



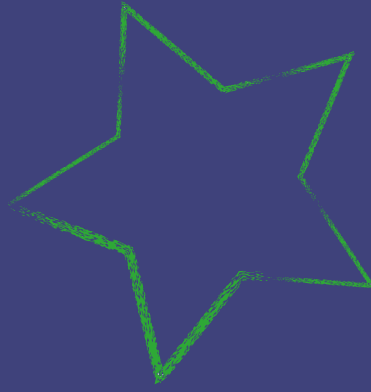
Finding the words

SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
WHEN SOMEONE HAS DIED BY SUICIDE



Grief support for
children and young people
in Oxfordshire





SeeSaw is a small, independent Oxfordshire charity founded in 2000 to provide grief support for local children, young people and their families, or those who care for them. We provide advice, information, resources, consultation, training and support for schools and, when appropriate, face-to-face support sessions for children and young people, usually in their own homes. We offer telephone advice and resources to enable family members and professionals to provide the support. Often we help them to find the right words, or to understand that a child's reaction is very normal for their age, or how to think about the situation from a child's point of view.

SeeSaw is a member of the Thames Valley Multi Agency Suicide Partnership and we would like to thank them for their support in producing this booklet, particularly Oxfordshire County Council and Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board.

Introduction

When someone in a family dies suddenly, it can be a devastating time for everyone. When someone dies by suicide, families often have additional worries and concerns around how to support children. The priority for most parents or carers is how to get it right for the children.

In this booklet we will answer some of the most common questions and worries that people have when they talk to us about supporting their child after someone important has taken their own life.

Impact of death by suicide on families

The death of someone important is an incredibly difficult event whatever the cause. For families bereaved through suicide there are often additional pressures and challenges.

It is common for families bereaved by suicide to find the grieving process more complex than other bereavements. Although the grief may be like that of any other kind of death, the suddenness and shock of a death by suicide can be acutely distressing and confusing, and grief can feel more intense and longer lasting. Families are often left with unanswered questions which can be confusing and hard to process. For some there is still a stigma attached to suicide. This can make it difficult to talk about with others and feel very isolating.

Even within the same family, each person's experience of a death by suicide will be unique and will be affected by the nature of the relationship they had with the person that died.



SECTION 1

Understanding how children grieve

Understanding if and how children grieve has been debated for many years. Talking to adults about their experiences of bereavement as children has taught us a great deal about grief in childhood. Different cultures also vary as to how much they involve children in grief rituals. The common belief today is that even very young children do grieve, although how they express that grief will be different according to their age. What follows are some broad outlines of how children experience grief at different stages of development. This helps us understand how we can best support children and young people following a death.



Very young children 0–2 years

Reactions:

Very young children and babies will react to a sense of loss rather than the death itself, especially if the death is of the primary carer. They may be affected by changes in the emotional atmosphere around them. Sad faces may replace the normally smiling faces of their carers. Babies and very young children may express this sense of change by becoming clingier and more fractious.

Children 3–5 years

Reactions:

Children of this age think in very concrete terms so abstract language around death can be very confusing. Using euphemisms to explain that someone has died, to soften the news, will add to the confusion so avoid words like lost, gone to sleep or passed away. Instead, simply say that the person “has died and that means we won’t be able to see them anymore”. Young children often use the word dead but that does not mean that they understand the concept or permanence of death. Young children will still often ask when the person is coming back. These repeated questions can be very hard for grieving adults and older siblings to manage.

At this stage children will show how they are feeling through their behaviour, such as becoming very clingy and rejecting the attention of other carers. This can result in some regressive and anxious behaviours, temper tantrums, bedwetting and reluctance to go to bed alone. Children may show signs of sadness but only for short periods before escaping into play or acting out events through their play.



How you can help them:

- strong familiar routines
- lots of reassurance
- repetition of short phrases telling the story of what happened – “Do you remember I told you that sadly Daddy died, and he can’t come back.”
- consistency of simple language used in the family and at nursery
- verbal and non-verbal expressions of affection and reassurance

Children 6–9 years

Reactions:

At this stage children may have a greater understanding that death is final. They can become afraid that other family members may die, and this may lead to separation anxiety. Children of this age often ask lots of questions; they may use the right words but not necessarily fully understand them. They can sometimes even feel that something they did or said contributed to the death, known as ‘magical thinking’. This can lead to feelings of guilt, which children may not talk about but can contribute to changes in behaviour. It may be expressed as anxiety, aggression, nightmares, regressive behaviours or withdrawal. Children will move in and out of their grief, sometimes attributing feelings of sadness to the death rather than to being upset for some other reason.

