



30th June 2016

Bereavement through suicide – the impact on young people

Shirley Potts
North Development Lead



In the UK in 2013:

- ☀️ There were 6,708 suicides in the United Kingdom.
- ☀️ Despite a peak in 1998, the trend in suicide rates was generally downwards since 1991, until 2008. The rise coincided with the start of the Recession
- ☀️ In 2013, there were 19.0 suicides per 100,000 population in men and 5.1 per 100,000 in women.
- ☀️ On average, a person dies every 2 hours in England as a result of suicide
- ☀️ Figures presented are for those aged 15 years and over

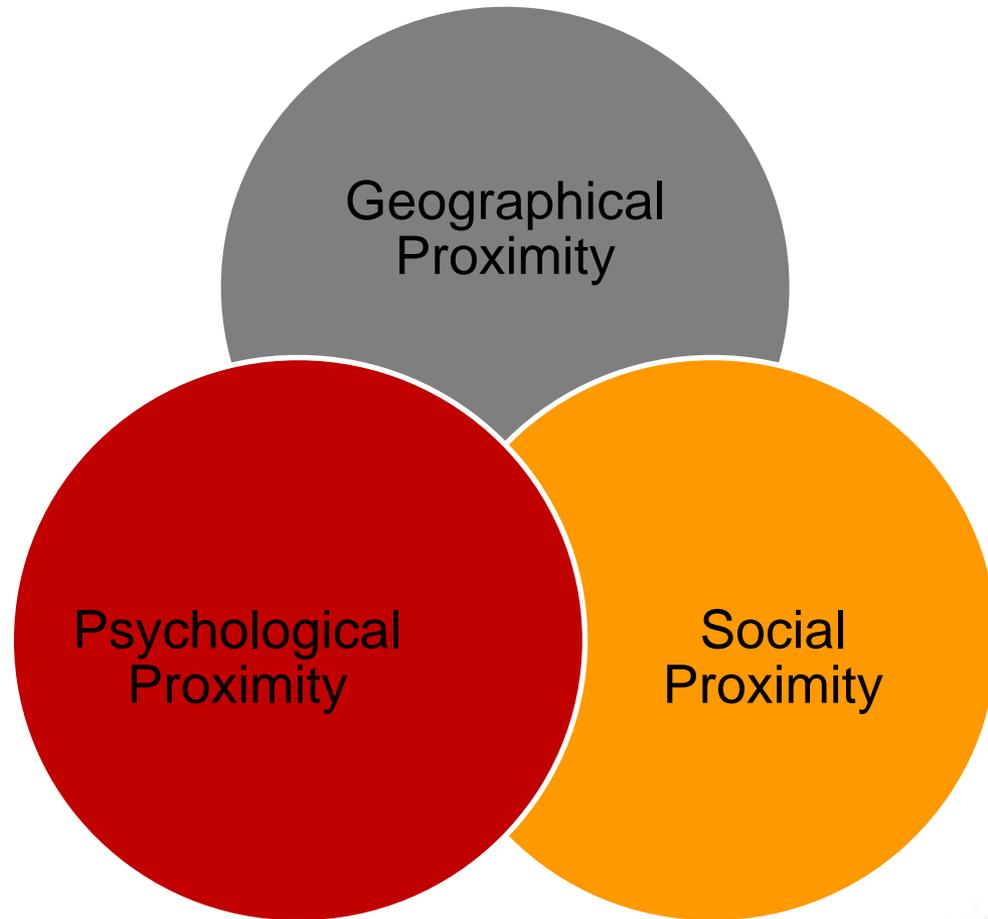
Stigma and isolation

- ☀️ Nobody wants to talk about suicide. Everyone thinks that it's best not to say anything – that if you don't talk about it, it will be forgotten and go away. For me, nothing could be further from the truth.
- ☀️ What I needed to hear was the same thing that might be said to anyone else who had experienced the death of someone close – I'm truly sorry for your pain and is there anything I can do?.....

