

Talking to students about bereavement: Toolkit for Staff

Please look after yourself as you go through this guidance.
This topic may be distressing. You may chose to go through it with a
colleague or at a time that is best for you. Sources of support are
included on the last slide.

For further support or questions contact
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Everyone experiences grief differently based on:

Your living environment

The type of death

Your support systems

Your personal resilience and ability to manage feelings

Access to funerals and group memorials.
(May not be accessible during a lockdown or if the person lives abroad.)

The type of relationship you had with the person who died



Notre Dame
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Grief in Teens

The teenage brain goes through a huge amount of change; continually developing abstract thought, emotional regulation and risk management. This can add to the difficulty of understanding and processing death and grief. They may question everything in their lives that once were taken for granted.

Teens are more likely to be reluctant to ask for help. Friends often report not knowing what to say or how to support someone who is grieving. Friendships can become strained.

There are the pressures studying and goals of university or employment that might be more difficult now or disrupted completely.

If the death is of a parent or caregiver, the living arrangements, financial situation, responsibilities may all change very suddenly.

Being able to talk openly about death and grieving can be a huge support when it may be very difficult to express themselves at home or with peers.

What can staff provide?

- Communication – acknowledgement of the death and the emotional impact on the community.
- A chance to talk about the person who died; this may be difficult to do at home.
- Reassurance – Most of the feelings they will be having are normal and healthy.
- Guidance – how to manage the feelings, how to talk to friends or family.
- Signposting - to websites and additional support.
- Specialist bereavement support is unnecessary for most young people.



Talking about bereavement

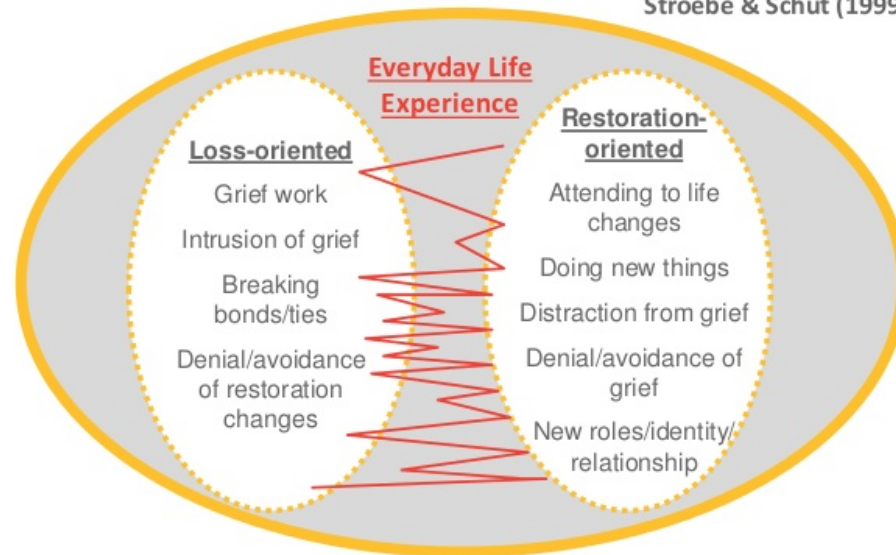
- Be open and honest. There are over 100 euphemisms for death as in society we shy away from it. It is ok to use the direct words 'died' and 'death'. Most bereaved people appreciate honest communication but if a student prefers to use other terms then follow their lead. This can be particularly important if the bereavement is through suicide. Using phrases like 'died by suicide' or 'took their own life' are less damaging than euphemisms that can imply shame or wrong doing.
- Clarity and honesty are particularly important for our students with SEND. Euphemisms will confuse and potentially increase fear in such students.
- Clarify any misconceptions. For example, a student may fear that they didn't do enough or it was their fault. They may be confused about what a funeral involves.
- Don't judge or assume. Reassure that this is a natural process that everyone goes through in their own way. They may not begin to grieve straight away or cry, they may be angry with the deceased, this is ok.
- Answer questions clearly. If you don't have answers to their questions don't leave them hanging, look for information together or signpost to websites and other resources.
- Don't force the issue. Some students will hear and appreciate the acknowledgement itself without needing further attention. Make the offer and let them come to you when they need to.

Managing grief

It is normal to 'puddle jump' back and forth between grief and thriving.
It does not mean that you are forgetting the loved one or that you don't care.
It is part of starting to adjust to life with grief whilst continuing to live.
'It is ok to be ok and it is ok to not be ok!'

A Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement

Stroebe & Schut (1999)



Death Studies 23(3):197-224

Practical ways to support restoration

Participate in the funeral or remembrance by finding a reading or making a music list for the wake

Make a photograph slide show or digital photo montage

Plant Seeds or a tree

Talk to your priest, imam or religious leader

A college memorial book

Co-create a poem

Make a memories scrap book

A group project

Talking about the person that died

Express feelings through a diary or letter writing

Focus on what can be controlled for a short time e.g. cleaning your room, baking, exercise.

Bereavement and Covid19

In some ways this pandemic has opened up a wider conversation about death that society has previously tried to ignore. It has encouraged more of us to talk about our fears and wishes with loved ones.

However, the lockdown has also created a lot of fear/worry and prevented a lot of the communal cultural rituals and restorative behaviours that we normally use, such as visiting family, funerals, wakes and collective worship.

Bereaved students could:

- Connect via social media, hold a virtual wake or video link to the funeral.
- Do something at home to mark the day such as readings or lighting a candle.
- Take frequent breaks from the news and focus on what they can do at home.
- Contact a national support service and talk things through.
- Parents may be struggling to cope and they can be signposted to Cruse (national bereavement charity)

After the lockdown ends it will be important to acknowledge the lives lost during this time and attend to the emotional impact this will have on everyone.

Institutions may acknowledge this in assemblies, services of remembrance, a memory tree, support groups and just talking about the pandemic openly.

Resources

National Bereavement Charities:

Cruse

www.cruse.org.uk

Hope again (teens and children)

www.hopeagain.org.uk/

Child Bereavement UK

www.childbereavementuk.org/coronavirus-supporting-pupils

www.childbereavementuk.org/online-learning-for-schools (additional training opportunity)

Leeds Suicide Bereavement Service

www.leedssbs.org.uk

Bereavement and Covid 19:

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief>

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/holding-a-funeral-when-you-cannot-meet-ideas-for-families>

Book:

The Grieving Teen: A Guide for Teenagers and Their Friends (2000)

by Helen Fitzgerald (Several copies are in the library)