How you can help them:

- stick to familiar routines and boundaries
- give clear, honest, age-appropriate answers to questions. If a child asks a question, they are ready for an answer. Check out what the child is actually asking – don’t make assumptions
- use phrases like “I wonder...” or “Tell me a bit more about what you are thinking...”
- help children to understand and express complex feelings associated with grief
- seeing adults grieve will help children model their own grief reactions
- give lots of reassurance

Children 9–12 years

By this age children fully understand the finality of death and begin to fear death for themselves as well as others. This can lead to a range of worries and sleep problems. As children get older, they may want a more detailed explanation about the death that can sometimes worry adults. While they can articulate their feelings they may be overwhelmed by their emotions of grief and act out the feelings in tearfulness, angry outbursts and fighting. Where the death coincides with the onset of early puberty mood swings are likely.

How you can help them:

- stick to familiar routines
- be clear about family boundaries
- use careful language in explaining events
- normalise grief reactions and reassure them it won’t always feel like this
- be available to talk, acknowledging your own feelings so children don’t feel they have to protect you or you them
- offer space and time to talk about the person who has died, beginning to build memories
- involve them in planning the funeral and support them if they want to contribute on the day



Adolescents 13–18 years

Reactions:

With so many changes already taking place in an adolescent's life, the death of someone they care about can lead to a potent mix of emotions and unfamiliar behaviours.

Like adults, adolescents understand that death is final and will often grieve for missing their loved one at future milestones such as graduations, learning to drive, getting married, etc. They will have a greater understanding of the impact and implications of a death on the family and may try to take on inappropriate caring roles. Adolescents may resist grieving outwardly or talking about their feelings. This will often be in line with their usual temperament. So a young person who doesn't normally express their feelings may be more withdrawn, while a young person who is usually open about how they are feeling is more likely to express their grief and want to talk about it. Both young people will be grieving but expressing their grief in different ways.

Recognising that these grief reactions are normal can help adults to respond to the needs of the young people in a family.

Young people will want to know the details of what happened and to be involved in what happens next. Being given choices about how things are managed at home and at school will be important. This will include wanting to be involved in plans for the funeral, communication with school and other issues that affect the family and their future.

Friendships will be important in providing times of normality and respite from the intense feelings of grief. It can be a difficult time for bereaved youngsters, as they want to appear 'normal' with their peers when all around them everything has changed. Sometimes in response to their grief young people's behaviour changes – they may start taking risks or cutting themselves off or they may become focused on studies or work as a way of managing their distress. At this stage parents can find it difficult to recognise what is bereavement and what is normal adolescent behaviour.

How you can help them:

- help to normalise grief reactions
- reassurance
- support – appropriate to their needs
- accept their mood swings while still holding reasonable boundaries
- be available to talk if and when they want to, or suggest someone else
- involve them in discussions and decisions
- give them choices
- involve them in how things are managed – school, funeral, home
- help them to develop coping strategies
- give them opportunities to engage with their peer group – permission to have fun
- recognise that not all their responses will be about the bereavement

Other factors that affect children's grief

Alongside these different ages and stages there are other factors which may affect how children grieve. These may include:

- their relationship to the person who has died
- their involvement in 'goodbye' rituals
- communication within the family and opportunities to discuss memories and express feelings
- additional support from family, friends or other professionals, e.g. teachers
- additional losses that come about because of the death, e.g. change of home, school, family
- religious, cultural or spiritual beliefs and expectations about how grief is expressed



Common thoughts and feelings

Below are some common reactions experienced by those who have been bereaved by suicide. These feelings are not definitive and may not be experienced by everyone. It is unlikely that very young children will experience these reactions.

Numbness, shock and disbelief

By its very nature, suicide is usually untimely and unexpected and may be violent. Often a death by suicide comes out of the blue – even if someone has expressed suicidal thoughts or has attempted suicide before, the death will come as a shock, and it can take a long time to accept it has happened. Initial feelings of numbness can protect people from overwhelming feelings and may help you get through the early days.

Guilt, anger and even relief

Guilt and anger are common reactions in bereaved people but tend to be felt more intensely and for longer when someone has died by suicide. You may feel guilt that you are alive and that you didn't or, indeed, couldn't prevent the death. You may be angry about being left behind to cope. You may find it impossible to 'switch off' the last conversation, particularly if it felt difficult.

