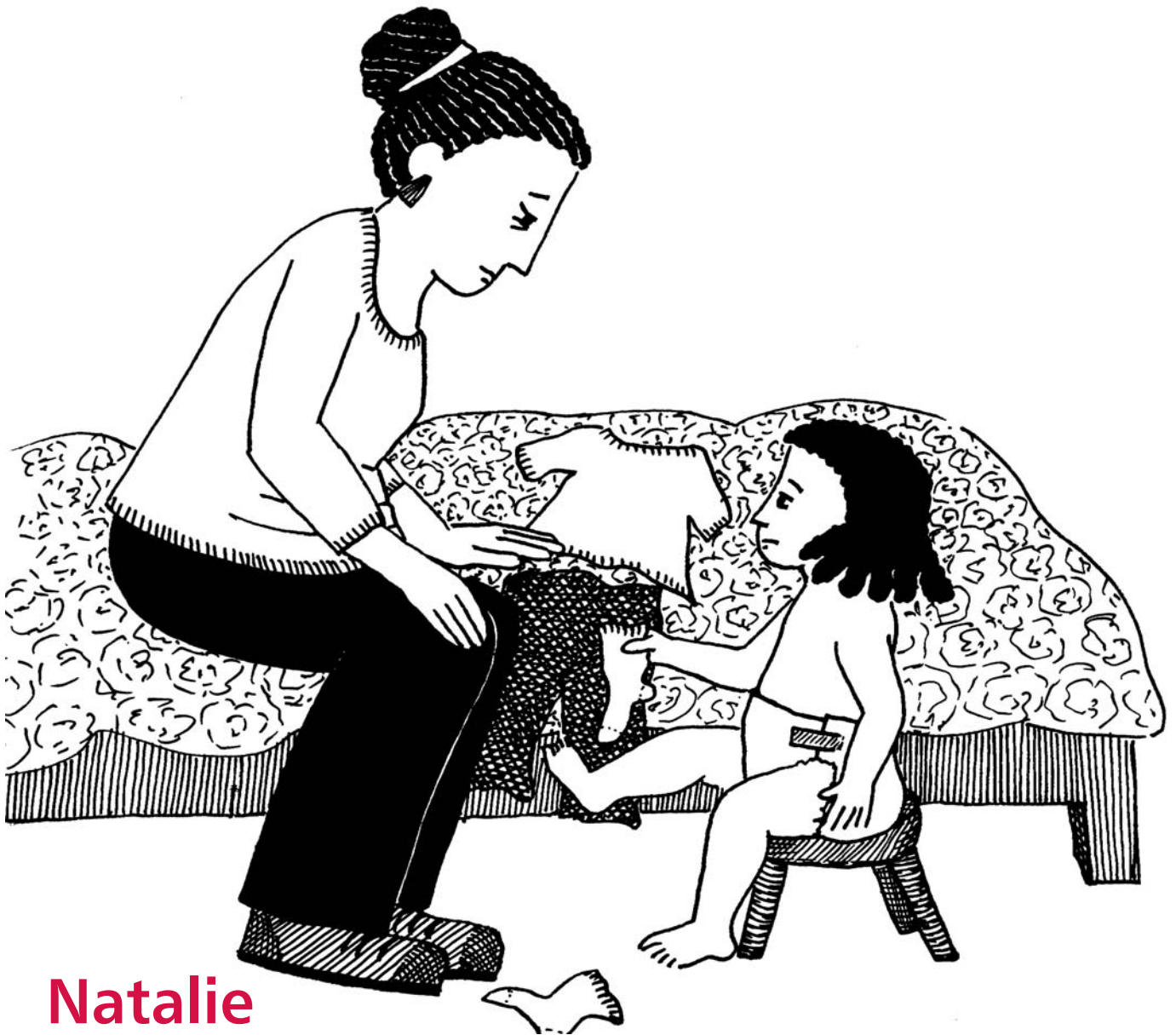
Megan

3. Children need reassurance that they are not to blame.



Robert

4. Children need you to watch and listen to them carefully.



5. Children need to know their feelings are accepted.



Jacob

6. Children need help with overwhelming feelings.



Harvi

7. Children need to be involved and included.



Sunita

8. Children need to carry on with routine activities.



Amy

9. Children need to see other people grieving.



Josie

10. Children need opportunities to remember.



Daniel

(a)

How do you explain
what "dead" means
to a young child?

