

# How can I help my child following a traumatic experience?

An information booklet  
for parents and carers



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Northamptonshire  
County Council



**When your child has suffered a loss, it is sometimes difficult to know what to do. There are often more questions than obvious answers**

- Should I encourage her to talk if it upsets her?
- Should I let him go to the funeral?
- He's gone into his shell – should I leave him alone?
- Should she see a counsellor?

Most children and young people affected by a death just need adults who care about them. You cannot take away their sadness but you can acknowledge it and support them through the experience.

Children and young people's reactions will depend upon how close they were to the person who died, their personality, the way they cope with stress and the availability of support. Hearing about any death can make a child anxious.

How adults express their emotions will influence the reactions of children and young people



**Most children and young people just need adults who care about them and can support them through the experience**

Common reactions to trauma include:

- Shock/disbelief
- Fear
- Guilt
- Grief
- Confusion
- Shame
- Anger

These reactions are closely linked, can be difficult to separate and may not happen in any particular order. You may notice some of the following which are all common as long as they do not go on for too long.

- Change in behaviour, unnaturally quiet and withdrawn or unusually aggressive.
- Disturbed sleep and bad dreams.
- Anxiety demonstrated by clinging behaviour and reluctance to be separated from parents or carers.
- Being easily upset by events that would normally be trivial.
- Difficulty concentrating, being forgetful. School work may suffer. Older children may feel there is no purpose to their lives.
- Physical complaints such as headache, tummy ache or being generally run down.

The following suggestions may help you to be more confident in choosing a course of action. There are however no right answers for all situations, and if you remain unsure, you may find it helpful to talk to someone in order to clarify what to do. This may be your child's head teacher or a member of staff in the first place. They may put you in touch with a support service outside the school, provide you with more information or reassure you about your son or daughter's reaction.

## Some suggestions for parents



When the facts are known ensure the child/young person is told as soon as possible.



Whenever possible the information should be told by someone close to them, in familiar surroundings.



It is important to tell the truth to prevent rumour and fantasy which may build up.



Allow time and plenty of opportunity for questions.



Understand that there are normal reactions that you both will experience.



Encourage your child to talk and express feelings.



Share your own reactions, cry together, don't hide your emotions.



Physical contact is very reassuring, hugs are important, reading books, talking, listening.



Teenagers may repress grief. This is an inappropriate coping strategy and it is important that parents and other adults give them the opportunity and support to grieve.



Talk positively about the deceased person and in particular, about events involving him/her.



Be tolerant of changes in behaviour and emotion.

## More suggestions for parents



The funeral service can be an enormous help in the grieving process. Young people need to know what a funeral involves and be allowed to make their own choice about attending.



A personal tribute from the young person can be helpful when someone close to them has died. They may want to send a card, flowers, write a story, a poem or a letter and should be encouraged to do so.



Allow time. Coming to terms with trauma and grief is a process, a working through of feelings to an acceptance of what has happened. Everyone is different and needs to go at their own pace.



Share your feelings with family and friends; try to help them to help you.



Anniversaries of the event will be difficult. Intense emotions felt in the early days may well flood back.



Encourage your child, in the long term, to focus on the future and on living. Although traumatic events are never forgotten, it is possible that from death we can all learn to value how precious our lives and relationships are both in our families and our communities.



Do seek professional help if you are worried.



Keep in contact with school.



## The overall message is

- Try to maintain feeling of security, of being cared for, of being loved.
- Maintain all the necessary practical care.
- Be honest at your child's level of understanding
- Continue to talk and communicate Do not pretend to believe what you don't believe
- Try to understand your child's feelings and reassure them where possible
- Don't be afraid to say "I don't know"
- Share your own feelings
- Remember there are others who can help
- Be prepared to share with family and friends, or people at work, if you feel overwhelmed and it seems hard to cope



**Who is available  
to help?**



Friends and family members



Staff from your child's school



Religious groups (your own, school's, any other)



Children & Young People's Service  
(educational psychologist or specialist teacher)



General Practitioner

## **CHILD, ADOLESCENT AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**

### **(CAMHS)**

Clarendon House  
8-10 Station Road  
KETTERING  
Northants  
NN15 6EY  
Tel: 01536 313850

### **(CAMHS)**

8 Notre Dame Mews  
NORTHAMPTON  
NN1 2BG  
Tel: 01604 604608





## Youth Counselling Services

### **CORBY**

Green Door  
Connaught Centre  
CORBY  
Tel: 01536 200520

### **DAVENTRY**

Time to talk  
1 North Street  
DAVENTRY  
Tel: 01327 706706

### **KETTERING**

Kettering Youth Information  
William Knibb Centre  
KETTERING  
Tel: 01536 510089

### **NORTHAMPTON**

The Lowdown  
3 Kingwell Street  
NORTHAMPTON  
Tel: 01604 622223

### **WELLINGBOROUGH**

Service Six  
26 Rock Streety  
WELLINGBOROUGH  
Tel: 01933 22615







For further advice  
contact your area  
**Children and  
Families Service  
within  
Northamptonshire**

