



ALWAYS IN MY HEART

A BOOK FOR CHILDREN ABOUT GRIEVING

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WHAT IS GRIEF?

Grief is usually what we go through when somebody special dies. We can also feel grief when a pet dies or if we aren't going to be able to see someone for a long time, for example if they live far away.

Humans and other mammals need to form bonds to survive, so of course we are going to be sad when someone close to us dies. It means we loved the person very much.

Grief can be a huge bundle of different feelings. We can expect to feel sad, but sometimes people can feel things they don't expect. This book might help you understand those feelings.



HELPFUL THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT GRIEF





Grief is a made up of a lot of other feelings such as being sad, angry, scared, worried, tired. Sometimes, people feel grief in their body, such as tummy aches. Sometimes grief feels like a big, empty, hollow pain inside. All of these feelings get jumbled and tangled up together.



Everyone grieves differently, the same way we all have our own special fingerprints.



Everyone in a family will show their grief in a different way. Just because some people don't feel able to talk or cry doesn't mean they loved the person any more or less. Not understanding each other can cause hurt.



About one in ten children experience the death of someone special in their life each year.



Grief often comes in waves.
Some days are harder than others.



Sometimes we feel a mixture of all of these things, and don't know why we feel bad or sad or angry, we just do. And that's ok. Sometimes it's enough just to know you're not feeling happy and that it will pass.

WHAT GRIEF LOOKS LIKE

Grief can affect us in many ways.

These are some of the common thoughts and feelings that many people have. Not everyone will have all of these and some people say they don't really have any of these. The thoughts or feelings might come and go as well.



GRIEF CAN AFFECT OUR THOUGHTS

We might think about the person, or when they were sick, or how life is now. It can be distracting. It might be hard to concentrate at school, when there are lots of different thoughts swirling around in our head.



WE CAN HAVE BAD DREAMS

ADAM was 10 when his Mum died. He found the night times a bit hard. He used to have nightmares and found it hard to sleep. As a result, he became tired and cross. For a short while, he used to do things that he did when he was much younger, like going into his Dad in the middle of the night when he was scared. As time went on, he started to talk to his Dad about his dreams. Talking about them reminded him they were not real and they were then easier to manage. His Dad got him a memory bear made of his Mum's shirt and having her with him at night time to hug made him feel his Mum was close. He was soon able to sleep in his own bed through the night again.

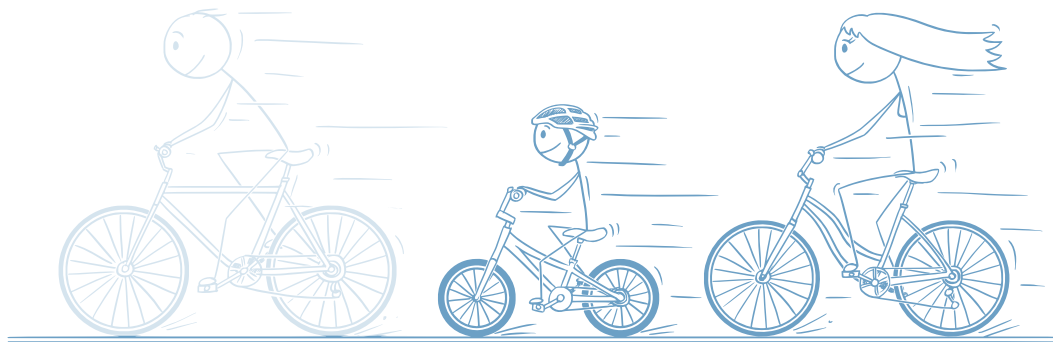




LONELINESS/SADNESS

We may feel lonely even when we are with other people. This can happen, even with our family, especially if we are all grieving differently. We can feel very alone, because we might find that our friends have not gone through anything like this and don't understand or know what to say.