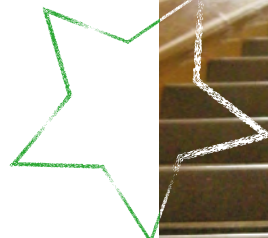
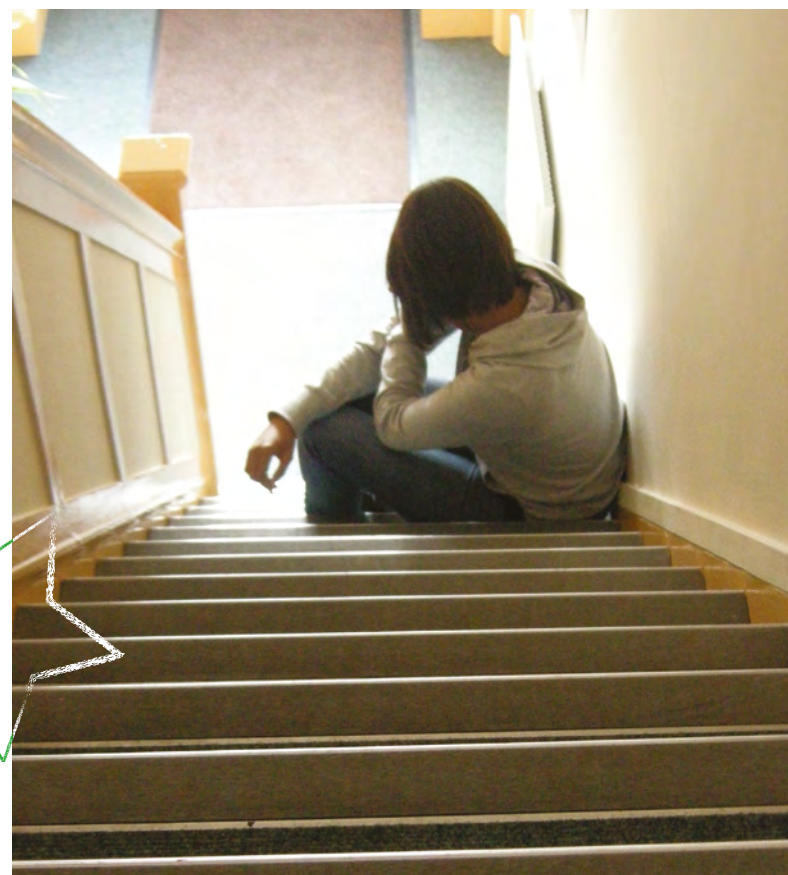
Rejection and betrayal

Family members can often feel rejected by someone who has taken their own life. Relatives and friends may be left asking, "Why did they do this to me?", "Did I fail them in any way?", "What have we done to deserve this?" When time has been spent supporting a child or partner with depression it might feel as though these efforts or their love have been rejected.

Shame and blame

Suicide is no longer a crime but there can still be stigma associated with it. The legal framework that surrounds an investigation and inquest can make families feel on trial. Families may feel that neighbours, work colleagues or even other members of the family are questioning the death in a way they never would if the death had been through an illness or accident. Relatives may be desperate to understand what has happened and, in trying to make sense of everything, they may try to put the blame onto someone other than the person who died. This is even harder when feelings of self-blame are already apparent.

Adults often feel that there is a strong sense of shame attached to a death by suicide and they try to protect their children from this feeling. In fact, younger children do not experience shame in the same way as adults do when someone has taken their own life. They may well be blaming themselves and possibly others, but shame is not such a common reaction. Adolescents may feel shame, having developed a more mature understanding of suicide, and being particularly sensitive to the judgements of others.





SECTION 2

How to explain death by suicide to children

Why honesty is important

Overhearing information

It is a natural instinct to want to protect children from upsetting news and it is understandable that people are tempted to give a different explanation when the death is by suicide. When someone has taken their own life, it is common for the bereaved family to have to cope with the circumstances of the death becoming public. There may be visits from the police, media interest and conversations about the death taking place within the community and on social media.

Because of this, it is likely that children and young people will come across information about the death by overhearing conversations or from other people. The possibility of this is increased with children's access to the internet, where information may be available for years to come. It is generally best to try to be open and honest with children from the start so that they don't find out the truth by accident or hear something that isn't true.

Preventing children filling gaps in their knowledge with their imaginations

These conversations may feel very difficult but hearing this news from a parent provides an opportunity to give a clear and age-appropriate explanation. When children don't have the information they need, they often fill in the gaps with their imagination or they can make wrong assumptions that they may be responsible. It is important to try and avoid secrets and unnecessary details. A parent or carer is generally the best person to tell their children this difficult news. However, if this isn't possible, it is important they try and be present while another adult, who is known and trusted by the children, delivers the information.

It can help even very young children to have a simple story that they can use to retell and slowly make sense of what has happened. Use words they understand. Always check they have understood what you have told them.

Events surrounding suicide can often become very confused. Try to be consistent in your explanations to the children, telling them honestly what you believe to be true.

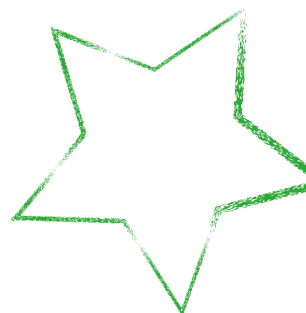
If you've given a different explanation already

It may be that you have already given your child a different explanation for the death than suicide. If this is the case, it's ok to go back and explain things again. You could say something like:

"You know I told you that Daddy died and that he died from a heart attack? Well, I'd now like to tell you a bit more about it. When Daddy died it was hard for me to explain exactly what happened, but now I'd like to tell you more about how your Daddy died."