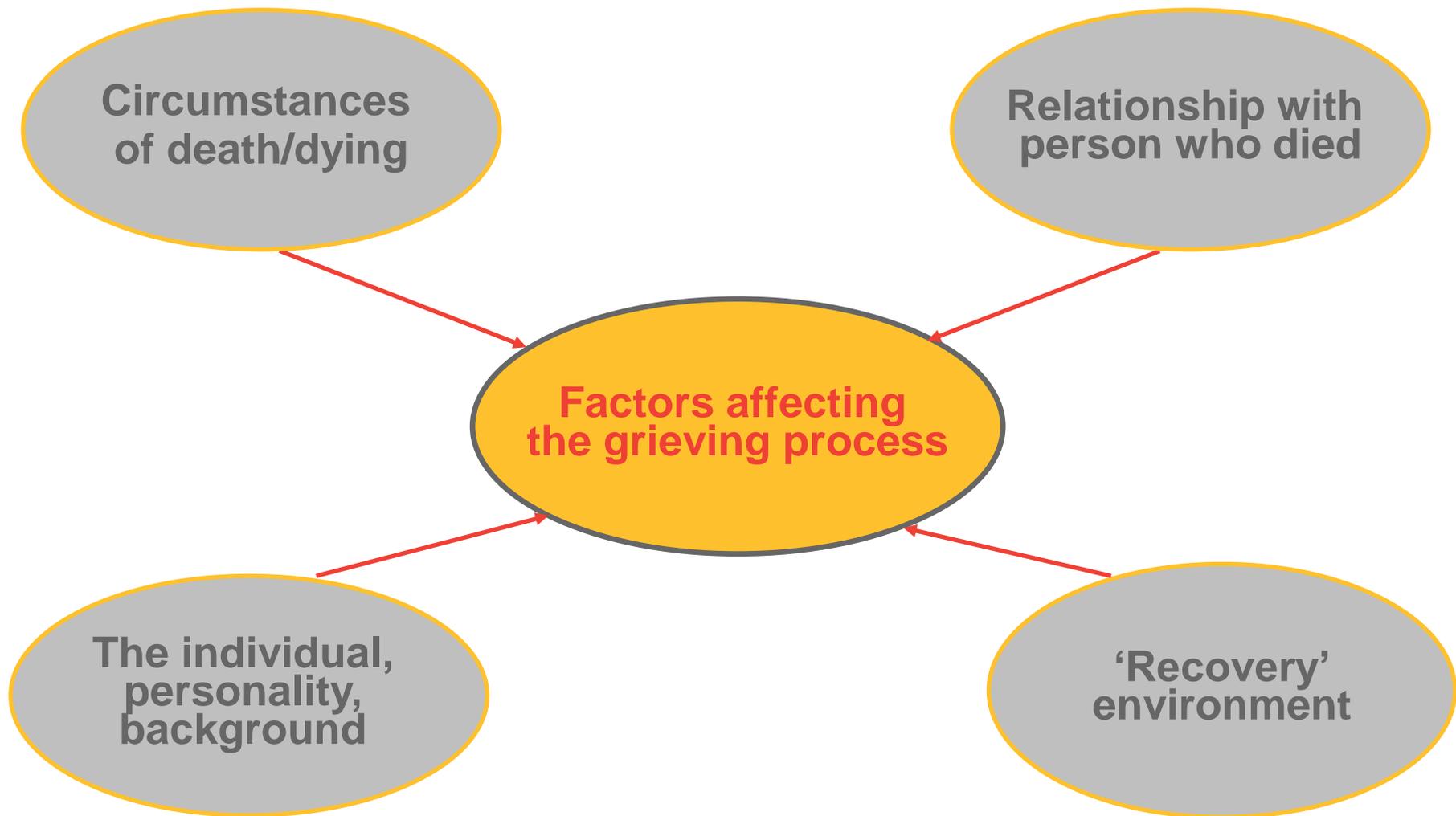
Help is at Hand (2006) DoH



Suicide Clusters



Intense shock
Media attention
Rejection
Anger
Suicidal fears
Judgement
Blame
Shame
Abandonment
Recurring images
FINDING THE BODY
Social isolation
Stigma
Disbelief
Guilt
What if...?
If only....
Suicidal feelings



