

Supporting bereaved children through difficult times

Frightening events widely reported in the media, such as the coronavirus pandemic, can cause children to worry about themselves and others. It is normal for children to feel unsettled when something scary is happening or has happened, and many will be upset, sad or fearful at times. Children who have been bereaved are likely to show a stronger reaction and may worry that they or someone they know will die.

Here are some tips to help you support a bereaved child:

Talk

Children and young people often find it helpful if they can talk about what is happening, helping them to make sense of events and feel less afraid. Even young children are likely to hear reports in the media or overhear adults talking about deaths due to coronavirus, or the risk of death from becoming ill with the virus.

It's important to talk about their fears or anxieties honestly and openly in age-appropriate language. It may also help to restrict the amount of media coverage and social media they are exposed to, and balance this with other activities and positive things to focus on.

Children's understanding of death varies with their stage of development and it can be helpful to understand why children may respond differently. Our website has information which can help you understand and accommodate these differences and you may find it useful to watch our short guidance film [Children's understanding of death at different ages](#).

Be honest

Give children honest, factual information in language appropriate to their age and level of understanding, and be guided by their questions. Children tend to pick up when questions are avoided and may then imagine all kinds of things, causing further anxiety. It's not necessary to go into detail but it will be helpful to explain things that affect them directly, such as why they are being asked to wash their hands regularly and how the virus is spread, why their school has closed, why they can't visit a grandparent or why a parent is working from home.

Acknowledge concerns

Bereaved children may be concerned about someone they know becoming ill or even dying. Explain that some people will have no symptoms and will be fine, most people will experience only a mild form of the virus and will get better, but some people are more vulnerable and so we need to make sure they are protected. Be honest though and don't shy away from explaining that some people may die, as children need to trust that you are being honest and open with them, so that they can ask you other questions with confidence.

Create routines

Currently, keeping to usual, daily routines might be difficult. But routines can be reassuring to children when everything else seems to be disrupted. If you are at home with your child, try to keep to regular routines such as meal times, school work, breaks, play and bedtime.

Children feel more in control, and therefore less fearful, if given simple clear jobs to do, such as washing their hands properly, or simple jobs around the house.

Get support

If you are struggling with your own reactions, try to get support for yourself. Children and young people are quick to pick up on the distress of others around them, even if the adults are trying to hide their feelings.

For guidance on supporting a bereaved child, please contact Child Bereavement UK:

Helpline: 0800 02 888 40

Live Chat via childbereavementuk.org

Email support@childbereavementuk.org

9am-5pm, Monday-Friday (except Bank Holidays).