Older children may feel hurt to have been protected from the full facts before. In these circumstances it can help to say something like:

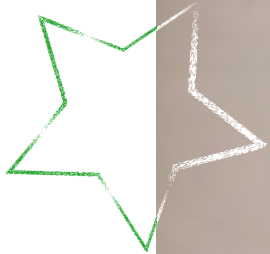
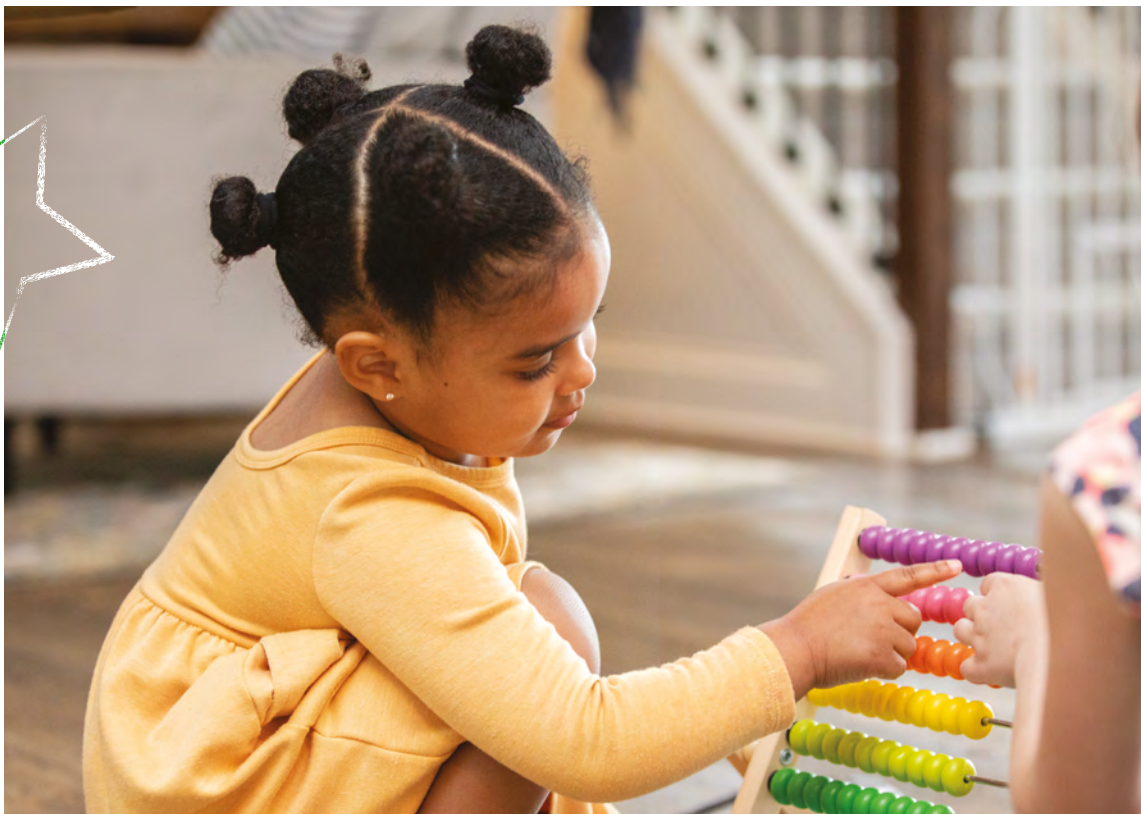
"I've been impressed by how you've been since Mum died and I think you're mature enough to know some more about what happened when she died."



Things to think about when telling children

When telling children about a death by suicide, consider the following:

- **Choose a quiet, comfortable space where you will not be disturbed.** Where possible, if there is more than one child in the family, tell all the children together about the death. You can give older children further information at a later stage.
- **You don't need to give all the information in one go.** It helps to break it down into small chunks. This makes it easier for children to understand and process the information.
- **These chunks of information may be given in the space of minutes, hours, days, weeks, months or even years.** The pace between the information is often led by the child's needs and ability to understand, which is in turn affected by their age and developmental understanding. The pace will also be affected by the situation, for example the possibility of your child finding out what has happened from other sources or from older members of the family.
- **Try to avoid telling children just before they go to bed** as this can result in problems sleeping.
- **Start by explaining that you have something very sad to tell the children.**
- **Be aware of the children's different levels of understanding.** Try to use the word died or dead rather than words like passed or lost, which can be confusing for younger children.
- **This process takes time.** It needs to be handled with care, giving the children the chance to say how they are feeling. You may want to ask your child if they would like to know more details and then be guided by their response. If a child says they don't want to hear more just now, they need to know that they can come back to you for more information. Then again, you may feel that your child cannot handle any more information at the moment. It is important then to tell your child that you will tell them more on another occasion – and to do this.
- **Remember that children will respond differently to the news:** some may cry and stay close; others may be angry or possibly still and silent. Younger children may behave as if nothing has happened.



