



Giving hope to grieving children

THE IMPACT THAT BEREAVEMENT THROUGH SUICIDE CAN HAVE ON CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

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Child bereavement statistics

- 111 children a day are bereaved of a parent
- 41,000 newly bereaved children each year
- 480,000 (4% of) children in the UK under the age of 18 have experienced the death of a parent or sibling
- 1 in 29 children have been bereaved of a parent or sibling in the UK (around 1 child per class)



Child bereavement statistics

- **Chronic illness** – Over 52% of calls to our helpline are related to a bereavement through illness
- **Sudden death** – 25% of deaths in the UK are unexpected deaths from sudden causes, 44% of the families we work with (Bereavement in Childhood Report, CBN 2014)
- **Suicide** – In the UK, someone takes their life every 80 minutes (+6,000 suicides a year). Around 22% of calls to our helpline are related to a suicide bereavement
- **Murder** – A child is bereaved through murder or manslaughter every day – 570 such deaths in the UK each year



Suicide statistics

- Suicide is the third most common cause of death for the population as a whole
- Suicide rate for males is 3 times the rate for females (Stanley et al, 2007)
- It is the second most common cause of death for 15 – 24 year olds (19% of all deaths) (Office for National Statistics, 2010)
- 20 – 45% of older adolescents have had suicidal thoughts at some point (Hawton & James, 2005)



Suicide statistics

- Suicide has been reported as the leading cause of death in prisons in England and Wales
(Devitt et al, 2009)
- Young adults in custody are between 8 – 10 times more likely to die through suicide than young adults in the general population
(Devitt et al, 2009)



Issues related to Suicide

Rejection

Shame

Manipulation

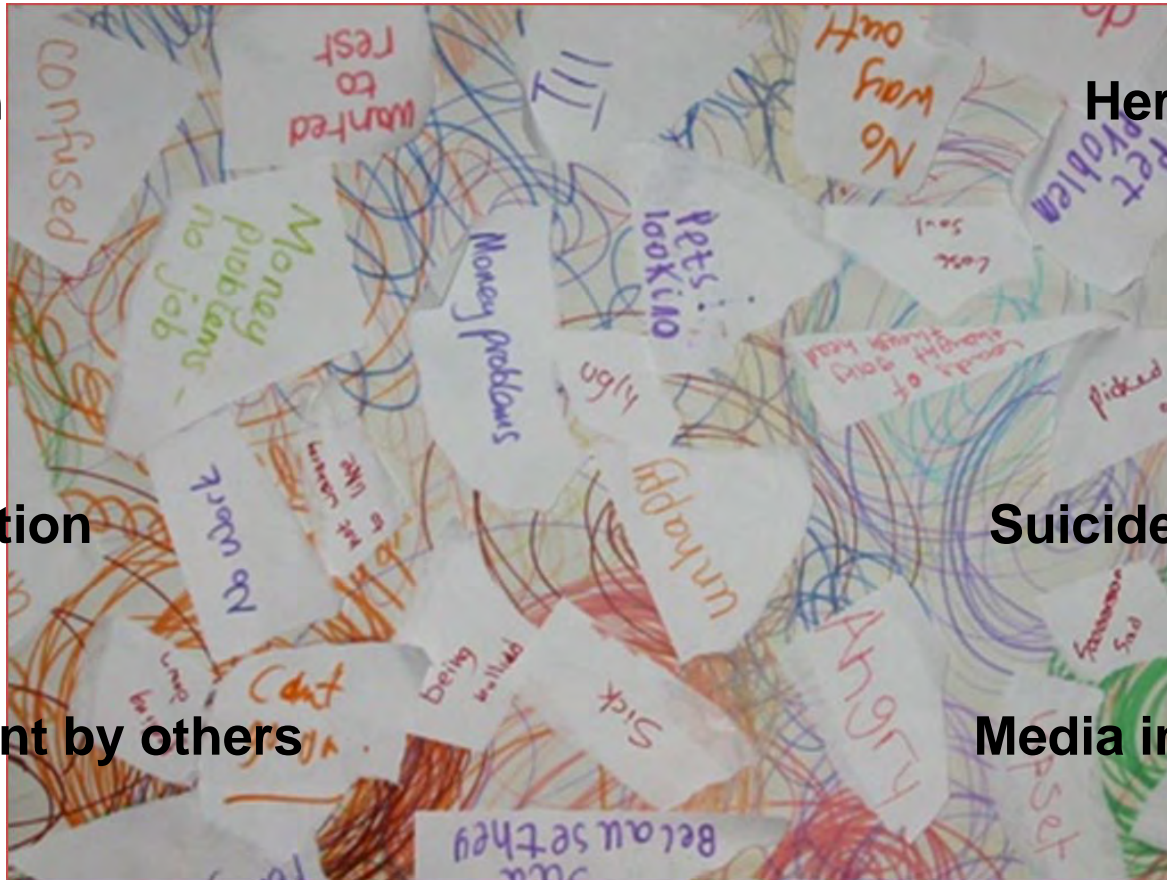
Judgement by others

Hereditary?