After **JOHN'S** dad died, seeing his friends cycling to school in the morning with their dads was hard. He'd get quite angry that his Mum couldn't cycle with him to school, as she was nervous and he might sometimes get cross with his Mum. But talking about it and agreeing to evening or weekend bike rides made him feel less like he was losing out and he understood more.







SHOCK

Shock shows itself in different ways. Shock can make us feel numb at first. Being numb can stop us feeling upset for a while, and protects us from understanding what has really happened.

Some people feel ashamed for how they were immediately after the death or at the funeral. Try not to be alarmed or ashamed if you felt you acted strangely.

Everyone copes differently.



ANGER

It is natural to feel angry when someone we love dies. We can feel angry that our life has changed, angry that the world feels different, or just angry at 'why me'? We can feel angry with the person who died for leaving us, even when we know this doesn't make sense.

LUKE was 9 when his Grandad died. He lived with him and they were very close. He didn't get to see him much when he was sick. He feels angry about that, as he feels he missed out on that time with his Grandad.

Luke started to become moody towards others and got into fights at home and in school. He was in trouble a lot. Luke's parents helped him to see that the feeling of anger itself is natural. It's a feeling like any other, but that he needed to express it in a way that doesn't do any harm to others or get him into trouble. They explained that his Grandad was too sick to see anyone. They also helped him to remember his whole life with his Grandad, not just the difficult pieces.

Luke found that going out playing football helped him a lot, as it got rid of his bottled up energy.



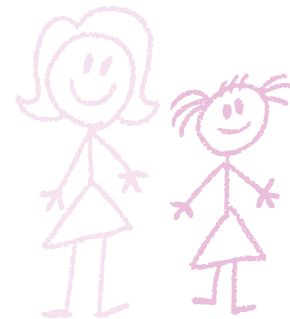


ANXIETY/WORRY

It makes sense that loss causes worry. People often feel that the world isn't the same and they don't feel as secure. Sometimes children can worry about others in the family. They can worry about being away from their parents or doing things without their family. This is normal and over time you will worry less. Sometimes we feel a mixture of all of these things, and don't know why we feel bad or sad or angry, we just do. And that's ok. Sometimes it's enough just to know you're not feeling happy and that it will pass.

KATIE was 11 when her Mam died. In the beginning, she worried a lot about things and other people. She didn't like to be away from her Dad. She didn't like going on sleepovers or even playdates. If she did, she often asked her Dad to collect her early. At the start, she couldn't concentrate in school because she had lots of different thoughts swirling in her head. She really worried about getting upset in school or in front of her friends.

Katie didn't tell anyone how she was feeling and how much she missed her Mam because she didn't want to upset or worry her Dad. She bottled up her feelings. One day she got very upset about doing badly in a school test, something that normally wouldn't happen. Then it all came out about how sad she was and her Dad was able to support her.





GUILT

Sometimes people have guilt about something they feel they can't talk about.

They can feel bad about a fight with someone before they died, or that they didn't always want to visit them when they were sick. Sometimes people feel guilty if they don't have any of the feelings they think they should be having.

Try not to bottle this up, because it can be really hard if you feel guilt on top of sadness. Try to talk about it with someone you trust. This can help a lot.



CONFUSION

Sometimes our thoughts and feelings can be jumbled up. We miss the person, but also feel sad about how life has changed.

Maybe our parents or other people in the family are acting differently. We might miss the person for all the things we used to do with them. We might lose interest in some of the things we used to like doing for a while. It's almost like everything has been rearranged.

Our world feels very different. It's hard to get used to living in the world again without our loved one and this can take time.