Permission and honesty

- ☀️ Adults are often reluctant to share open and honest information with children...
- ☀️ When death occurs through suicide, children are often given inadequate, incorrect explanations or are told half-truths
- ☀️ Brown, E. (1999) *Loss, change and grief*

Children's developmental cognitions of death and bereavement

0 – 2 year olds (Bowlby's attachment theory)

 Protest

 Despair

 Detach

Importance of substitute care is crucial

Lower Primary (Piaget's preconceptual stage)

- ☀️ Egocentric – “magical thinking”
- ☀️ Causality
- ☀️ Struggle with concept of finality
- ☀️ Evolving understanding – pets, insects, leaves...

- ☀️ Permission and honesty!

Upper Primary, concrete operational stage

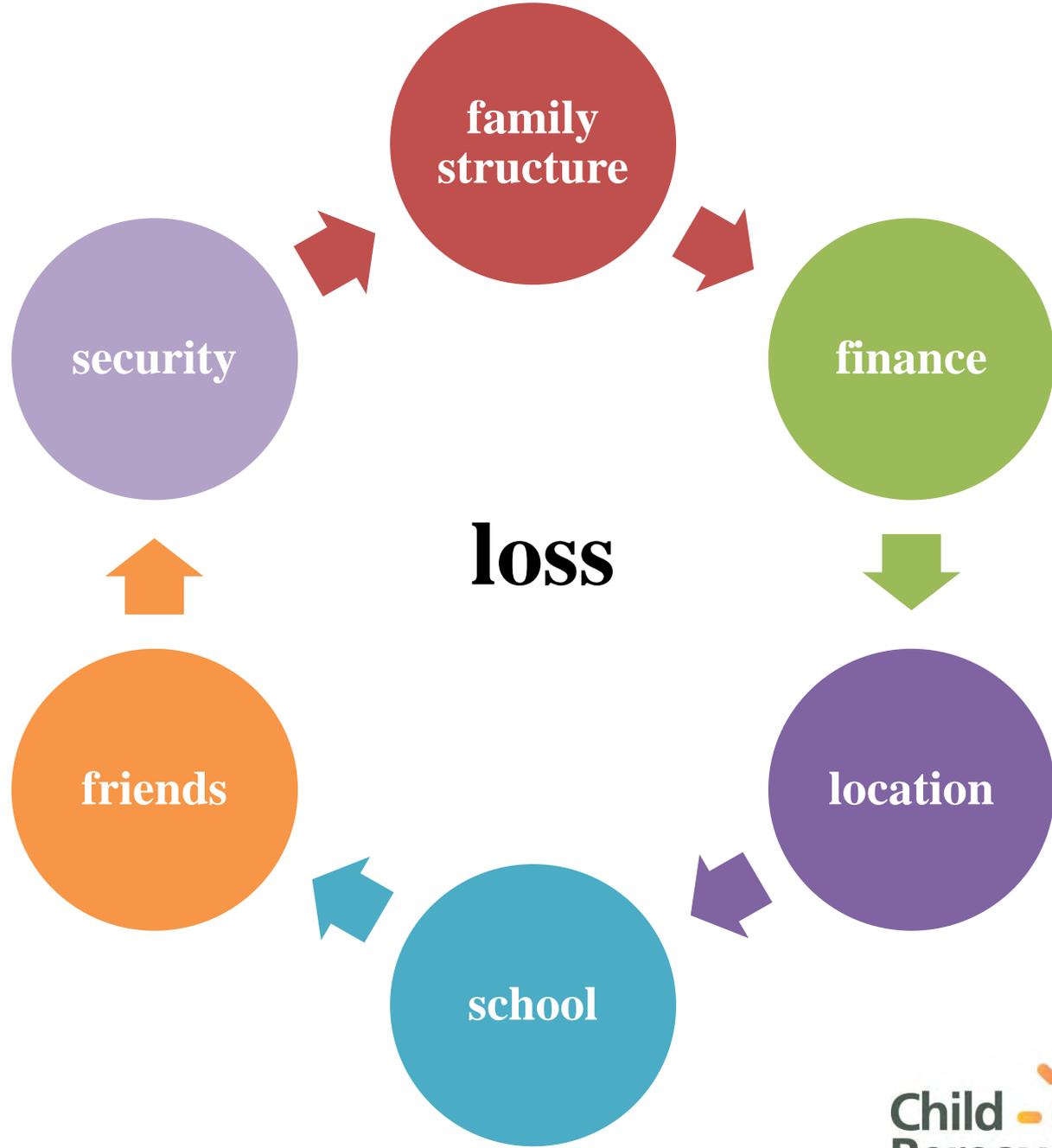
 Evolving concept of finality, permanence, death

