



Supporting children & young people bereaved by suicide

Finding out someone has taken their own life is very distressing and it can be hard to know how best to respond when it comes to supporting bereaved children. This can be particularly hard if you are experiencing your own grief too. In this video we share what we know can help a child bereaved by suicide.

Be honest

Be honest and give age-appropriate information about what has happened.

When someone dies by suicide, it can quickly become public knowledge through police inquests, local press and social media. It is important to consider the likelihood that a child may overhear information from others or read about it online. Where possible it is best for a child to be given honest, age-appropriate information from someone they love and trust. This will help them process what has happened and be able to respond to rumours they may overhear.

How to share information

When sharing information, it can help to break it down into chunks that you can build on, starting simply by telling them the person has died, you can then add on further age-appropriate details about when, where how and why. With each piece of information, let them know they can ask for more when they are ready. Where possible, choose a quiet and comfortable location where you know you won't be disturbed and allow plenty of time for the child to talk to you or ask any questions they may have. Let them know that they can ask you any questions they like or talk to you about how they feel. They need to know that nothing is too bad that it can't be spoken about.

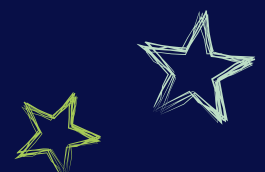
They may want a cuddle or choose to go off and play – however they react, be led by them, reassuring them that you are there for them to talk to whenever they need.

For more detailed advice on how to share information, including examples of age-appropriate language, look on our website, download our suicide support booklet, or contact us for direct support.

Reassure and Normalise

It's common for children to experience a variety of feelings when someone close to them has died by suicide. These can feel unsettling, and children may worry there is something wrong when they experience them. Reassure them that it's normal to have all sorts of feelings and that they may come and go or feel stronger or weaker at different times. Encourage them to express their feelings through talking, playing or drawing. It can help to think with them in advance about what they can do when they experience difficult feelings, such as breathing techniques, or mindful activities.

When someone dies by suicide it is common to search for answers as to why it happened. Children will likely be doing this too, and especially for younger children, it's common for them to connect their own actions with the cause of someone's death. Therefore, it is particularly important to reassure children that they are in no way responsible for what has happened, and their death was not because the person did not love them.





Information online

Details around a death by suicide can appear online fairly quickly. For younger children you may want to consider what access they have to online information, especially in the early days and weeks following the death. For older children you might choose to talk with them about being aware that information online is not always trustworthy or true and encourage them to avoid reading about the death online.

Sharing information

We know that a lot of children prefer to return to school fairly soon after a death as school can be a reassuring place where nothing has changed. When your child returns to school, it can help to let the school know what's happened in advance so they can support the return. It is also important to share what information your child has been given with school and other adults who may regularly see your child. This means there is consistency in what your child hears if they ask questions.

Difficult questions

It is helpful to encourage children to ask questions. This will help to find out what they are thinking and how they are dealing with the death. When someone dies by suicide there may be questions that you will never find an answer to. If you don't know the answer to a question, it's ok to say so and reassure the child that it was not a silly question to ask. If it's a question you can find the answer to you could say 'I don't know the answer to that at the moment, but if I find out, I will let you know' Sometimes it can help to think ahead about questions that might get asked and then practice answers you are happy with. You can find examples of these on our website.

Routines and boundaries

Try to keep to as many normal routines as possible, explaining any times there may be changes. Routines help children to feel safe and secure and provide a sense of normality during a time of change.

Your child needs to know there are boundaries and behaviour expectations that are there to keep them safe. If we remove these boundaries, we can also remove their sense of safety which can cause difficulties with anxiety and self-regulation, potentially leading to more challenging behaviours.

For further guidance and advice in supporting children bereaved by suicide,
please visit our website: www.seesaw.org.uk