(b)

What should I do in the
immediate aftermath of a
death, to help a child or
their carer? Should I say
anything, or send a card?

(c)

How can we include
children in the
ceremonies
surrounding death?

(d)

What can we do to
stop children blaming
themselves or others
unrealistically?

(e)

When a child who has
been bereaved is
behaving badly, how
should we respond?

(f)

For how long will
children grieve?

(g)

Should staff share
their own feelings with
children? How can
staff support each
other?

(h)

How can we help
children to remember
and make sense of the
life of the person who
has died?

(i)

How are other young children likely to react when one of their peers is bereaved? Why do young children sometimes react by bullying a child whose mother or father has died?

(j)

What should we do about mother's day and father's day?
Are there any other significant celebrations where we need to be especially thoughtful about a bereaved child's experience?

(k)

Should we talk about heaven?

(l)

What do you say if a parent has died not from illness but from suicide, murder, drug abuse or a preventable accident?

(m)

How can we help bereaved babies and very young children to feel more secure?

(n)

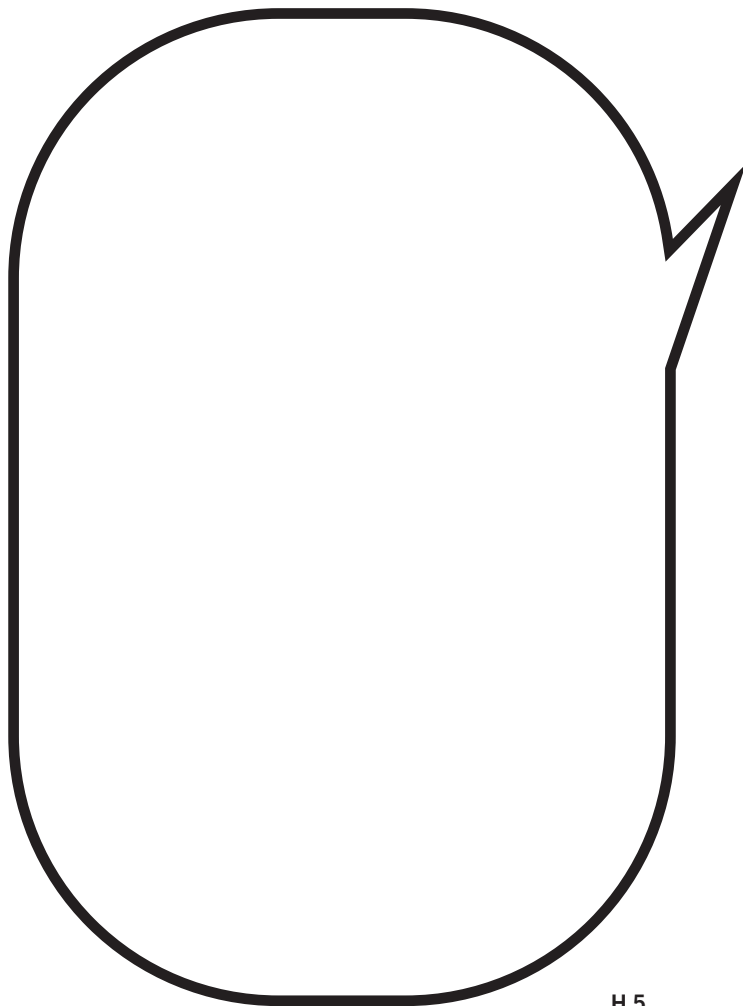
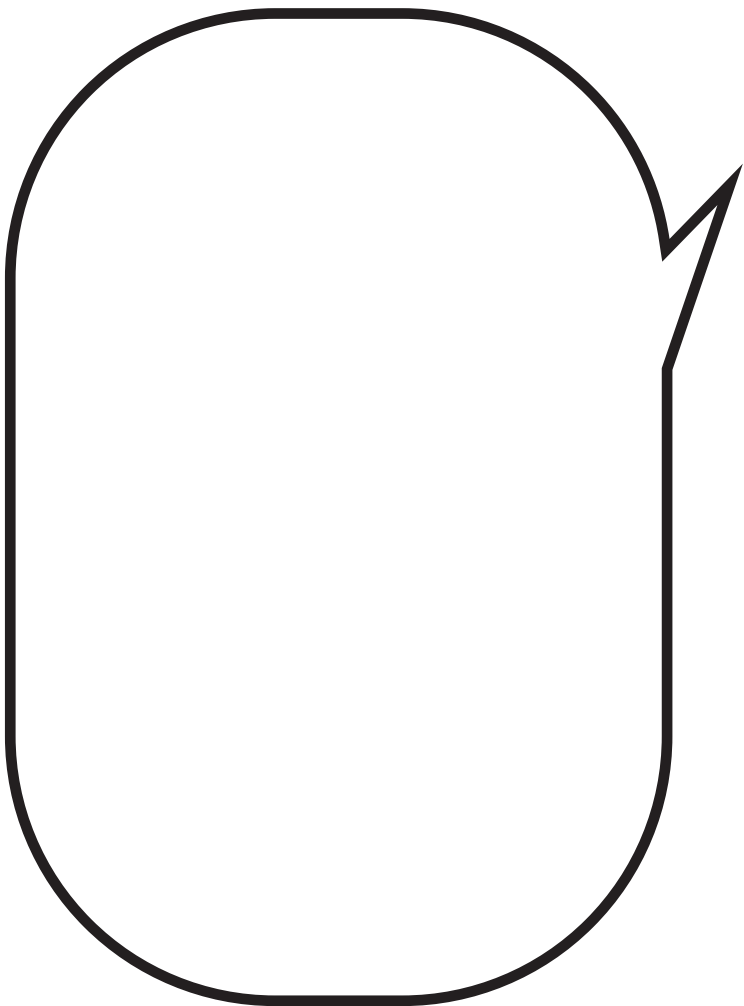
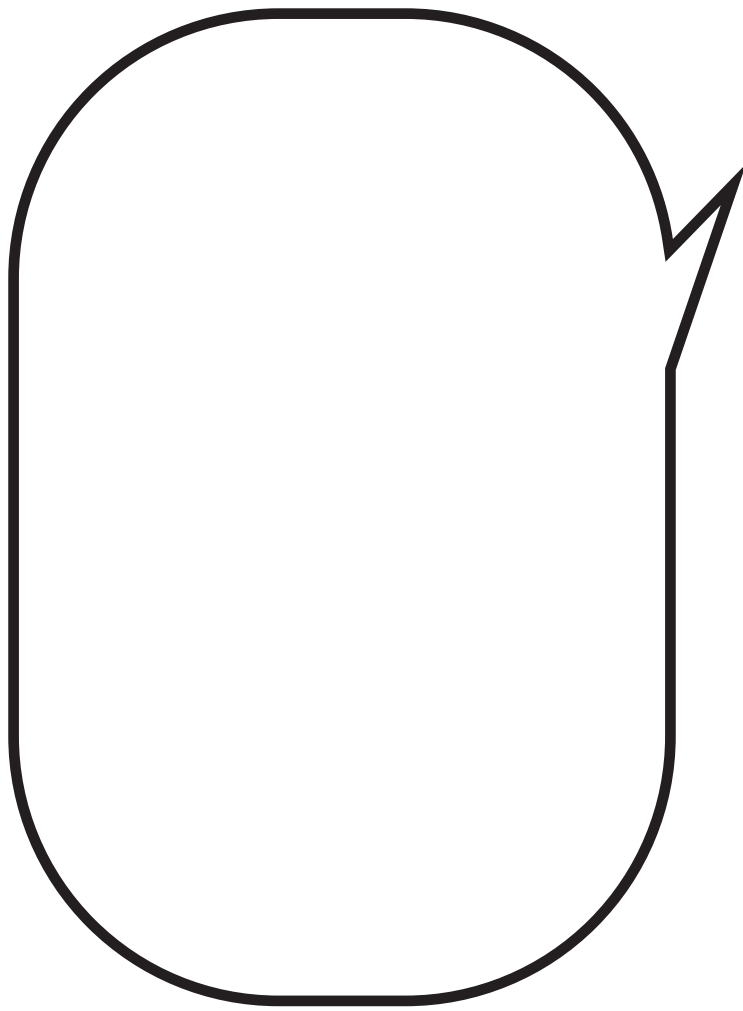
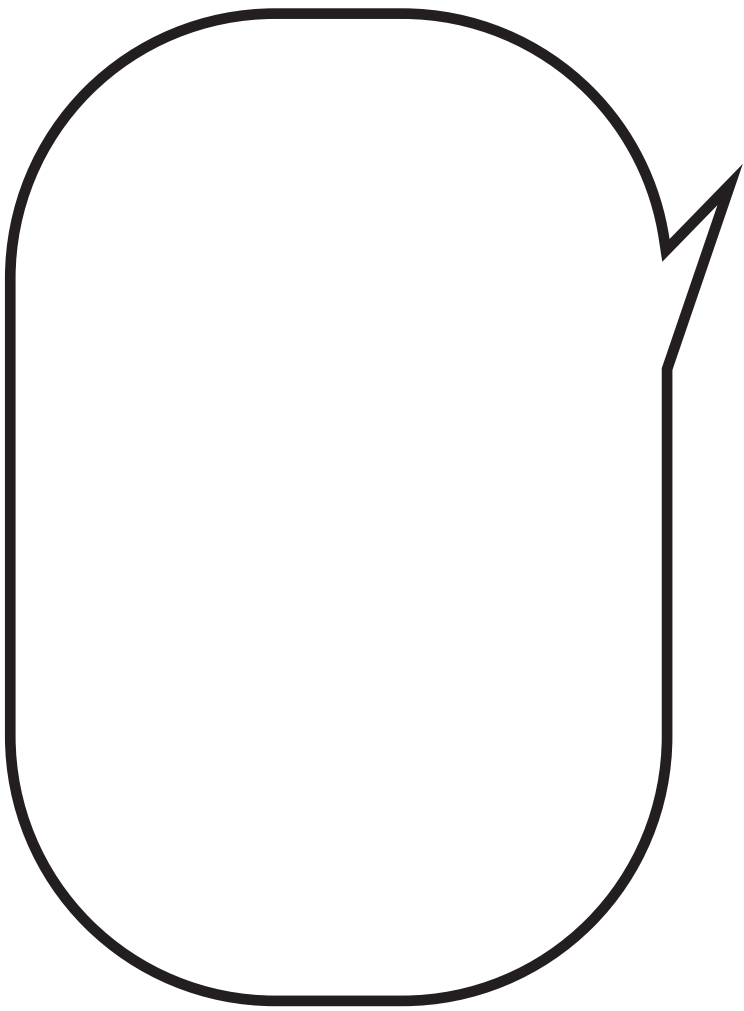
How can you help a child while they are adjusting to a new home or carer?