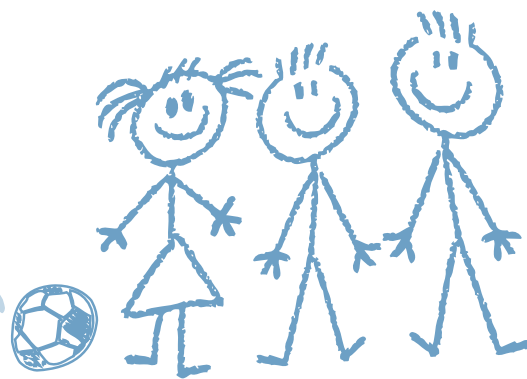
Another confusing thing about grief is that people can feel guilty for enjoying themselves or not thinking about their loved one, even for a while, and worry about forgetting them. People can think "how can I be enjoying myself when this has happened?" We need to take a break from our grief. Distracting ourselves sometimes helps us cope. Just because you don't think about the person all the time, does not mean you are forgetting them. They live in your heart always.



SAM was 9 when his Dad died. He said that what he missed most was his Dad being at his football matches. That made him feel sad. He didn't want to tell people in the beginning that his Dad had died, because he didn't want to feel different. He didn't feel as confident about himself and wondered why this happened to him.

He said he felt a bit jealous of his teammates who had a dad at the matches. He found that in the beginning people didn't know what to say to him. He stopped playing football for a while but then, he noticed that other people stepped into his life to support him at the matches, like his Uncle or his Grandad. As he got older, the other parents stepped back a bit and weren't always at the matches anyway.

As time went on some of his friends also had a bereavement and he noticed he really understood what they were going through and he was able to support them.

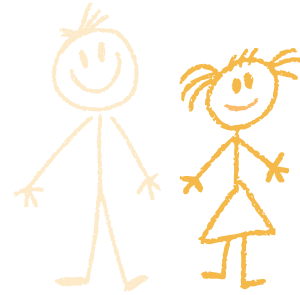


GRIEF CAN FEEL AWKWARD

**Sometimes people can say strange things,
but that's mostly because they just don't
know what to say and feel awkward.**

Some people find it easier to talk about how they feel. Others just don't like to talk about their feelings. Sometimes we can worry about talking about the person who died in case it upsets someone. We end up feeling we can't mention them at all. A lot of people talk about how they find it really hard when people ask them how many are in their family.

SARAH 11, said how she hated having to do a project in school describing who was in her family now. Before her Dad died, she always said there were four in her family. Then she felt she had to say there were only three and she found that really hard. She spoke to her teacher and that helped as her teacher told her she could still describe that there four in her family and that her Dad was in heaven.



Remember, grief can affect our bodies as well.

Some people may have headaches or tummy aches and feel tired.



WHY DID SOMEONE I LOVE HAVE TO DIE?

**Many people who are sick and go to hospital get better.
Sometimes people get a more serious illness.**

No matter how hard doctors and nurses try to make someone better, the body gets too sick and is unable to stay alive. People have lifetimes and for everyone the length is different. This can seem really unfair.



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

**We often wonder where are they now?
This is such a hard thing to understand.**

Every culture has different beliefs about what happens when someone dies. Many cultures believe some of the same things, like that when a person dies, their body doesn't work anymore but their spirit or soul goes somewhere else and is with other people who have also died.



Some people think they are an angel in heaven with God.

Some people believe they are a star in the sky looking after them.

Some people just accept they have no idea what happens.

**One thing that is certain: if we loved them, they will always
be in our heart.**



Many people believe they have been given signs that their loved one who died is looking after them or their spirit is close to them. **This might be if they see a symbol like a feather, a butterfly or a robin.**

This can give people a lot of comfort and a feeling of still being connected to their loved one.

For others this doesn't have any meaning for them at all.



WAYS TO REMEMBER

Love is very powerful. No one is completely gone after they die if we remember them.

The things we learned from them can stay inside us and can become part of us. There are many ways we can remember them.

We can remember people by talking about the happy times we had with them or the funny things that happened. It can be comforting to think about what advice they might give us or what they might say or do in situations. We can also talk about what was important to them, like being kind and funny, or what their hobbies and interests were.