**CORBYS & KETTERING**

William Knibb Centre  
Montague Street  
KETTERING  
NN16 8AE  
Tel: 01604 533930

**NORTHAMPTON**

Springfield  
Cliftonville  
NORTHAMPTON  
NN1 5BE  
Tel: 01604 630082

**DAVENTRY & SOUTH WEST**

Administration Building  
St John's Centre  
TIFFIELD  
Northants  
NN12 8AA  
Tel: 01604 857382

**WELLINGBOROUGH &  
NORTH EAST**

Fairlawn Centre  
Spring Gardens  
WELLINGBOROUGH  
NN8 2AA  
TEL: 01933 440289





## National Counseling Services

### **CRUSE - Bereavement care**

CRUSE House  
126 Sheen Road  
RICHMOND  
Surrey  
TW9 1UR  
Tel: 0870 1671677

### **Samaritans**

Northampton  
Tel: 01604 637637

Kettering  
Tel: 01536 416999

Peterborough  
Tel: 01733 312727

### **Compassionate Friends**

53 North Street  
BRISTOL  
BS3 1EN  
Tel: 0117 95396390

### **Child Bereavement Charity**

Tel: 01494 446648  
[www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)

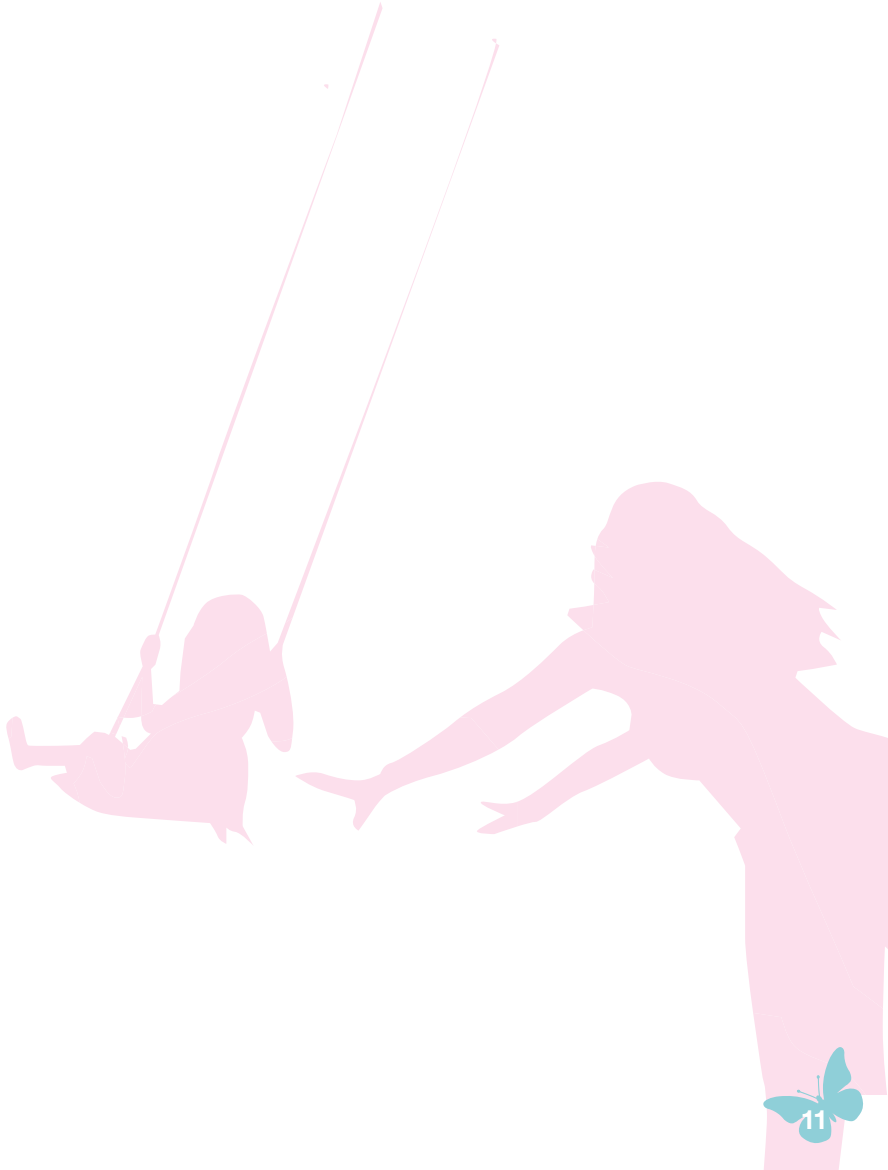
### **Childline**

Tel: 0800 1111

### **Winston's Wish**

Tel: 08452 030405  
[www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)





This information can be made available in other languages and formats upon request including Braille, audio cassette and floppy disk. Contact 01933 440289

[www.northamptonshire.gov.uk](http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk)

Produced January 2009