(o)

What physical symptoms of illness might a child have, as a result of bereavement?

(p)

If the parent who died was estranged from the one who is now looking after a child, what issues might arise?



Tutor's Notes on Frequently Asked Questions

Introduction

There are no definitive "right" answers to these questions. The main purpose of the questions is to promote thought and discussion. Many of the following points are likely to be made by participants in the training. Where they have not been made you may, when you deem it appropriate, bring some of the following thoughts into the discussion.

(a) How do you explain what "dead" means to a young child?

- Young children need repeated age appropriate information.
- It may take years for full comprehension to develop.
- Use the words "dead" and "died" rather than words like "gone to sleep", or "lost".
- Give a simple explanation of the cause of death and how that prevents the body from working.
- Explain that someone who has died does not eat or drink, nor feel pain. They have not gone away, so they can't come back to life.
- Seeing a creature that is dead helps understanding more than words. Even seeing a dead insect and noticing the differences from a live insect can help.
- In many cultures it is expected that children will be able to see the dead body, to help them understand what has happened.

(b) What should I do in the immediate aftermath of a death, to help a child or their carer? Should I say anything, or send a card?

- This is a significant event in a child's life and we need to acknowledge it. Just saying something like "I am very sorry to hear your mummy has died" is important. It helps the child to know that you are aware of the death.
- A card or note to a carer acknowledges this loss and may give you the opportunity to offer help.
- Talk to colleagues about who needs to know about the death and how you will share this information.

(c) How can we include children in the ceremonies surrounding death?

- Some families will follow fixed or traditional practices or customs following a death. Children benefit from a clear explanation of what is going to happen.
- Even quite young children can contribute to a funeral or memorial, for example, by choosing flowers, a piece of music, drawing a picture or choosing a favourite toy to bring with them.
- Sometimes if a child has not been directly involved in the funeral (or was not able to understand it), the family could hold a child-friendly ceremony to remember and say good-bye.

(d) What can we do to stop children blaming themselves or others unrealistically?

- Make sure you use simple and unambiguous words to explain the cause of death. In many cases words such as “there is nothing anyone (or we) could have done to stop Daddy dying” are helpful.
- Pay attention to what a child says or does, including in any role play, so that you can reassure them if they show signs of guilt or regret about things they have done.
- Remind them of positive things they did for the person who died. For example, “Your sister loved playing hide and seek with you”.
- If a close family member or carer has a terminal illness it is helpful to give some advance warning that they are seriously ill.

(e) When a child who has been bereaved is behaving badly, how should we respond?

- Make sure that you do not label a child “bad” because of particular behaviours. Noticing when, where and with whom a child behaves in a certain way will help you to find ways of responding appropriately.
- It is generally helpful to keep consistent boundaries. Knowing there are limits helps children feel more secure.
- Whilst still keeping boundaries, it is helpful to acknowledge feelings that may be being expressed. “I can see that you are very angry; it is OK to be angry, but not OK to punch me”.
- It is quite common for children to be less capable and appear to go backwards for a time following bereavement. Concentration and other abilities may not be at the level they were before, especially if a child feels anxious or afraid.
- Addressing the needs of the child (for instance, for information, reassurance and security) may help to address the underlying cause of difficult behaviour.

(f) For how long will children grieve?

- A significant bereavement will be part of a child's experience for the rest of their life.
- Certain events, reminders or anniversaries are likely to trigger feelings and thoughts about the dead person.
- Children go in and out of grief. This is true both over the short and longer term. Directly following a bereavement they may move in and out of grief feelings from moment to moment.
- As they grow and develop they may re-visit a death with their new awareness and understanding. This may trigger new feelings of grief.
- Studies have shown that children are affected by bereavement for a long time. The Harvard Bereavement study reported that a significant proportion of the children showed more emotional distress two years after a death, than immediately following their bereavement.

(g) Should staff share their own feelings with children? How can staff support each other?