- **Sometimes children worry that it was their fault that the person died.** Reassure children it was nothing they did or said that caused the death, and there was nothing they could have done to prevent it.
- **It's important that other family members know what you have told the children** so that they say the same thing and use the same language. This will avoid confusion or giving mixed messages.
- **Children will want to know what is going to happen next.** This might include conversations about the funeral, returning to school, general childcare and so on, all of which will help children feel supported and safe.
- **Our experience indicates that if a child asks a question about what has happened, they are ready to hear the answer.**
- **Remember, all children will grieve differently** depending on their age, personality, coping mechanisms and previous experiences of loss.
- **Take care of yourself and don't hide your grief from the children.** It's ok for children to see you sad and upset but explain that you are sad because you are missing the person or are having a difficult day. This will show the children how they too can manage their sadness.



Knowing what to say and when – breaking the information down

STAGE 1

Explaining the person has died

This is the point when you explain gently and simply that someone has died. It is helpful to do this somewhere the child feels comfortable and safe. Older children may need space to themselves afterwards, so being close to a place they can go to on their own, such as their bedroom, is useful.

It's important to avoid euphemisms such as gone to sleep or gone to the sky as this can cause confusion. Although it might feel uncomfortable, it's important to use the words died and dead. Try to give them a simple, short, honest sentence:

"I have something really sad to tell you. Mum died today."

STAGE 2

Giving simple details of how the person died

The second step provides a little bit more information by giving an explanation about how or where the person died. This allows you to be honest without giving details you may feel are not appropriate. Giving these simple details allows the child to place the death within a context in their head which can be added to as time goes on. When children are not given honest information, they tend to fill in those gaps with their imagination, which can result in confusion and complications later.

Here are some examples:

"Mummy died up on the hill by the trees."

"Grandad died in the car."

"Daddy died because he took more of his tablets than he should have."

"Alisha died by the railway line."

"Hassan died because he got very badly burnt."



STAGE 3

Saying the person chose to end their own life

The next step is to explain that it was the person's choice to take their own life. This can be a very difficult thing to explain to a child, but our experience shows that being given this truth in a child-appropriate way is important and prevents them from discovering this information from someone or somewhere else.

You can start by asking to give them some more information:

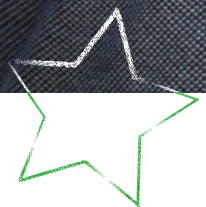
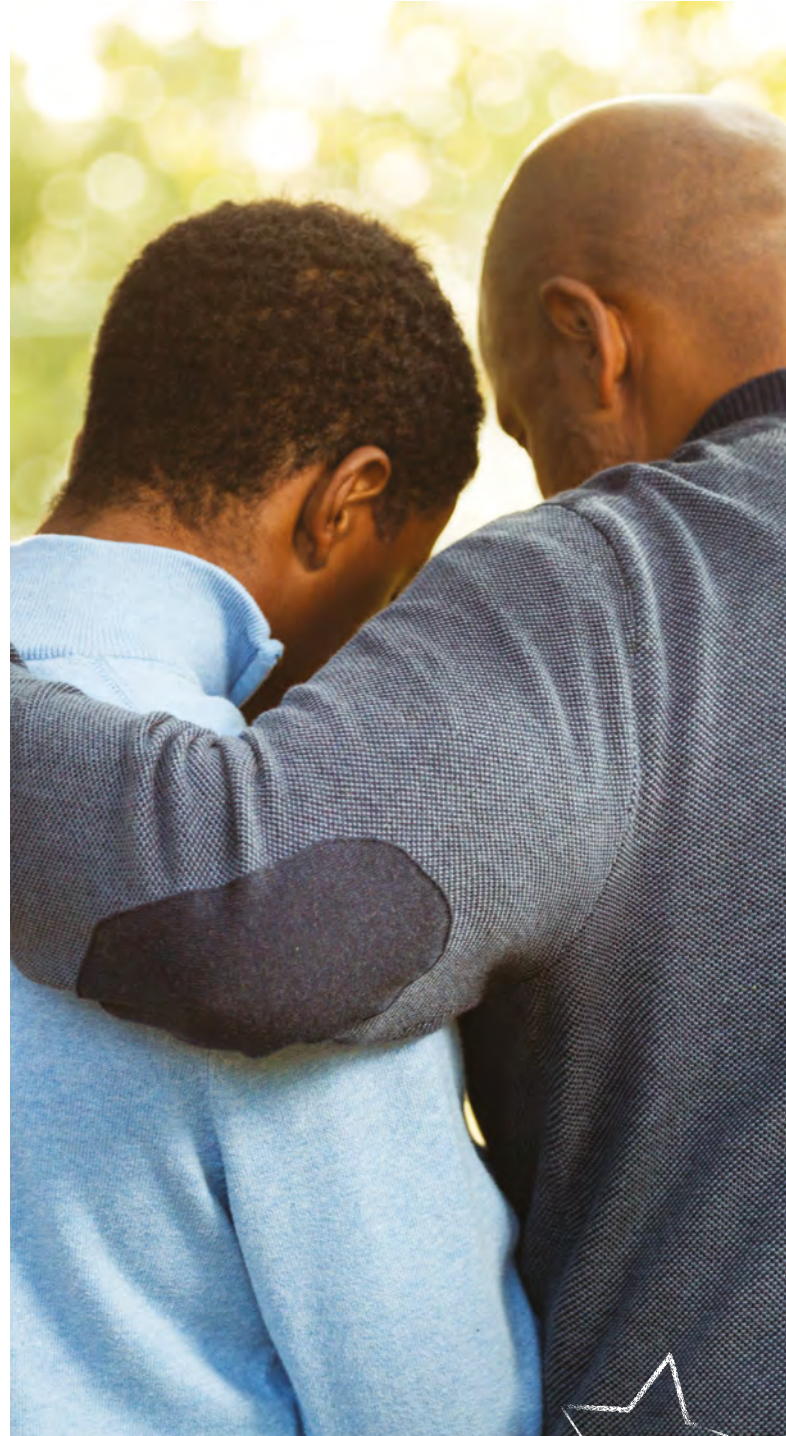
"I would like to give you a bit more information about how Daddy died."