Blame

Suicide notes?

Media intrusion



WHY?

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What's different about suicide?

- Potentially shocking language
- Shattered world view
- Secondary losses
- Parental coping strategies
- Difficulty in telling story
- Trauma-related intrusive visual imagery, nightmares
- Heightened arousal and anxiety



Consequences of bereavement

- The death of a parent or sibling is one of the most fundamental losses a child will ever face
- If childhood grief is not dealt with appropriately it can lead to a variety of short and long-term problems



Impact of bereavement

- Low self-esteem
- Offending
- Children in the Looked After Care system
- Poor school attainment
- Bullying
- Teenage pregnancy
- Substance misuse
- Low participation in education, employment and training
- Mental health difficulties including depression and anxiety in adulthood



Educational outcomes

- Little evidence on the relationship between childhood bereavement and educational competence
- Risk of lower academic success after the death of a parent (Haine, Ayers, Sandler, & Wolchik, 2008)
- School performance for subjects that require high concentration (e.g. mathematics, physics, grammar) seems to be more negatively affected (Dyregrov, 2004)
- GCSE results for parentally and sibling bereaved children: under 5s and 12 year olds may be more affected (Abdelnoor and Hollins, 2004)



Educational outcomes

- Boys appear more vulnerable to general disturbance and externalising behaviours (Dowdney, 2000)
- Some children show higher educational functioning as a form of tribute to their dead parent (Dowdney, 2000)
- The effect of bereavement may be prolonged. Identification of needs and intermittent support is important (Abdelnoor and Hollins, 2004)



Ages and stages

Children grieve in different ways according to their stage of development in terms of:

- What they understand
- What they feel
- How they behave



Tasks in the 'normal' grieving process

- **To accept the reality of the loss**
- **To experience the pain of the loss**
- **To adjust to the new environment without the deceased**
- **To find an enduring connection with the deceased while embarking on a new life**



Contributing factors

- **Characteristics of the child or young person**
- **Characteristics of the death**
- **Characteristics of the family**



Traumatic bereavement

- The circumstance of the death leave the bereaved deeply shocked, horrified, in disbelief, angry
- Following a death that occurred under traumatic circumstances, particularly homicide, there are persistent, frequently distressing thoughts, images, or feelings related to traumatic feature of the death (eg. Degree of suffering, gruesome injury, blame of self or other for the death)



Traumatic bereavement

Traumatic Bereavement

=

Loss due to violent cause

Involves both separation distress & traumatic distress

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Unresolved grief

- Physical health
- Health behaviours
- Risk taking behaviours
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Attainment and achievement



Outcomes

After bereavement in natural circumstances up to 20% of people experience complicated grief

After bereavement due to violent cause:

- 60-70% experience complicated grief
- Up to 40 % experience PTSD
- 75% experience adjustment difficulty/depression
- Many experience all three



Help and support in the early weeks

- The need to be among supportive family and friends
- Support from relevant agencies to be ongoing if wanted and not to vanish
- Up to date information as available
- Psycho-education – potential reactions/what to expect
- People often want to talk to someone who has experienced something similar

They do not need counselling at this stage!

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Understanding what has happened

Information gathering

Understanding what has happened as a family

Telling their 'story' of the event

Having a narrative

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Children need:

- Information and understanding
- To explore, express and normalise their feelings
- Memories and the opportunities to remember
- To say goodbye/ rituals
- A continuing bond – over time
- Coping strategies



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Talking with a bereaved child

- Don't just wait for the child to talk about the person who has died
- Acknowledge the death
- Be open and honest
- Ask questions
- Don't be afraid to say "I don't know"
- Use direct, concrete language "died"
- Nothing you say is going to make it worse – the worst has already happened



Including parents

“The functioning of the **surviving parent** is the most powerful predictor of a child’s adjustment to the death of a parent”

(Worden 1996)



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Building resilience and self-esteem

- Hope and Optimism
- OK to be normal
- Meeting other in similar situations
- Seeking other help when necessary
- Praise
- Reaching out/allowing yourself support
- Support network
- Information/education
- Remembering
- Being allowed to make mistakes
- Being yourself: Parent/Child
- Stability
- Honesty/Trust
- Openness/Truth
- Understanding
- Reassurance
- Love and Support
- Talking
- Sharing thoughts and feelings
- Having fun/happiness
- Contentment

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Winston's Wish aims...

- To facilitate conversations within families and be alongside family members as they support each other in grief
- To enable young people to have a coherent story and to share it with others if they so choose
- To promote continuing bonds through memory work
- To enhance resilience and the ability to express feelings in healthy and constructive ways



How can we support you?

- Freephone Helpline
(08088 020 021)
- Website (winstonswish.org)
- Publications and resources
- Training and Consultancy
- National murder-manslaughter and military families programmes
- Out of county referrals



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Thank you



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WINSTON'S WISH **WW**

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