

# Grief and Loss



Listening to and  
talking to children  
about grief and loss

## Listening to and talking to children about grief and loss

If children seem to want to talk about what is happening, adopting the stance of sympathetic listener is probably the most generally helpful approach. The following points may also be relevant: -

a)

Try to recognise and keep in check any feelings and prejudices you may have about the nature of their loss, especially if it is a contentious marital breakdown.

b)

Children and families usually find their own solutions to crises eventually and should be allowed to do so. It is tempting to give lots of advice but it can prevent people from finding their own way through problems.

c)

Try not to criticise either parent, but allow the child to do so if they wish and accept their feelings or anger.

d)

In your desire to help children feel better, try to avoid leading them to expect unrealistic improvements or solutions to the situation, such as 'I'm sure Daddy will be home soon'. A comment like 'Things will work out in the end' might be a useful, comforting phrase.

e)

Use simple words for emotions, e.g. sad, cross, lonely, mixed-up, fed-up.

f)

Primary aged children in particular may need assurance that they are not the only family that this has happened to, given the picture of the nuclear family portrayed by society and in the media.

g)

It is often helpful to encourage the child to think about whether there is a relative or friend of the family who could be a special friend during this time.

h)

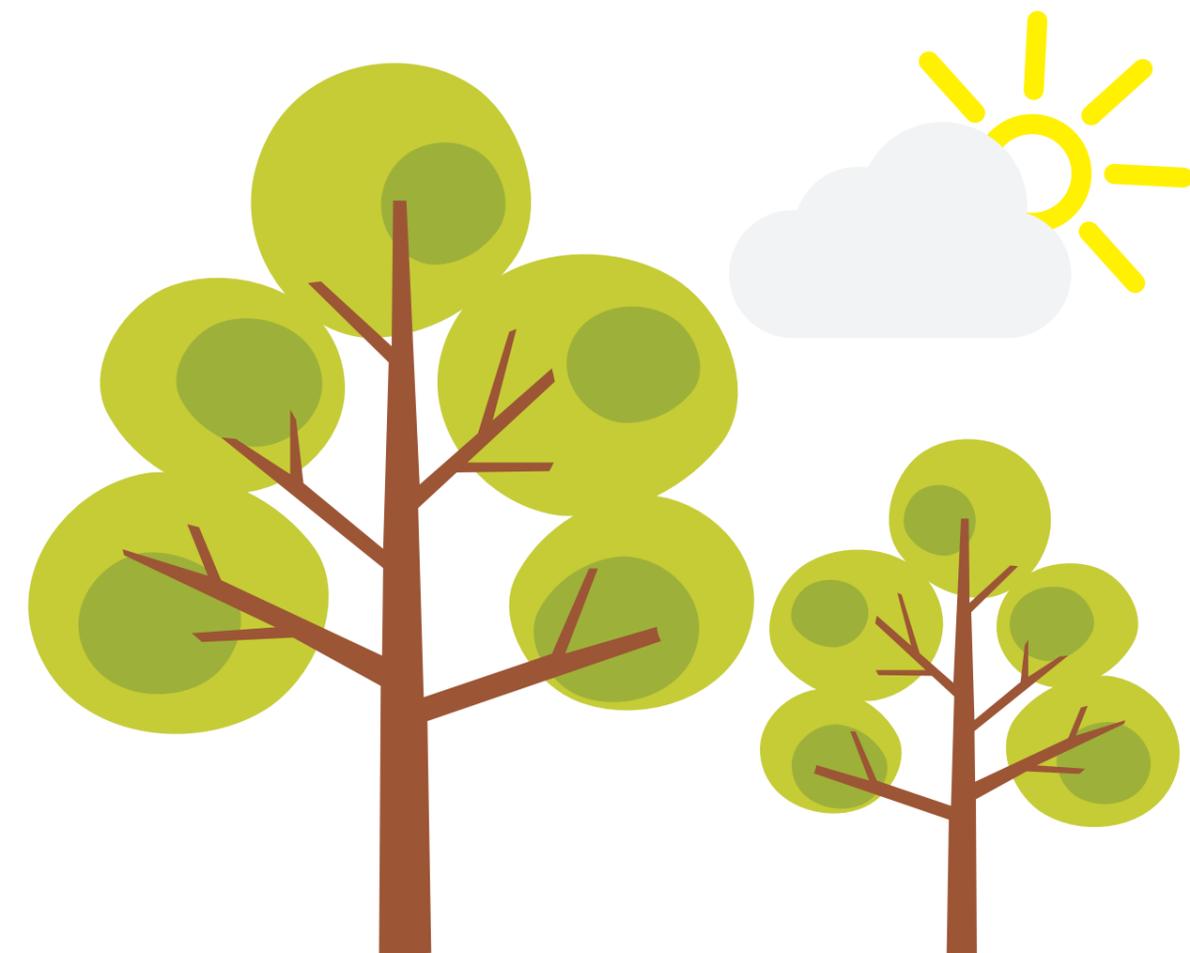
If the child clams up, don't press the conversation further.

i)

You need to respect the child's confidentiality. However, you may feel that it is appropriate to let a few key members of staff know that all is not well. Equally you may find the child's distress upsetting and emotionally draining and may need to discuss your own feelings or what to do next with a trusted colleague.

j)

Finally, although at times everything may seem very negative and stressful, it is important to remember that even the most difficult situations generally do change, develop and eventually resolve.



## Helping someone who is suffering from loss – Some do's and don'ts

- DO** let them express any sad feelings they have at a particular time and are willing to share.
- DO** let your genuine concern and caring show.
- DO** be available to listen or help however seems appropriate at the time.
- DO** say you are sorry about the sad event and about their pain.
- DO** reassure them that they could not have prevented it.
- DO** talk about the positive qualities of the person they have lost.
- DO** allow them to talk about their loss as much and as often as they want to.
- DO** let them understand that they will have a mixture of feelings including sadness, anger guilt and that this is perfectly normal.

- DON'T** avoid them because it makes you uncomfortable.
- DON'T** say you know exactly how they feel. (Unless you have also experienced their particular loss they are unlikely to believe you can empathise with them fully).
- DON'T** say anything that implies how they should feel or they will feel something in particular next.
- DON'T** change the subject when they mention their loss or feelings.
- DON'T** avoid mentioning their loss for fear of reminding them of bereavement (they won't have forgotten it).
- DON'T** try to find something positive about the loss.
- DON'T** point out they have their other .....
- DON'T** suggest they should be grateful for .....
- DON'T** make any comments which suggest that it was their fault.