Some people make a memory box and put special things in it that they want to treasure, like their loved one's key ring or photos or hairbrush, or other things that matter to them. Some people make a photo book with collections of memories which can include all the happy and special times.

ROSIE, 9, in the beginning found it hard to talk about her Dad and how she was feeling.

They both supported Liverpool and she would wear her Dad's jersey when watching the football matches. That's how she felt connected to her Dad.



YOU MIGHT WONDER, “WILL I EVER GET OVER THIS?”

There is no magic cure for grief. A lot of people say grief is like a journey. Things do get better, and there are things you can do to smooth over the rough and rocky places along the way.

As time goes on, things will be easier to manage but certain times might feel harder than others, like special occasions, birthdays and Christmas. It can help to do something special on these days. It might be something like cooking their favourite meal, or lighting a candle with your family, or planting something in the garden or the patio.



GROWING YOUR WORLD

Some people find this idea a helpful way of looking at grief, particularly if we feel guilty for getting on with our life or if we feel pressure from other people that we should be feeling better by now.

PEOPLE
THINK THAT
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'GROWING AROUND GRIEF' (LOIS TONKIN 1996)

MOLLY, 12, found growing around grief helped her. As time went on for Molly after her Granny died, she started to do lots of new things. She went onto secondary school and made new friends and joined a basketball team. She felt guilty and she worried she would forget her Granny and wasn't thinking about her so much. Growing around grief showed her that her grief was a sign of her love and wasn't getting smaller, but she was making it better. Her life was getting fuller as she was doing new things. She also knew that her Granny would really want her to be living her life and doing lots of new things and having fun. Doing all the things she should be doing as a young person.



THINGS THAT CAN HELP



FIRST AID KIT

Some people like the idea of a First Aid or Self-care kit, which is a list of the all the different things that can help on the harder days. This might include listening to music, playing sports, talking to a friend or a family member, playing a game. It can look different for everyone.



YOUR SUPPORT CIRCLE

It can also help to think of who the people are that support you.

Some people look after you. Others make you laugh.

You can play games with others and there are others you can talk to, maybe a parent, auntie or good friend. The main thing to remember is that things will improve and you will begin to feel happy again. It can be hard to imagine that, but you will learn to live with your feelings and in time the memories will make you smile.

INFORMATION FOR ADULTS ON SUPPORTING BEREAVED CHILDREN

Sometimes we can avoid talking to children about death because we can worry about causing pain. However if we avoid the subject:

- It can be harder to support children, as we don't know how they are feeling.
- They can make up their own version about what happened, which might not be accurate.

We know we cannot protect children from their loss. No one can fix or reverse what has happened, but we can support them in their grief. We also know it's not about 'making' a child cry or upset, but 'allowing' a child to be upset and express their feelings. This can help them to understand their feelings and develop ways to cope with them.

THE GRIEVING PROCESS

- In the past we used to believe that children didn't grieve, but we now know that if you are old enough to love, you are old enough to grieve.
- Children's grief is different to adults' grief. Their capacity to understand the concepts that death is *universal*, that it is *irreversible* and that it is *permanent*, depends on their age and developmental stage.
- Unlike adults, children dip in and out of grief, often termed '*puddle jumping*' or '*puddle grief*.' It can be intense, but also can pass quickly. Children can be distracted by activities, so it can be hard to know sometimes what children are thinking and feeling.
- We associate grief with sadness, but there are parts to grief we don't expect. Grief can feel very confusing. We often talk about the many faces of grief.
- Children experience the pain of loss, but will express it in different ways to adults. They can act out how they feel through their behaviour, so it is important to be patient and try to look behind the behaviour.
- Children can often revert to behaviour they exhibited when they were younger.