Then you can explain that sometimes people choose to end their life:

"There are lots of reasons why people die. Most people don't die until they get very old, but sometimes people die from illnesses or accidents. Sometimes people choose to hurt themselves and they die. This is what Mummy did."

After your conversation, you might want to ask the child again if they want any more information, which might be a good opportunity to introduce the word suicide. They are likely to come across this word at some point and if they hear it being used to describe what happened to their loved one, without knowing what it means, it can cause confusion.

"When people do something like this, they are often very sad and confused and think it is the only thing to do. It is called 'suicide' or 'ending your own life'."





STAGE 4

Providing a more detailed description of how the person died

The next stage is to give more detail about the method of suicide. This is often the part most people worry about and want to protect children from. Understandably, this feels counterintuitive and uncomfortable, but if the information is given in a simple, gentle, honest and age-appropriate way it often helps children fill in gaps in their story of what happened. When these gaps are missing children are likely to fill them with their own imagined thoughts which can cause more distress.

Here are some examples you could use for different methods of suicide.

Suicide by hanging

“Do you remember how we say to never put anything around your neck because it’s dangerous and can stop you from being able to breathe? Well, this is what Daddy did. He put something around his neck and pulled it so tight that it stopped him from breathing. This is how he died.”

Suicide by overdose

“When the doctor gives us medicine to take it’s to make us feel better, but if you take more medicine than the doctor has told you it can make you very poorly. Mummy took too many tablets at one time. When you take too many tablets it makes your body very poorly and is too hard for your body to stay alive and you die. This is how Mummy died.”

Suicide by overdose and alcohol

The above explanation can be adapted, as in:

“Mummy took too many tablets at the same time and then she drank a lot of wine. When you take too many tablets and drink lots of alcohol together, it is hard for your body to stay alive.”

Suicide on the railway lines

“David walked down to the railway line and he stepped in front of the train when it was coming towards him. The train was very fast, and it didn’t have time to stop. It hit David. His body was very badly hurt and he died straight away.”

Suicide by drowning

‘Ishmael went into the lake and spent too long with his head under the water. It’s very dangerous to keep your mouth and nose under water for too long because it stops you breathing. When you stop breathing your heart stops beating. This is how Ishmael died.’

Suicide by jumping

“Yasmin went to the top of the building which is very high up and she jumped off. It was so high up that the fall hurt her very badly. When your body has been hurt that much you die and that’s how Yasmin died.”

Other situations

There are other ways people die by suicide for which the suggestions given here can be adapted.

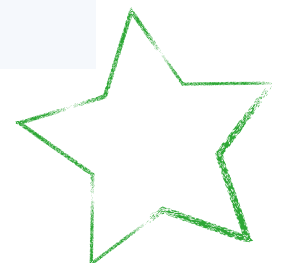
Check and reassure

It is important to try and balance the information you give with some reassuring and comforting words, such as:

“Daddy loved you very much and nothing you did or didn’t do made him do this.”

“Mummy didn’t want to hurt you; she loved you very much.”

It’s also important to check what the child has understood after one of these explanations. They should feel informed without feeling too frightened.



STAGE 5

Exploring possible reasons why the person chose to end their life

One of the hardest things about death by suicide is that there will always be unanswered questions. No one can ever fully know the reasons someone chose to end their life. It's important though that children know that nothing they said/did or could have said/done made it happen.

The suggestions below could be adapted to help you give some explanation of why someone took their own life.

“Sometimes people can feel so sad that they believe things that aren't true. Sometimes they might believe that the people around them would be better off if they were not here anymore. This isn't true, but it's what they believed and so they decided to stop living. This might be what happened with Daddy.”

“Sometimes people can have an illness in their brain that makes them feel very sad and confused. Doctors can give medicines to help this, but Mummy didn't go to the doctor. When people feel this way, they can think that the only way to stop feeling so bad is to stop

living. This might be why Mummy decided she wanted to die.”

“People often have problems in their life, but sometimes these problems can build up and feel like they are too much and that there is no way to escape them. Sometimes, instead of asking for help people can feel that the only way they can get away from the problems is to end their life. This might be why Aleksander decided to end his life.”

