



Children's Bereavement

The Theory

- Children grieve differently to adults
- Oscillation between extreme emotions very quickly – can be hard for adults



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So....

- Grief is not an illness, it is a normal process
- Most young people are very resilient
- Growth and creativity are possible if supported
- We need the most courage and least anxiety about getting it wrong



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Children Need...

Information

- Use clear, simple straightforward words like "dead" and "dying"
- Be clear with the child that this means the body of the person who has died is no longer working and does not feel pain
- Be prepared to explain repeatedly & answer questions again & again
- Ask them what is their biggest worry

Reassurance

- Address concerns about their own health and that of others in the family. "What happened to mummy was very unusual...."
- Feeling guilt does not make them responsible for the death.
- Explore what **WILL** remain consistent in their lives – who will look after them, take them to school etc.
- Address concerns about the future – family finances, where they will live etc.



Children Need....

Caring Adults

- Provide opportunities to express feelings safely
- Encourage children to participate in mourning rituals alongside others
- Offer opportunities for remembering the loved one
- Can share their feelings
- Respect their feelings and way of mourning



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Do's and Do Not's

DO

- Remember you cannot take away the pain
- View the loss from the bereaved child's unique perspective
- Show genuine concern and care
- Listen with acceptance and awareness of our own judgements
- Look to the wider perspective in dealing with the bereaved e.g. family and social support etc.
- Encourage the bereaved to give themselves permission to have fun
- Maintain appropriate distance



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Do's and Do Not's

DO NOT

- Be afraid to mention the dead person to the bereaved
- Make promises
- Try to explain the loss using your own religious or philosophical beliefs
- Tell the griever to feel better because there are other loved ones still alive
- Be surprised if the bereaved talks about the same things repeatedly
- Support avoidance but understand its importance to the bereaved



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What Children Want!

- * **Choice** – often feel they have no control
- * **Creativity** – eye contact and finding the right words to say can sometimes be too much & too intense, so creative exploration of their emotions is safer
- * **Questions** – to answer “I don't know” is OK!
- * **Memories** – acknowledge special/difficult occasions
- * **Fun** – it's ok to have happy times
- * **Not to be different** – as much as possible



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