WAYS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN

PARENTS OR GUARDIANS CAN:

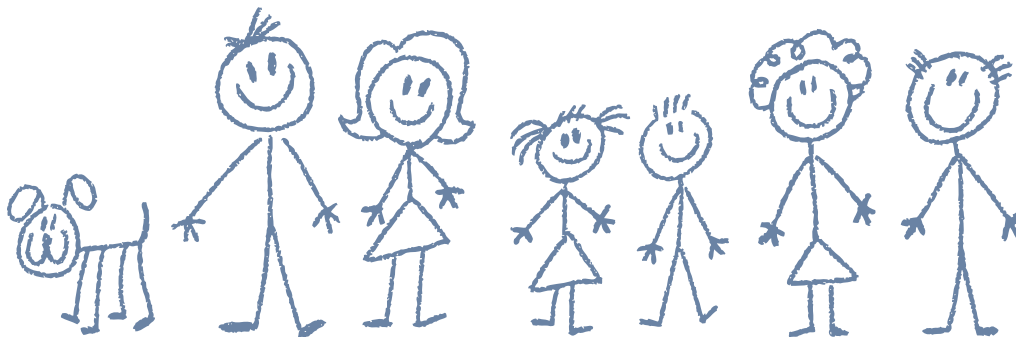
- Make it clear that everything was done to try and make the person who died better.
- Answer children's questions as openly and as honestly as you can. Try not to use euphemisms like 'gone to sleep' as this can confuse children and make them worry about sleeping. Use clear, concrete language about what has happened.
- Have familiar routines which can increase a child's feelings of security and keeps a sense of continuity.
- Give them extra reassurance. Children can worry about something happening to their parent and especially in the early days may fear separation and may need extra reassurance about exact times their parent will return.
- Try to spend time together, maybe enjoy comfort food and meals together as this can reduce feelings of isolation.

- Set and maintain limits but with compassion. Children can feel very out of control and scared when experiencing the death of someone important and may respond with challenging behaviour.
- Give extra reassurance, if needed, that they will be cared for.
- Plan things to look forward to.
- Give encouragement and permission to have fun.
- Acknowledge certain days which can be particularly hard, like Mother's day, Father's day, Christmas and birthdays. It can be important to create opportunities to grieve together. Invite children to mark these days and include them in decisions around marking them, whilst also accepting if they want to do nothing at all.
- Respect their coping style, as each child in a family grieves differently due to their personality, and the relationship they had with the person who has died. Not all children are comfortable talking about feelings.
- Explain you are all helping each other cope and work through grief and your emotions. When one person is having a tough day, others in the family can help. On different days, different family members may need this help.
- Be aware that children tend to protect parents, so they may not tell you how they are feeling in case they upset you and might prefer to talk to somebody else. You may help them identify other trusted adults they can talk to.

- Answer their questions as best you can. It's okay to say you don't know. You might talk to someone about how to answer their question and then go back to talk to the child about this.
- Be aware that sometimes children revisit grief as time goes on. They may have different questions as they grow older. This is normal.
- The presence of One Good Adult has been found to be a key indicator in how well a child copes with their grief. Although it's important for children to have one good adult, it is equally important to remember that there is no such thing as the perfect parent.

Mind yourself so you can mind them. As a parent or guardian, you are grieving too.

It's important to find ways to look after yourself. This might be through exercise, connecting with nature, reading, listening to music, whatever that looks like for you. If you are struggling, there are a number of ways to get support. You might talk to a friend or your GP, consider what supports your workplace might be able to offer, or contact where the person died for more information about local resources.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following is a selection of websites which offer information on how to support grieving children which you may find useful:

www.childhoodbereavement.ie

www.dougy.org/grief-support-resources/teens/

www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/for-parents/teenagers-understanding-of-death

www.childbereavementuk.org/contact-us

www.winstonswish.org/

www.griefencounter.org.uk/

www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

If you are worried about your child, who has signs of grief that don't soften over time or if they have anxiety or anger that is persistent, you may need to contact a professional for additional support or guidance.



NOTES

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