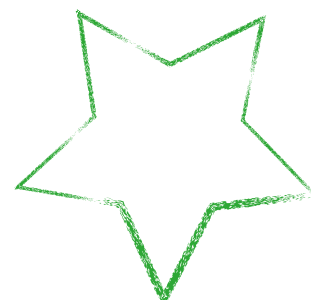
“We don't understand why Omar decided he wanted to die. Sometimes someone can seem very happy on the outside but be feeling different thing inside. Unfortunately, sometimes people feel that they can't talk to people about the feelings they have and instead these feelings can become too big, and they might feel the only way to stop these feelings is to die. We will never know exactly what Omar was thinking, but we do know that he loved us, and he didn't want to upset us.”

Finding time to talk

It can be difficult to find the opportunities to talk, particularly if the death occurred some time ago. You could use opportunities provided by news events, stories, TV programmes, anniversaries or a further family death to talk more about the person who died. Try to visit the grave, garden of remembrance or another special place and talk about the person who died. Also try to keep in contact with friends and family: it is easy to lose contact, especially if you feel people are still feeling guilty or blaming each other.

Children may raise the subject when you are least expecting it but try to stay calm and take time to listen to what they are saying and asking. If it is not an appropriate time to talk, let them know that this is something that is important to you and set an appropriate time to talk about it.

If you would like support for having these conversations, SeeSaw can help. Please get in touch via our website www.seesaw.org.uk/referral-form





SECTION 3

How to support children bereaved by suicide

Being in the public eye

The death of a family member by suicide can feel very public. As well as the funeral, families also have to face an inquest, which can be very stressful. The full inquest may not be held until months after the death. This delay can be difficult for families and many feel that they can't begin to grieve properly until the inquest has taken place. It can also be painful to have the person who has died discussed by strangers or referred to in newspapers or on social media. It can help to:

- try and avoid looking at articles about the death
- be aware of what is accessible on the internet so that you are prepared for what children may be able to access

Talking to other people

Death is still a difficult issue for many people to discuss and a death by suicide is probably one of the hardest things to explain or talk about, especially if it is at a time when you are not prepared. Thinking in advance about some answers to questions that could come up should make them easier to deal with. Here are a few suggestions:

- *"I'm sorry to say that he killed himself – we're still struggling to understand why."*
- *"Yasmin felt she couldn't go on living anymore and so decided to end her life."*
- *"Isaac seems to have felt that suicide was his only choice, which is very painful to think about."*



Returning to school

Children and young people often surprise us by wanting to return to school the day or a few days after they have been told that someone they care about has died. This return to a normal routine can be a way of managing their grief and escaping some of the feelings at home. Often the person who has died hasn't been part of the school day, so being in school can give some respite from what has happened. However, some children may want to stay close to family members in those early days after the death. Even within the same family children may want to go back to school at different times.

Here are some suggestions to think about:

- Before children return to school it's advisable to make contact with the headteacher or head of year to tell them what has happened.
- Talk to your child about what they think will be most helpful in making the return to school.
- Decide with your child how they would like information about the death shared with staff and pupils. Some children and young people like to be there when their classmates are told, or even do it themselves; others prefer not to be. Older children and adolescents may not want a general announcement but prefer to choose who should know and tell them themselves.
- The decision about who should be told may affect what time your child returns to school on that first day. Some children will want to keep things as normal as possible so arriving with everyone else might be important.
- Schools will usually recognise the needs of bereaved children and accommodate what works best for the child and the family in terms of a later start time or shorter days.
- Encouraging children to return to school with support from the school will help to establish familiar routines. A delayed return to school can sometimes make it more difficult for a child or young person, especially if there were previous issues around school attendance.
- Children can become very anxious about separating from a parent or carer when someone in the family has died suddenly. They may worry that something else 'bad' might happen while they are at school. Children will therefore need lots of reassurance at this time to resume normal routines.

You may find it helpful to:

- clarify with your child who has been told about the death in school, what they have been told and who the child can talk to in school if they are upset
- be clear with your child and the school about any change to arrangements regarding who will collect them from school
- talk to your child about things you and other family members will be doing while they are in school
- give them something to carry with them that connects them to the person who died or to you, such as a small photograph
- where children are struggling with separation anxiety it might help for the adult and child to choose matching key rings (maybe with a tiny cuddly toy attached). The child and adult can use this as a comfort while apart
- talk with your child about how they will respond to questions. You might want to come up with a short sentence which they can repeat



Should my child attend the funeral?

Parents and carers often wonder whether to take their child to the funeral, and friends and relatives can offer different advice about whether it is appropriate. This can make the decision more difficult. There is no right or wrong answer to this: it will depend on your family beliefs and knowing your child. Children, even very young children, can be prepared for what will happen at a funeral and be given the choice about attending. If children are given enough information and allowed to choose, they will often say they want to attend, as it's an opportunity for them to say goodbye to the person who has died and is part of the next stage of coming to terms with what has happened. Children can feel excluded if they aren't given the choice.

