

Helping children understand loss

At some point in life, most children experience the death of someone they know—whether it's a grandparent, a family friend, a beloved pet or another important figure in their life.

Bereavement can be confusing, sad and sometimes frightening for children, especially if they don't fully understand what's happening. As parents and carers, your support can make all the difference in helping your child feel safe, heard and comforted during this difficult time.

Understanding how children grieve

Grief in children can look very different from grief in adults. Young children may move in and out of sadness quickly- one minute playing happily, the next asking a difficult question about death.

Here are some common ways children might react:

- asking the same questions repeatedly
- showing changes in behaviour (clinginess, anger, quietness)
- worrying about others dying too
- having trouble sleeping or concentrating
- acting out emotions through play.

Practical ways to support your child

- **Keep routines going** – children feel safer with predictable routines such as school, mealtimes and bedtime.
- **Create space to remember** – light a candle, draw pictures, make a memory box or photo album together.
- **Give choices**– if there's a funeral or memorial, ask your child if they'd like to attend or do something else to say goodbye.
- **Use stories**– reading books about loss can help children talk about their own feelings.

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- Supporting your child with a bereavement
- Using WhatsApp safely

TALKING ABOUT DEATH HONESTLY AND GENTLY

It's natural to want to protect children from pain - but being open and honest is actually one of the kindest things we can do.

Use simple, clear language

Avoid confusing phrases like 'gone to sleep' or 'passed away'. Try gentle but clear words such as:

"When someone dies, it means their body has stopped working. They don't feel pain anymore."



Answer questions honestly

It's okay to say 'I don't know' or 'That's a really good question' if you're unsure. Children often ask the same questions repeatedly - this helps them make sense of the loss.



Talk about feelings

Talk about feelings. Let your child know it's okay to feel sad, angry, confused, or even nothing at all. You might say: "Everyone feels different when someone dies. However you feel is okay."



Model healthy grief

It's okay to let your child see you cry. This shows them that sadness is natural and it's safe to express emotion.



Here are some trusted organisations that offer specialist support for bereaved children and families:

Winston's Wish – www.winstonswish.org

Child Bereavement UK – www.childbereavementuk.org

Cruse Bereavement Support – www.cruse.org.uk

SPOTLIGHT ON SAFEGUARDING

Using WhatsApp safely

As children begin exploring ways to connect with friends online, many are using apps such as WhatsApp to message and share with others. While these platforms can offer positive social interaction, they also come with risks that children may not yet fully understand. WhatsApp's age rating is 13+, so if your primary-aged child is using it, they'll need close parental support and clear guidance. It is important to note that age 13 does not reflect the content children may be able to view on WhatsApp; it does not have moderators previewing what users send to each other and therefore, the content may not be appropriate for a child.

Keeping your child safe on WhatsApp

Here are some key steps you can take to help your child use WhatsApp responsibly and safely:

1. Set strong privacy settings

- **Last seen, Profile photo, About Info:** set these to 'My Contacts' or 'Nobody' to prevent strangers from seeing their information.
- **Status updates:** limit who can see their status to trusted contacts.
- **Blocked contacts:** encourage your child to block anyone who makes them feel uncomfortable or is unkind.
- **Read receipts:** you can turn off read receipts (blue ticks) to help reduce pressure to respond immediately.

2. Turn off disappearing messages

WhatsApp allows users to send messages that vanish after a set time, which can hide evidence of bullying or inappropriate content.

- **To check this setting:** Open a chat → Tap the person or group's name → Tap 'Disappearing Messages' → Set to 'Off'.
- **Talk to your child** about why it's important to keep a record of conversations and why messages shouldn't 'disappear'.

3. Encourage kind and respectful messaging

Digital communication can sometimes feel less personal, which makes it easier to say things we wouldn't say face to face. Help your child develop empathy and kindness in their messages:

- **Think before you send:** encourage your child to pause and ask, "Would I say this in person?"
- **Use kind words:** compliments, encouragement, and friendly emojis can make a big difference.
- **Avoid teasing or excluding:** group chats can become a place where some children feel left out-talk about how to make everyone feel included.
- **Don't forward hurtful messages or images:** even sharing something as a 'joke' can really upset someone else.

4. Know how to report and block

- Show your child how to **block contacts**, **report** harmful messages, and **leave group chats** if they feel uncomfortable.

5 STEPS TO

Setting healthy boundaries

Children need guidance to build healthy habits with technology. Here are some suggestions:

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Screen-free times: set limits like no phones after 7 PM or during family meals.

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Check-ins: regularly check their chats together and discuss anything confusing.

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No phones in bedrooms: this helps avoid late-night chatting and protects sleep.

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Real-life friend rule: agree that they only chat with people they know in person.

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Keep the conversation open: remind your child that you're their safe person.