

In most circumstances it is healthy for individuals to express their feelings in whatever way seems natural to them. It is also good to still enjoy life and have fun. The recovery process does not have a set time scale and support should be offered for as long as it is required. Some children and young people might not need a lot of support.

Adults can help by:

- Remembering there is no 'right' or 'wrong' thing to say; a sensitive, respectful and careful approach will guide you in what to say and do
- Using plain and simple language to address any traumatic events
- Being aware that you too, may be affected by the trauma

Looking after yourself

Remember that supporting others, including children, can be demanding, and it is important to identify your own support networks. Teams are resilient and traumatic events can often draw people together.

You might want to ask others for support and remember that dealing with trauma and loss may bring your own experiences and emotions to the surface.

Links to further information

- Winston's Wish.
<http://www.winstonswish.org.uk>
- Child Bereavement UK.
<https://childbereavementuk.org/>
- Child Bereavement Network.
<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk>
- The Smart Grief Guide – simple accessible emotion emoji's for Primary aged children.
<http://smartgriefguide.co.uk/>
- The Little Website – examples of primary aged children's drawing representing their emotions.
<http://littlewebsite.org/index.asp>
- P&K Bereavement Box resources – held in schools and clusters but currently moving to electronic resources.
- School Managers should refer to P&K Critical Incidents Guidelines which can be found in school admin manuals.
- If a child or young person has additional support needs, consider seeking advice from relevant national organisations.
- Educational Psychology Service.
01738-476242

Common reactions to trauma and loss



Children and young people usually experience trauma and loss in a similar way to adults and have a similar need for support, although they may be less able to express their feelings.

Young children in particular are likely to express their feelings through their behaviour as opposed to what they say. Some young people may not show any outward signs of distress but may still need some support.

Sadly, trauma and loss are normal parts of life and it is good to remember that the experience is unique to each individual and influenced by a range of factors.

It is important to take account of a child's age and stage of development as this will affect their understanding.

Early Primary

- At this age, death may be understood as temporary or reversible, equated with being asleep
- Children may have irrational thoughts and believe that they are in some way responsible for what happened; they may feel they are to blame and therefore need reassurance

Upper Primary

- At this age, young people will often recognise death as permanent
- It is helpful when adults speak in clear and simple language, avoiding subtleties and euphemisms about traumatic events which may cause confusion

Upper Primary to Secondary

- At this age, young people may already have first-hand experience of trauma and loss and have formed their own views about traumatic events

Common emotional reactions

A range of emotional reactions may be expected. Often people experience sadness, confusion, anger, guilt, disbelief and shock.

Children and young people can show fluctuations and demonstrate resilience that can sometimes surprise adults.

Common behavioural reactions

- Changes in behaviour, appetite and sleep patterns and a reluctance to talk
- An increase in pretend play which may include acting out the circumstances of the trauma or loss
- Anxiety about separation from loved ones
- Difficulty concentrating and falling behind with work
- Increased alertness to danger and worry about their own safety and that of friends and family

Other things to consider

Take account of any known cultural and religious differences.

As children and young people mature and their level of understanding develops, they may benefit from talking about previous trauma and loss, and being supported to notice changes in perspective or feelings.

Supporting children and young people

Children and young people often appreciate the chance to talk about what has happened and this helps them understand.

Often the most helpful thing you can do is simply to listen and acknowledge what is said without any comment.

Everyone has a right to be upset, whatever the circumstances of their trauma or loss.

Some young people may need further support which could include:

- A safe place to go when needed
- An adult or peer who is available whenever a child wants to talk or sit quietly with someone
- Opportunities to ask any questions (even when the adult may not have the answers) and express feelings without being judged
- Making adults aware, as appropriate, so that a child or young person does not have the responsibility of explaining their absence
- Extra support with classwork and communication with exam boards, if required