You can prepare children by:

- Talking about what will happen at the funeral and explaining that it's the time for saying goodbye to the person who has died.
- Involving children in planning the funeral – choosing songs, music, readings, poems, flowers. Children sometimes write a letter or poem about the person who has died and want to read it during the funeral.
- Children may want to put something in with the body such as a letter, poem, photo or drawing as their way of being included and saying goodbye.
- Outlining to the children what will happen during the day and who might be there.
- Taking the children to see where the funeral will take place or showing them a picture.
- Inviting someone the children know well to support them in case at the last minute they can't manage it.
- Explaining that at the funeral some people may be crying because they are very sad, and that some people may also tell funny stories about the person who died, so they may laugh as well.

- Taking a bag of activities they can do quietly during the funeral or arranging for someone the children know well to take them out if they get upset. This will help you if you are overwhelmed by your own grief.
- Letting children know that it's ok not to go to the funeral or to leave if it's too much. Think about other ways for them to say goodbye like visiting the grave or a favourite shared place, or lighting a candle.

A booklet for children called 'What happens when someone dies' is available free from SeeSaw. The booklet is written to help adults explain to children in simple language and pictures what happens after someone dies. It also helps to explain to children about a cremation or a burial. We also have a leaflet called 'What happens next? A funeral guide for young people', specifically for helping adolescents understand what might happen after someone dies. You can find both on the resources section of our website: www.seesaw.org.uk/resources



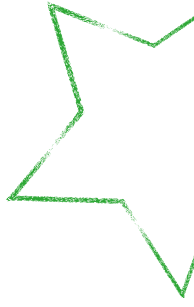
Looking after yourself

Grief can feel lonely, so accept practical offers of help from family and friends as well as emotional support. In the safety briefing on an aeroplane, passengers are advised to put on their own masks before putting on their children's. The safety mask is a helpful way to think about how adults and carers support children when someone has died.

Parents often say they will put their own grief on hold so they can support their children, but this can give mixed messages to the children about how to manage grief. It's important to make time for your own feelings of grief and to take care of yourself. You may find it helpful to get your own support through a grief counselling charity such as Cruse Bereavement Support (see page 20 for details).

Be realistic about what you can do and cope with one day at a time. Not making time for your own needs may mean you are unavailable to meet your children's.





Further support and resources

Early Support

SeeSaw provides an early support service when a family have experienced the death of a parent/caregiver or sibling by suspected suicide. Where possible, one of our children and family practitioners can meet with the adult caregivers to provide reassurance and advice around supporting children and young people at this early stage. This can take place in the family home or at our office building in Headington.

Other support

SeeSaw offers a bespoke service to help parents and carers support their children, talking through their concerns and providing advice, resources, and where appropriate, one-to-one support for children and young people.

To contact us for support, please complete our online referral form: www.seesaw.org.uk/referral-form/

SeeSaw also has a range of advice and information as well as blog articles and recommended resources on our website: www.seesaw.org.uk/supporting-children-and-young-people-bereaved-by-suicide

Other organisations

Support After Suicide Partnership

Explore practical information and find emotional support if you have been impacted by suicide
<https://supportaftersuicide.org.uk/>

Amparo

Confidential support for anyone affected by suicide
<https://amparo.org.uk/>
Phone: 0330 088 9255

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide

Local and online self-help and support groups for those bereaved through suicide
Phone: 0115 944 1117

Samaritans

Confidential emotional support for anyone in a crisis – 24 hours a day
Phone: 08457 909090
Textphone: 08457 909192
Email: jo@samaritans.org

The Compassionate Friends


Support for bereaved parents who have lost a child of any age and from any circumstance
Phone: 0845 123 2304
Email: info@tcf.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Support


Grief counselling charity
www.cruse.org.uk
National helpline: 0808 808 1677



What people tell us...




“Thankyou for all of our sessions... you made a very big impact on my thought processes around grief and helped me feel that everyone has different coping strategies and it’s all normal and ok. Thank you for being one of my safe places too.”




This morning I didn’t have a clue what I was going to say to them about the funeral, but now I feel so much calmer and I think I’ll be able to answer the majority of questions they might have. Thank you so much – I am so glad someone told me about SeeSaw!




“Thanks for everything, I don’t know what we would’ve done without you.”




“It was great to talk to someone who was sympathetic but very constructive and positive. And helped me think about what I could say.”



“When you are suffering a tragic loss yourself it’s hard to know if you’re doing everything right for your children. SeeSaw made me feel that I was, in every way.”



“It helped to talk to someone who could clarify the important issues. It gave me confidence and reassurance to trust my own instincts about how best to help my children.”



“I wasn’t sure how to tell and help the children; helpful advice was given. I think Seesaw is a very good cause.”



Grief support for
children and young people
in Oxfordshire

SeeSaw

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2 Merewood Avenue
Oxford OX3 8EF

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