

# Bereavement and Loss during COVID-19 for Early Years Settings

Dover STLS  
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## Introduction

PREVIOUSLY:

- Primary teacher / SENCo
- Specialist Teacher Bereavement supporting for pupils, schools and families from pre-school through to sixth form

NOW:

- Child Bereavement Services
- Clinical Co-Lead Traumatic Bereavement UK Trauma Council
- Tutor at the Anna Freud Centre/UCL

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**If something is unmentionable,  
it is also unmanageable**

*Folk wisdom*

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## HEALTH WARNING

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## Session outline

- Understanding grief in young children
- Communicating with and supporting young children's grief
- Developing our relationship with the bereaved family
- Impact on staff

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What do you need to get out of this  
session?

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## Thinking about loss for all children

What separations and losses do the children in your care experience?

- Relationship losses
- Material losses
- Health losses
- Loss of role
- Loss of dreams

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## When young children have experienced a death

*They **will** need support. And with support can learn to manage and adjust. Grief is a normal response to loss.*

*Some children may be directly affected by the death of someone important. Others may be impacted on by the grief from others around them rather than so directly by the death themselves.*



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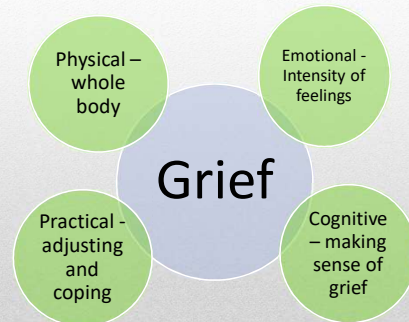
## So .... how do young children grieve?

May depend on many factors:

- Child's age, ability and understanding
- Circumstances of the death
- People who are supporting the child

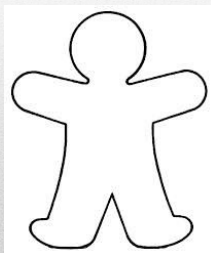
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## How young children grieve



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## Grief: The physical impact



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## The emotional impact: Feelings wall activity



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## The emotional impact: Feelings wall activity

	bad	confused	lonely	
worried	happy	sad	cross	
	different	fine	scared	
frustrated	unsure	guilty	loved	
	tired	ill	excited	

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## Feelings: public vs private



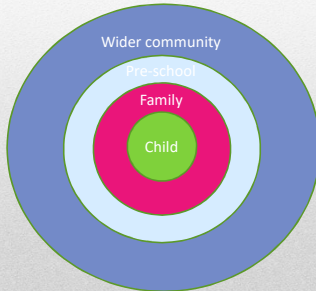
*Is sad a big enough word?*

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## The cognitive impact:

Making sense of death

*How do young children learn about death?*



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## Death and COVID-19



*Death has always been present in the world but the Coronavirus pandemic has put death very much at the forefront.*

How will children make sense of death? See their world? Their community? Their home?



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## Grief: The cognitive impact

*Making sense of personal loss*

- What information have children been given?
- What questions do children have?
- Do they understand what happened?
- Do they understand that death is permanent and irreversible?
- What do the family believe?



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## Grief: Coping with the practical impact



*What additional changes have happened in the child's life?*

*What new roles are having to be filled?*

I feel like I have lost mum too

You're the man of the house now!

*Is the child's support structure still firmly in place?*

Who will collect me from nursery?

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## Puddles of grief

- Young children are good at grieving for a while then putting their grief down and getting on with playing. This doesn't mean they are not grieving.



Grieving in puddles



Grieving in rivers

- Separating from parents/ carers may become difficult as their anxiety may increase.

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## But how can I talk communicate with and best support a grieving young child?

Potential barriers:

- Time
- Confidence
- Skills

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## HUMPTY DUMPTY

Can't make it better



Can't make it worse

Brenda Mallon

Don't need to be a counsellor, just a caring human being

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## Communication

- Our role: translator not informer
- Process not an event
- Using language that is honest, clear and unambiguous
- Communication style appropriate to the child's development
- Don't assume they don't understand- don't assume they do
- Be mindful of family beliefs, values, history, current context

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## What can settings do to support bereaved young children?

Get planning.....

- Download Small Steps support guide
- Check your bereavement policy and update in the light of Coronavirus if appropriate
- Prepare a bereavement box so you have resources to hand
- Make contact with the family and agree how contact will be maintained
- Plan the child's return ideally with familiar staff and friends

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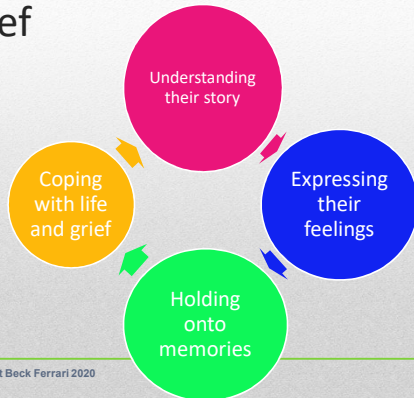
## Small Steps

- Use **Small Steps Booklet** available from The Education People website
- Books- see booklet
- Activities to support children in their feelings and memories
- Other organisations- see useful contacts list for your setting and the bereaved family



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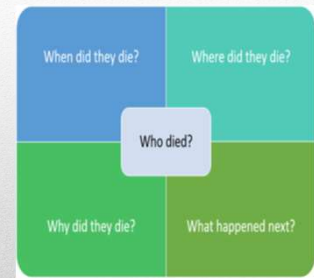
## Supporting young children's grief



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## Story Activities

- Jigsaw to piece together : Who died? When? Where? Why? What next?
- A story book with photos about the person who died, including what happened to them.
- Child drawing pictures of what they remember
- Use puppets or small world toys to help the child tell the story



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## Feelings Activities

*Young children's feelings are not dissimilar to adults they just have less language to express them so find different ways.*

- Feelings biscuits
- Feelings faces on plates / wooden spoons
- Feelings clock



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## Memory Activities:

- Memory jars,
- Clay/play dough memories
- Memory box
- Photographs
- Story books

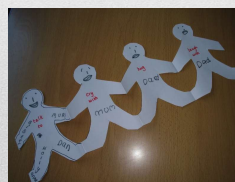


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## Coping Activities

### Who is there to support you?

- Chain of people
- Feathers in a bag
- Beads on elastic



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## The bereaved family

### Open door of communication:

- Address the loss directly but gently: "I was so sad to hear about..."
- Check in regularly, (in tune with the adult)
- Find out how they are doing as well as their child
- Listen, listen, listen.....
- Offer signposting to other organisations
- Check in around anniversaries
- Find out about their wishes re important dates/events: Anniversaries, Mothers'/Fathers' Day



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## Impact on staff:

- Share the load!
- Check in with who ever is taking a leading role
- Consider the impact on staff who may have their own grieving stories
- Where else can you get support/information?

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## Impact on staff: Looking after yourself



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## Reflect:

Things for me to ....



Think ...



Say.....



Do...

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child bereavement services

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