 Unsettling and unnerving stage to encounter death in family or peers

Permission and honesty

Puberty and adolescence

- ☀️ Transitional stage – almost always complicates grief process
- ☀️ Meaning of life
- ☀️ Personal/social losses
- ☀️ Permission and honesty



Common reactions in children (and adults)

- ☀️ Regression
- ☀️ Separation anxiety
- ☀️ Sleeping difficulties
- ☀️ Eating problems
- ☀️ Lack of concentration
- ☀️ Imagined illness
- ☀️ Sadness; anger; fear; guilt; relief; passivity, lack of confidence

Talking to children

 *I don't think my son knows anything, but I am lying to him every time I tell him how his Dad died and I feel terrible about that... I don't know how to tell him. I don't know where to start. I don't want to hurt him.*

Talking to children

- ☀️ Try to give enough accurate information in an understandable manner so that the child can answer “how” and “why” in a way that makes sense.

Talking to children

 *The more information you have, the less room there is for myth-making and the many problems it causes. There is enough darkness already; where you can shed light on this terrible event it is important to do so.*

 Abrams, R. (2000) *When parents die*

Stages in talking to a child about suicide

- ☀️ Be honest - explain that the person has died
- ☀️ Give simple general details about how and where the person died
- ☀️ Explain that the person killed themselves
- ☀️ Provide more detail about how the person died
- ☀️ Explore possible reasons why the person killed themselves

This should be taken at the child's pace, checking out what they understand and if they want any more information at each stage



I realise now that there were many things that led to Dad's death...lots of things that piled up and finally became unbearable

Bereaved 14 year old

Children's Wisdom

*“It’s a struggle, but you can survive it.
It gets easier as memories come in
and the grief goes out.”*

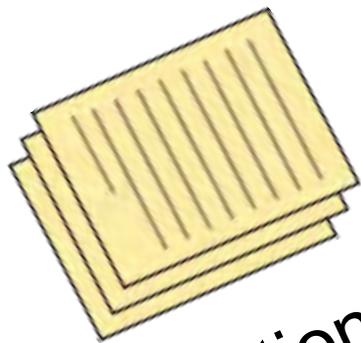
12 year old boy 2 years after his father’s death

Supportive interventions

-  Knowledge is power
-  Being included
-  Meeting fellow travellers
-  Literature and practical resources

What families want..... a menu of support:

- ☀ One-to-one or family
- ☀ Groups
- ☀ Booked telephone support



Information sheets



App

Helpline: **0800 02 888 40**



Email: support@childbereavementuk.org



Child Bereavement UK supports families and educates professionals when a baby or child of any age dies or is dying, or when a child is facing bereavement. Our vision is for all families to have the support they need to rebuild their lives.

Support & Information
0800 02 888 40

See how we can help

This hole in my heart

is in the shape of you
and no-one else can fit it.
Why would I want them to?