- Children learn from others. Often it is through adults talking about thoughts and feelings that children make sense of their own experience.
- In supporting a child we need to focus on their experience rather than our own. However it is important to acknowledge your own feelings, especially where they also recognise a child's loss e.g. "I feel sad when I think about your mummy dying".
- Talking about your own experience of loss in age appropriate language can be very helpful to a young child.
- All staff that work with a bereaved child need to be informed as quickly and clearly as possible about a death.
- In supporting staff it is important to respect individual differences. Some may need the opportunity to talk; others may prefer to cope by getting involved in other activities or focussing on the needs of the children. It is valuable to acknowledge the impact a bereavement may have on the staff.
- Some time at staff meetings can be given to acknowledge the impact of a death and to address any issues and questions that have arisen.

(h) How can we help children to remember and make sense of the life of the person who has died?

- Talk naturally about the person who died.
- Photographs are invaluable reminders of the life of the person who died. Some families find that creating a memory box for each bereaved child is helpful.
- A child is likely to be interested in two different aspects of their life: their relationship with the child and what they were like as a person. For example, if a parent has died, anyone who knew them will be able to share stories about their earlier life. For instance, "I remember when I first saw your mummy holding you" or "I remember going to the park with your daddy when we were your age".
- If you acknowledge anniversaries and other significant events (e.g. Mother's Day) you will provide opportunities for the child to remember and make sense of their loss.

(i) How are other young children likely to react when one of their peers is bereaved? Why do young children sometimes react by bullying a child whose mother or father has died?

- They may react in a whole host of ways. Some common reactions are fear, disbelief, not understanding, anger and sympathy.
- The information they are given should include some guidance about how to be with the bereaved child. This can make a significant difference to behaviour.
- Bullying often comes about from fear and lack of understanding or knowledge. Children find it frightening to think that someone so significant can die. They may blame the bereaved child for their own uncomfortable feelings.
- Children sometimes use 'difference' as a cue to bully. Bereaved children's own behaviour may add to the perceived difference. On occasion they may also exhibit angry and aggressive behaviour which may trigger reprisals.

(j) What should we do about mother's day and father's day? Are there any other significant celebrations where we need to be especially thoughtful about a bereaved child's experience?

- Openly acknowledge the anniversary, recognising that if a father or mother has died these days may highlight the loss.
- If an activity has been planned, give the child a choice about taking part, and in what way. In many cases a child will be pleased to make a card for a deceased parent, perhaps placing this on a grave or other special place.
- Other days are child, family and culture specific. Birthdays, religious festivals, visits or meetings with people that have a particular connection to the deceased may all trigger stronger feelings of loss. All these occasions also provide opportunities to remember the person who has died and honour the importance of their relationship.
- Having acknowledged someone's absence it can be helpful to give a clear message that it is OK for children to have fun. For instance, "mum would really want you to enjoy your birthday".

(k) Should we talk about heaven?

- We need to be aware that young children may not be able to clearly understand any explanation of death whether spiritual or physical in nature. Their understanding will increase as they get older.
- It is important to make sure that religious or spiritual explanations do not create fears through misunderstandings. For instance, a child may be frightened that someone ("Jesus") can come and take them away.
- For many children and families it is natural and important to talk about heaven or another form of after life. It is important to acknowledge and respect this part of a child's reality.
- In a secular setting, it may be appropriate to reflect on a range of beliefs, e.g. "Some people believe..., other people think..." or to allow the child to talk about their own beliefs.
- Children will often say they want to go to heaven and see the person who has died. This is usually a natural expression of the desire to be with this person. Saying something like, "You wish that you could see mummy now, and it is very sad that you can't" helps to acknowledge the child's feelings and the reality of loss.

(l) What do you say if a parent has died not from illness but from suicide, murder, drug abuse or a preventable accident?

- We may naturally want to protect children from difficult and traumatic events but pretending that they have not happened does not help in the long run. Even if you tried to keep information secret, children will often overhear or pick up on other people's thoughts and feelings about a traumatic death.
- We want to avoid overloading the child with too much information at once, but at the same time we need to be open and honest.
- Sometimes it may be appropriate for a child to learn the whole story about a death over a long period of time, as they develop and grow. When a death occurs it is important that children see some of the pieces of the jigsaw. Over time they will be given more pieces so that eventually they can see the whole picture.
- Sometimes we may doubt a child's story about a death because it shocks us or does not seem to make sense. Initially accept their version of events, then if unsure check with an adult in case they are confused.
- If there is a great deal of anger in the family about a death, then some understanding of who or what the anger is directed at helps a child to know that they are not being blamed.

