The Impact of Sudden Bereavement on Children

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Scotland

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Who we are and what we do
Our website
www.childbereavementuk.org
Helpline: 0800 02 888 40

Email: enquiries@childbereavementuk.org
Why Bereavement Support?

Every 22 minutes in the UK a child is bereaved of a parent, making up some 24,000 children a year. 
www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

In Scotland 2,500 parents die each year leaving dependent children. This means 4,100 children under 18 are bereaved of a parent each year in Scotland. (from Mortality Stats 2011).

Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, school friend or other significant person.
The Evidence Base

Unresolved grief issues have higher incidence in:

- Academic Under-Achievement
- Challenging Behaviour/ Mental Health Issues
- Teenage Pregnancies
- Youth Offenders
- Prison Populations

www.cbn@ncb.org.uk
Scotland Development Project

- Glasgow
- Edinburgh
- West Lothian
- Dundee
- Aberdeen
- North and South Ayrshire
- North and South Lanarkshire
- Fife
- The Highlands
- Orkney
- Shetland
Aims Of The Project

- Awareness raising – needs of bereaved children
- Capacity building – increase access to support

We aim to do this by:
- Working in partnership with local services to ensure co-ordination of support to families
- Offering training and consultancy
- Setting up advisory groups/networks
Child Bereavement UK
Room 5, Maryhill Community Central Halls
292-316 Maryhill Road
Glasgow G20 7YE

Tel: 0141 352 9995
Email: glasgowsupport@childbereavementuk.org
Factors affecting the grieving process

- Circumstances of death/dying
- Relationship with person who died
- ‘Recovery’ environment
- The individual, personality, background
Permission and honesty

Adults are often reluctant to share open and honest information with children...

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!
Children tend to dip in and out of their grief
Families in grief

At a time when partners need each other most and children need their parents, they are often unable to be emotionally available to each other because they are consumed with their own grief. School can be a vital source of stability and security for a grieving child.
The Ripple Effect

- Family structure
- Family finance
- Geographical location
- School
- Friendships
- Academic competency
- Perspective on life
- Love and security

Change!
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 and Listening about loss with children:

- Active listening
- Allow for repetition
- Clarification
- Say “I don’t know” if you don’t know
- Answer at child’s level, in response to their query
- Allow them to change the subject
- Don’t rescue
- Normalise grief symptoms
- Be prepared to refer on if child’s reactions giving cause for concern
**Resilience** is the ability to adapt to difficult or stressful events in our lives.

The strongest oak of the forest is not the one that is protected from the storm and hidden from the sun. It's the one that stands in the open where it is compelled to struggle for its existence against the winds and rains and the scorching sun.

*Napoleon Hill (1883-1970)*
Building resilience is especially important for bereaved children. Nothing can take away the sadness when someone important to them dies, but we can support them to feel good about themselves and help them to find ways to manage the worries and uncertainties that come with this huge change in their life.
Reassuring them about who will care for them, and that there are people they can rely on.

Understanding their vulnerabilities and, when apart from them, letting them know where you are and when you’ll be back etc.

Routine - increase a child’s feelings of security and maintains a sense of continuity.

Encouraging children to express their thoughts and feelings, and helping them to know that whatever they feel is OK.

Helping them find ways to manage difficult feelings and worries.

Being able to trust in the adults around them, through honest and age-appropriate responses to their questions.

Asking them what they think and listening to their point of view about things that affect them.

Involving them appropriately in decision making, which can help them feel more in control.

Ann Chalmers, Child Bereavement UK
“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 other bereaved youngsters
- Literature and practical resources
The loss of a loved person is one of the most intensely painful experiences any human being can suffer.

Not only is it painful to experience, but also painful to witness, if only because we are so impotent to help.

John Bowlby
Training and CPD
Where do you get your support?
A Menu of Support

- Child Bereavement UK website: www.childbereavementuk.org
- helpline
- training
- publications and resources
- young people’s support mobile app