(m) How can we help bereaved babies and very young children to feel more secure?

- Respond to the basic need for physical holding.
- Provide as much that is familiar as possible. Storybooks, a piece of clothing from the person who died or perfume may all provide comfort.
- Provide as much continuity of care and carer as possible.
- Give children adequate age appropriate information.
- Provide activities which are relaxing and soothing, e.g. sand and water play, massage, music, and ones which allow children to “let off steam”, e.g. running, jumping and dancing.

(n) How do you help a child while they are adjusting to a new home or carer?

- Be sensitive to the impact of the change; pay close attention to how the child is responding.
- Acknowledge the reality of the change by talking about differences e.g. “Going to bed is different now because you share a room with Jo”.
- Where possible allow the child some choice. Even being given small choices (“Which duvet cover do you want?”) helps to give a sense of some personal control.
- Find out about familiar routines and keep as many as possible.
- Allow the child to take their time to adjust; allow them to express negative feelings about the change, including towards new carers in their lives.
- This situation may be one where a professional setting – playschool, nursery or a child minder – may provide valuable continuity and familiarity.

(o) What physical symptoms of illness might a child have, as a result of a bereavement?

- First, if a child displays any physical symptoms it is important to treat them medically. Make sure that any illness or underlying physical cause has been treated or ruled out.
- Grief and other strong emotional pain hurts. Sometimes it hurts physically – places that many people feel this pain are in the throat, chest, stomach and head.
- A child may worry that they could have the same illness as the person who died, and they may echo symptoms of the illness. This may be to seek reassurance that they will be OK.
- Sometimes being physically hurt may provide the opportunity to cry or release other feelings. Children may on occasion deliberately fall over for this release and/or because they need attention.

(p) If a parent who died was estranged from the one who is now looking after a child, what issues might arise?

- There may be family conflict, including issues about custody of the child.
- The child may have to cope with a lot of further changes. These might include moving house, friends, nursery/school, losing or gaining contact with relatives and having a new main carer.
- Where there was little contact with the parent who died it may take longer for the death to fully register. This may be a death and relationship that the child will need to re-visit as they develop.
- The surviving parent may need to contain their own negative feelings about the deceased, to allow the child to freely mourn their loss.
- This is a potentially difficult situation for everyone. It will make a great difference if people can see the child's needs as a priority when considering practical arrangements.
- In a situation where the parent who died had a difficult relationship with the child, grieving will be more complicated. The child has lost the chance for things to be better, and memories may be painful rather than comforting.

Useful Organisations

National organisations:

Childhood Bereavement Network

(a national co-ordinating organisation, which can help you find out more about support and training available in your area).

www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk 0207 843 6309

email cbn@ncb.org.uk

8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE

Child Bereavement Trust

(provides training and educational resources)

www.childbereavement.org.uk 0845 357 1000

email enquiries@childbereavement.org.uk

Aston House, High Street, West Wycombe, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP14 3AG

Cruse Bereavement Care

(offers counselling and support to all bereaved)

www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk 0870 167 1677

email helpline@crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Cruse House, 126 Sheen Road, Richmond-upon-Thames, Surrey, TW9 1UR

Winston's Wish

(a grief programme for Gloucestershire children which also provides a wide range of useful training materials and advice, nationally)

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Winston's Wish Helpline, for anyone caring for a child who has been bereaved:

0845 20 30 40 5 (calls charged at local rates)

email info@winstonswish.org.uk

Clara Burgess Centre, Bayshill Road, Cheltenham, GL50 3AW

Local Organisations: